“To Make the Negro Anew:” The African American Worker in the 
Progressive Imagination, 1896-1928

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines how progressive era social scientists thought about African American workers and their place in the nation’s industrial past, present, and future. Turn of the century racial thought held that certain peoples were naturally equipped to perform certain forms of labor. African Americans were confined to, or excluded from, certain industrial spaces on the pretext that they were congenitally unfit for the rigors of modern industrial life. Elites argued that freed from the protective embrace of slavery African Americans were doomed to degeneration. However, the imperatives of industrialization, migration, and world war soon required new forms of racial labor evaluation and hierarchies.

Despite their differences, observers across the color line drew on a common discourse of industrial evolution that linked racial development with labor fitness. Evolutionary science merged with scientific management to create new taxonomies of racial labor fitness. I chart this process from turn of the century actuarial science which defined African Americans as a dying race, to wartime mental and physical testing that acknowledged the Negro as a vital - albeit inferior- part of the nation’s industrial workforce. During this period, African Americans struggled to prove their worth on the shop-floor, the battlefield, and the academy. New socioeconomic realities produced new forms of racial knowledge. Progressive era social
scientists maintained that mastery of this knowledge was needed to navigate and rationalize America’s rapidly shifting industrial landscape. Many progressives sought to understand these complex and overarching social shifts in stark biological terms.

My analysis of the progressive era Negro problem links African American, Labor, and Disability History to examine how notions of the fit and unfit body colored the progressive era labor economy. Adopting a corporeal perspective allows me to foreground World War One as both a catalyst and an agent of African American proletarianization. The war mobilized African Americans for the work of war and organized social scientists to develop new methods of measuring racial labor fitness. Initiatives such as the draft and vocational rehabilitation endeavored to transform rural southern black migrants into efficient modern workers/soldiers. Throughout these processes tensions between biological and social models of racial fitness persisted. This thesis contends that the modern Negro type—African Americans as objects of social scientific inquiry—which came of age in the post-World War Two era, was born in the draft boards, factories, trenches, hospitals, and university classrooms of the Progressive Era.
To My Son

William Anthony Ellison Lawrie

And Once Again, To Rose
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................... vi

Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 1

**Chapter One:** Counting a Vanishing Race: Statistical Narratives of African American Extinction in Turn of the Century America ........................................................................... 21

**Chapter Two:** “Adjusting the Colored Worker’s Industrial Consciousness:” The Department of Negro Economics and Wartime Racial Labor Policy 1917-1921 .......................................................................................................................... 71

**Chapter Three:** “Measuring Men for the Work of War”: Anthropometry, Race, And the Draft 1917-1919 ...................................................................................................................... 114

**Chapter Four:** “To Make the Negro Anew?” Race, Rehabilitation, and African American Veterans 1917-1924 ........................................................................................................... 163

**Chapter Five:** “A New Negro Type:” The National Research Council (NRC) And the Production of Racial Knowledge in Postwar America 1919-1929 ........................................................................ 207

Epilogue ..................................................................................................................................... 255

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................... 261
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vii
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Introduction

He (the Negro) is here; we can’t get rid of him; it is all our fault; he does not suit us as he is; what can we do to improve him?

Charlotte Perkins Gilman
A Suggestion on the Negro Problem (1908)

When ideologies are formulated to defend a set of economic interests, it is more illuminating to examine the strategy of argument than to insist that the argument is selfish

Reinhard Bendix
Work and Authority in Industry: Ideologies of Management in the Course of Industrialization

“How does it feel to be a problem?” asked W.E.B. DuBois in The Souls of Black Folk, his eloquent meditation on the racial politics of America at the turn of the century. When confronted with this question, DuBois conceded, “I seldom answer a word.” For many blacks, this profound sense of otherness began in childhood. DuBois recalled that, as one of the few black children at a predominately white New England elementary school, his innocent offer of a greeting card to a white female classmate was “peremptorily refused with a glance.” He quickly realized “that I was different from the others...shut out from their world by a vast veil.” Injured, the young boy professed no desire to penetrate this veil, instead choosing to hold “all beyond it in a common contempt.” As the years passed DuBois’ youthful defiance gave way to the depressing realization that “all the worlds I longed for, all the dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine.” With the dawn of the twentieth century, the vast veil separating black and white Americans shifted to accommodate drastic changes in the racial demographics of American capitalism. Increasingly social scientists struggled to link race with biology with the sanction of scientific authority.

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Historians remain divided over the defining characteristics of the progressive era. Debates persist over whether the various social, economic and cultural attempts to negotiate the rapidly shifting landscape of American capitalism evinced a retrenchment of the corporatist status quo or produced new ruling structures and values. James Livingstone describes this as a shift from proprietary to corporate capitalism. Whereas Louis Menard characterizes the period as one in which “ideas mattered.” Despite their many disagreements, progressives were united by the belief that ideas were produced in response to broader social trends. Progressive’s faith in philosophical pragmatism and empirical inquiry as tools of social reform led them to view all social networks, institutions and groups as problems in need of a solution. For many, applied knowledge was the sole means of interpreting and engaging with the world. The race problem—which one observer more accurately termed “the vexing problem of the Negro”—mattered deeply to progressives. However, progressive faith in rationalism was tempered by an acute sense of pessimism and fears of social degeneration, which was believed to be embodied by apparently degenerate and atavistic peoples, including African Americans.

The “Negro problem” was a social fiction rooted in the cultural demands of contemporary political economy. As Nell Irvin Painter notes, “Race is an idea, not a fact, and its


questions demand answers from the conceptual rather than the factual realm.” The twentieth
century culture of management—born at the turn of the century and reaching maturity in World
War One—was densely populated by social scientists who wished to explain everything that had
to be explained in order to achieve an efficient and productive society. Social thinkers were
especially interested in coming to terms with African American’s place in modern industrial
society. At the heart of the “Negro question” was the problem facing all free labor in hierarchal
societies: for workers, free labor meant economic autonomy, including the freedom not to work;
for employers, free labor meant economic dependence and the need to define which kinds of
workers could perform which kinds of work.⁵

This thesis examines how progressives thought about African American workers and
their place in the nation’s industrial past, present and future. In the wake of Reconstruction, rapid
industrialization in the North and legalized racial segregation in the New South, a national debate
arose over whether the ostensibly primitive Negro could survive in the brave new world of
American industrial modernity. Despite their differences, observers across the color line drew on
a common evolutionary discourse which understood social problems as biological problems.
Progressives linked racial development with labor fitness, to develop what Daniel Bender has
termed a discourse of “industrial evolution.” Paired with the narratological structures of the
emergent theories of Taylorism, the story of races became one of development and decline,
efficiency and inefficiency and the constant tension between civilization and savagery. In their

Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen and Ford* (Chicago: Chicago University Press,
attempts to solve the Negro problem, progressives were forced to confront the fundamental meanings of gender, work and race in early twentieth century America.\footnote{Carl Degler, \textit{In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought} (NY: Oxford University Press, 1991): viii-ix; 75-78; Daniel Bender, \textit{American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009): 2-10. Literary critic Martha Banta has argued that Taylorism was an extended narrative structure and discourse system which extended far beyond the factory floor to encompass every aspect of cultural existence. Banta, \textit{Taylored Lives}: 4.}

Progressive era social scientists sought to understand African American proletarianization in explicitly corporeal and evolutionary terms. At the turn of the century, African Americans were confined to, or excluded from, certain industrial spaces on the pretext that they were congenitally and temperamentally unfit for the rigors of modern industrial life. However, industrialization, migration, and war required new forms of racial labor evaluation. Social scientists in both the public and private spheres worked to assess black labor fitness through the disciplines of actuarial science, sociology, anthropometry, vocational rehabilitation and anthropology. Positing war as work, social scientists drew on physical and mental wartime testing to reconfigure African Americans from a seemingly dying race to a vital—albeit inferior—part of the nation’s industrial workforce. World War One produced new models of racial labor expertise as social scientists grappled to establish the black working body as an index of labor function. Throughout this period, African Americans struggled to prove their worth on the shop-floor, the battlefield and the academy.

We begin with an examination of late nineteenth century actuarial science, which characterized African Americans as a depraved race destined for extinction—much like the American Indian. Many observers felt that, freed from the protective embrace of slavery, blacks would be unable to compete in the unforgiving struggle of industrial evolution. The theory of black extinction found its greatest advocate in the work of Frederick L. Hoffman, an actuary at
Prudential Life Insurance. In *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro (1896)*, Hoffman charted black racial decline through the indices of venereal disease, criminality and vital capacity—a short hand for respiratory health. Theodore Porter describes turn of the century statistics as, “the science of numbers applied to the life history of races and nations.” Statistics, specifically actuarial science, allowed Hoffman to quantify the relative rate, nature and cost of deteriorating black bodies in concrete scientific and monetary terms. African American thinkers stridently condemned Hoffman, but their critiques were ultimately circumscribed by an inability to transcend prevailing statistical methodologies.

World War One made the African American worker into an national industrial factor. With American entry into the war in the spring of 1917, efforts to rationalize the process of black proletarianization and migration acquired a coherence and urgency previously lacking. The war offered social scientists a grand experiment in the possibilities of the war-collectivized state. Walter Lippman, writing in the *New Republic*, declared, “we stand at the threshold of a collectivism which is greater than any as yet planned by a socialist party.” Progressives hoped that war, with its various forms of state-sanctioned coercion, would help solve various social ills, such as the Negro problem. American progressives drew heavily on European theories regarding the productive duality of the modern worker-soldier, and conscription as a form of racial-labor control. Black social scientists worked to penetrate the wartime state in an advisory capacity to compensate for their acute lack of institutional support and financial capital. The hope and

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challenge of all progressives was to capture and democratize the machinery of war collectivism, and to shape public policy.⁹

Total war militarized industry at the same time that war was becoming increasingly industrialized. Chapter Two examines the wartime state as a key mediator in African American proletarianization. The establishment and workings of the Department of Negro Economics (DNE)—the first federal agency devoted exclusively to black labor since reconstruction—was an attempt to reconcile the Negro problem with the Labor problem within the institutional nexus of early twentieth century sociology. DNE officials—many of whom were black—drew on Chicago school sociology to chart and acclimatize black migrant’s shift from rural to modern industrial life. DNE officials sought to incorporate African American workers into the wartime labor economy through the development of black labor expertise, instilling migrants with a new industrial consciousness through worker efficiency campaigns and establishing stronger links between white capital and black labor. For Francille Wilson, “the predicament of black workers in industrializing America continuously engaged the attention of African American social scientists, more than any other single topic.” DNE officials fused vocational uplift with sociological expertise to counter prevailing narratives of congenitally unfit Negro industrial laborers.¹⁰

Wartime imperatives required new taxonomies of racial labor fitness. Chapter Three examines how social scientists on the Committee on Anthropology (COA), a part of the National

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Research Council (NRC), used the science of anthropometry to evaluate the health, shape and fitness of “the Negro type” through the wartime draft. COA members’ defined anthropometry as “that part of anthropology in which are studied variations in the human body and all its parts, and particularly the differences of such variations in the races, tribes, families and other well defined groups of humanity.” Framing war as work, the COA defined racial types through the measurement and evaluation of the first million army recruits, the ‘multiracial’ workforce of the American International Shipbuilding Association at Hog Island in Philadelphia and the measurement of some 100,000 demobilized men in the summer of 1919. These findings were collected in Physical Examination of the First Million Draft Recruits: Methods and Results (1919), Defects Found in Drafted Men (1919) and Army Anthropology (1921). Wartime anthropometry worked to equate the military evaluation of racial bodies with their industrial classification.  

Chapter Four details how federal efforts to rehabilitate disabled African American veterans led to new forms of racial knowledge and racial labor control in postwar America. A key agent in this process was the Federal Board of Vocational Education (FBVE), which was charged with rehabilitating the citizen-soldier into the citizen-worker. FBVE policy linked scientific management and eugenics to develop a catalogue of racial taxonomies in which labor fitness was linked to color and the body. Through the stages of diagnosis/benefits, training, job placement and hospitalization, officials struggled to determine whether they could, or even should, mend broken black veterans often accused of trying to “unjustly profit from their innate inferiority.” Black veterans rejected these characterizations, arguing for their right to

rehabilitation as soldiers, citizens, workers and men. The FBVE’s efforts to salvage black veterans for work in the postwar labor force revealed a key attempt to frame social policy along biological lines, and to rationalize racial labor hierarchies.

The Great War produced a wealth of social scientific racial knowledge. The final chapter analyses how social scientists at the National Research Council (NRC) built on wartime evaluations of blacks to develop, sustain and institutionalize a body of knowledge on the African American worker. Various NRC committees, such as the Committee on Scientific Problems of Human Migration (1922) and The Committee on the American Negro (1928), were established as clearing houses for racial labor expertise. The war changed perceptions of African American labor fitness in three significant ways: wartime migration and military service established the Negro as an industrial factor; rapid migration and urbanization were leading to mental and physical changes on African Americans; and national efficiency required racial integrity—hence the need to avoid the supposedly deleterious practice of race mixing. The successful management of the war effort provided social scientists with the impetus to rationalize humans and human networks through theoretical models analogous to those in the natural sciences; that is, it allowed elites to effectively create an organic or corporal model of the racial labor economy.

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This dissertation investigates the cultural and social archeology of the Negro problem and the labor problem in progressive-era America. My analysis of the praxis of racial labor expertise examines—to paraphrase E.P. Thompson—the ways in which progressives’ “minds met the world.” For the social scientists in question, theory and practice coalesced in wartime testing and the production of new ideologies of racial labor control. Raymond Williams defines ideology as “a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group, and the social processes by which meanings and ideas are produced.” The following examination posits racial ideologies as dynamic discursive practices or strategies used by individuals and institutions seeking to simultaneously reflect and transform their world. However, my focus is not on identities but on processes; it is on an arc of transformations that were, for a historical moment, central to the formation of categories and hierarchies of racial labor fitness.14

Progressive era racial thought was defined by common questions rather than a singular set of answers. Questions such as: did races exist? If so, were they the result of heredity or environment? How did one measure or quantify these differences? What was the value of these differences in the calculus of American industrial capitalism? Although these questions appear absurd, or even offensive, today, dismissing these forms of scientific racism as “pseudo science,” or a perversion of the scientific method, blurs our understanding of its role as a tool of racial labor control in modern America. Nancy Stepans reminds us that “the scientists who gave scientific racism its credibility and respectability were often first rate scientists struggling to

understand what appeared to them to be deeply puzzling problems of biology and human society.”\textsuperscript{15}

This dissertation links African American and Labor history to the emerging field of Disability History to make three key historiographical interventions. The first of these interventions addresses the roots and nature of black proletarianization in early twentieth century America. Traditional Marxist sociology defined proletarianization as the shift from a rural to an urban economy, the gradual deskilling of labor, the erosion of organic social networks, and the rise of individual autonomy. Marxists believed this process represented the most significant form of downward mobility, producing an atomized and docile labor class. Critics such as E.P. Thompson challenged this determinist model of working class development by positing an active process of class making that owed as much to the dynamic responses of workers as it did to the impact of industrialists and machines. As Thompson noted, “the working class did not rise like the sun at the appointed time. It was present at its own making.”\textsuperscript{16}

Historians of African American proletarianization built on Thompson’s work to foreground the agency of the black industrial working classes. Joe Trotter Jr. inverted traditional theories of black industrial development that stressed workers’ loss of autonomy, arguing that given the entrenched socioeconomic hierarchies of white supremacy, black proletarianization actually represented a degree of socioeconomic advancement. Subjugated within an exploitive southern sharecropping system of virtual peonage and trapped in domestic service in cities, the


movement of blacks into northern industries increased the sphere of black opportunity.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, the standardizing imperatives of Taylorist industry—the seemingly race neutral quest for “the one best way”—offered black migrants the chance to shed what Robert Park called their “racial uniform,” which had constrained them in a pre-modern and pre-rational southern labor economy. Yet Trotter conceded that black advancement was only relative. A complex set of changes in northern economics and politics, along with a shifting pattern of racial ideology and practice, conspired to relegate blacks to the bottom of the industrial economy. For African Americans, industrial modernity was a double edged sword promising both advancement and regression.\textsuperscript{18}

Scholars have long situated African American proletarianization in the shift from primary (rural) to secondary (urban) social relationships known as the Great Migration. The prevailing narrative holds that blacks were pushed out of the South by the peonage of sharecropping, the boll weevil and Jim Crow; at the same time, according to this narrative, blacks were pulled north by wartime industrial labor shortages and tales of greater freedom. The war itself is characterized as a midwife to these processes, notwithstanding debates over the relative importance of these push and pull factors.\textsuperscript{19} The literature on the Great Migration evinces a sharp focus on the


\textsuperscript{18} In arguing that the ideal working man (and manager) “was made” and not born, Taylor seemed to be echoing an environmentalist view of social difference. A view which was potentially sympathetic to those groups- such as blacks- who were generally seen as slaves to their nature. Frederick W. Taylor-\textit{The Principles of Scientific Management},1911): iv.; For work on Taylorism and Race see Frader, “From Muscles to Nerves”, \textit{International Review of Social History} 44 (1991):129-147; Stanford Lyman, \textit{Militarism, Imperialism and Racial Accommodation, An Analysis and Interpretation of the Early Writings of Robert Park}: 120-140;

\textsuperscript{19} For works on the modernist roots of the New South and southern progressivism see John Cell, \textit{The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the U.S. South} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Alex Liechtenstein, \textit{Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South} (NY: Verso, 1996); Edward Ayers, \textit{The Promise of
various political, social, economic, or cultural forms of black agency during migration. Little attention is given to the ways in which the wartime corporatist state governed and restricted African American agency during this period. Yet as Tami Davis Biddle notes, “Wartime affords the historian a window on a society under stress, actively enacting, reconsidering and perhaps redefining its sense of self.”

The wartime state was a key agent of African American proletarianization. Despite the mechanized and industrial slaughter of the war, many progressives retained a utopian faith in the ability of managerial expertise to reconcile democracy with the wartime political economy and establish a more rational and efficient post war social order. However, the small prewar American state was ill-equipped for the challenges of the first truly modern war. Officials forced to cobble together a functioning bureaucracy eagerly sought out designated “social experts” to fill the ranks of the wartime state. An institutional inability to standardize expertise effectively reduced the wartime state to an aggregate collection of individual technocrats. The weakness of the prewar state, the ad-hoc nature of its wartime development and the incestuous character of the American social sciences combined to give select individuals extraordinary power in developing policies regarding the racial division of wartime labor.

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The managerial cultures of the wartime state, linking war with work, were national in scope. For the millions of blacks who did not migrate north, wartime military service was their only exposure to the time, work, discipline and skill set required by modern industrial work. The war transformed private industry’s relatively inchoate response to black proletarianization into a coherent attempt to rationalize what one observer termed “the masses of colored labor.”

Officials at the Department of Negro Economics (DNE), the Committee on Anthropology (COA) and the Federal Board of Vocational Education (FBVE) employed sociological, anthropometric and rehabilitative methodologies to define and regulate black labor across regional lines. The webs of the wartime state ensnared African American laborers, from the fields of Dixie and the factories of the North to the trenches of France.

My second historiographical intervention argues for a corporal model of black proletarianization. Following the bodily turn in historical scholarship, this examination claims the laboring or soldering black body as a useful category of analysis that can be used to explore how progressives developed a corporal understanding of African American proletarianization. Ava Baron and Eileen Boris note that “bodies are both constituted by and constitutive of the workplace they inhabit and the racialized and gendered class relations which work both expresses and creates.” According to Baron and Boris, “racial bodies are cultural productions, constituted through an interpretive process which often masks the social struggles that went into their making.” Through the body, racial difference becomes naturalized. This process is expedited when social mores and norms dictating which bodies can do which kinds of work receive legislative sanction. When the state—particularly in wartime—determines the fitness and

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worth of these bodies through policies of conscription and rehabilitation, racial labor hierarchies become irrevocably normalized.\textsuperscript{23}

The Taylorist quest for standardized efficiency saw all working bodies as deficient by definition. Industrial managers and military officials were obsessed by the stubborn human element which consistently thwarted their attempts for systematic efficiency. The ideal worker-soldier remained perpetually out of reach. African Americans were excluded from these models precisely because of their apparent innate inferiority. Officials in the public and private spheres noted “stubborn Negro traits,” such as flat feet, broad hips, mechanical inaptitude and inferior lung capacity, as proof of black’s incapacity for modern work or war. By contrast, the mere absence of these traits marked white workers as nominally fit for the work of war. The normative logic of scientific management dictated that an unruly and insidious blackness—a sinister human element—was conspicuous even in the physical absence of black workers on the shop floor or the battlefield. Given the seemingly innate abnormalities of black bodies, the ideal working or soldiering body became white by default.\textsuperscript{24}

Wartime evaluations of African Americans produced new models of racial labor knowledge regarding both black and white workers. Early twentieth century capitalism and imperialism conspired to equate manliness, and manly self-sufficiency, with whiteness. In the representational political economy of Western society, only white men were seen to posses the rational mind and physical discipline that marked a man as a respectable citizen worker. Non white races—and women of all colors—were characterized strictly in bodily terms, beholden to


their depraved physicality—or what one observer termed “the pairing of passion and passivity typical of all the savage, backward races.” David Roediger argues that the social and financial benefits of white privilege, “the wages of whiteness,” often worked to offset the downward mobility experienced by all workers during periods of stress, such as rapid proletarianization or war. Wartime testing conferred scientific and legislative authority on the division of white man’s work from colored work and effectively ensured payment of the wages of whiteness in the progressive era political economy.25

Examination of the corporal dimensions of African American proletarianization also helps illustrate the ways in which bodies have served as sites of both repression and resistance within industrial capitalism. I build on Catherine Kudlick’s call for disability as a category of analysis when delineating how social difference has been embodied throughout history. Kudlick’s argument for “why we need another ‘other’” is especially useful for charting the way in which race and labor hierarchies were understood in visceral, aesthetic and everyday terms. Baron and Boris note that the abstract idea of the normative worker—like the abstract normative citizen of modern liberal theory—cast gendered, racialized and disabled bodies as exceptional and therefore deviant. Progressive era political economy marked black workers as diseased, dirty, unskilled and hyper-sexual, effectively treating blackness itself as a disability. These racial corporealities reveal the belief that, under certain circumstances, some peoples could draw on their bodies as a resource while others could not, because they were positioned as captive to their

bodies. Whereas whiteness entitled some veterans to the social and financial benefits of military service, the stain of blackness restricted the access of other individuals.  

Physiological models of black labor fitness, and the linking of blackness to disability, can be traced in part to the rise of Mendelian hereditarianism, which framed race in stark biological terms. However, employing the black working or soldiering body as an analytic category reveals the socially constructed epistemologies that governed black proletarianization. Such an approach challenges the supposed naturalness of racial labor hierarchies as the result of inevitable racial prejudice, along with the progressive belief that, for blacks, biology was destiny. The figure of the black working body pervades the histories of black proletarianization, migration and war. Yet, its meaning and function as a signifier of social differences is unclear. Building on Chris Schilling and Keith Wailoo’s works on racial corporealities as conduits of social knowledge and control, I seek to delineate the “absent presence” of black working bodies in the history of black proletarianization.  

The African American worker was an abject spectacle within the progressive imagination. Throughout the social sciences, black workers emerged as mere objects of law and social policy. They were seen as weak, disordered or, in the lexicon of industrial evolution, as a people out of time, and out of place. Jacqueline Jones claims that during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, theories of African American inferiority “remained remarkably malleable, as different groups of whites sought to advance their own interests and invent new

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rationales to justify certain traditional patterns of black labor.” Boris and Baron concur, arguing that “while racial categories, like gender, have proven historically flexible they remain ideologically rigid.”28 For many past and present racial observers, across the political spectrum, the continued physical presence of black people ensures the persistence of race and racism.29

The third and final historiographical intervention posits World War One as a key marker in the shift from hereditarianism to cultural models of racial labor fitness. The wartime state was a vital medium of African American proletarianization and wartime testing produced new corporeal understandings of the black worker. However, in the immediate postwar era these new models of black labor fitness proved untenable. The theories and practices of sociology, anthropometry, vocational rehabilitation and anthropology all failed to merge racial form with function. Elites were stymied in their efforts to maintain racial form as an index of racial function by the ambiguous results of mental and physical wartime testing. Instead, social scientists unwittingly severed race from biology, presaging the rise of cultural models of racial labor fitness. Yet, throughout the postwar era biology would remain a powerful maker of racial difference.

African Americans’ sudden emergence as an important industrial factor required social scientists—still centered mainly in the north—to confront their long held convictions regarding blacks. The Negro of the prewar era, despite being overwhelmingly confined to the South, was a decidedly known figure in the progressive imagination. Northern observers gleaned their knowledge of blacks and black life from self appointed southern race experts and popular

culture. A burgeoning mass culture transmitted stock characterizations of child-like, buffoonish or rapacious “darkies,” through song, stage and the page, to an appreciative nation. Following the mass wartime exodus of blacks to the North, these mediums became largely ineffectual for making sense of rapidly shifting racial labor dynamics. Paradoxically, despite the increased presence of blacks in the industrial north, the Negro had become something of a mystery. Amidst the fractious processes of modernization, precise social scientific inquiry was needed to evaluate and regulate these New Negroes. Progressives hoped that heredity, not environment, would form the basis of new racial labor hierarchies.

Wartime testing provided a scientific veneer to the legal and often horrific extralegal violence that threatened every black laborer who dared to challenge America’s white supremacist political economy. Social scientists argued that science, not crass prejudice, necessitated blacks’ exclusion from the mainstream labor economy. Historians have cited the role of Army IQ tests and Army anthropometry in the drafting of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924, as well as Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act of the same year, as proof of wartime testing’s role in the rise of eugenic thinking. The 1920s has been described by many scholars as the high tide of race science and hereditarian models of racial development that marginalized workers of color. In this era, social policy was explicitly reconfigured along biological lines and bestselling paeansto the virtues of whiteness, such as Madison Grant’s, *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) and

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Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy* (1920), enflamed the public consciousness.\(^{31}\)

This narrative is complicated by wartime social scientists failure to develop a coherent model of African American labor fitness. While white social scientists were frustrated in their efforts to link black industrial development to heredity, black thinkers—especially those affiliated with the Department of Negro Economics—failed to develop an effective cultural critique of this discourse. White and black alike were baffled by the results of army anthropometry which found the “uninfected Negro to be a constitutionally better physiological machine than his white counterpart.” These results ran contrary to those of the infamous Yerkes IQ testing, which was also being called into question at this time and had seemingly found blacks to be mentally inferior to whites. Efforts to rehabilitate disabled black veterans blurred the line between racial function and form. Finally, postwar social scientists’ fascination with the processes of race mixing evinced a distinct inability on their part to delineate the exact physiology of the New Negro. Nonetheless, just as mainstream social sciences began to abandon hereditarian models of black labor fitness, leading African American nationalists such as Marcus Garvey began to embrace race purity as a source of racial uplift.\(^{32}\)

Wartime testing revealed deep fissures in the edifice of postwar American white supremacy. Historians have maintained that the push-back against eugenic thinking began with the rise of New Deal pluralism, abetted by new models of cultural relativism developed by the anthropologist Franz Boas. Davarian Baldwin argues that during this period the labor


management practices of “racial reasoning and regulation shifted from the religious tales of Ham to the biocultural social sciences.” For many scholars, eugenic or hereditarian models of race and racial difference were ultimately discredited with the rise of Nazism and the horrors of Auschwitz. Daniel Kelves notes that while the “barbarousness of Nazi policies eventually provoked a powerful anti-eugenic reaction...this reaction obscured a deeper historical reality: many thoughtful members of the American public had already recognized that a great deal was wrong with mainline eugenics.”

My dissertation argues that the revolt against hereditarian racism began in the trenches, draft boards, cantonments and veteran’s hospitals of World War One. Notwithstanding the persistent critiques of African American thinkers and religious and secular reformers, postwar white supremacy was ultimately undone by its own logical contradictions. Heredity could not be reconciled to function, and biology clearly did not equal destiny. Building on the work of Daniel Bender, I contend that postwar American white supremacy was a profoundly pessimistic ideology that was in retreat due to rapidly shifting demographics of race and labor. The regulatory imperatives and mechanisms of the wartime state ushered African Americans into industrial modernity and eventually helped sever race from biology. Embedded in the sediment of progressive era thought, wartime theories of racial labor fitness provide historians with a fossil record of how capitalism, war and the state worked to produce and naturalize racial and labor hierarchies in Progressive era America.

Chapter One

Counting a Vanishing Race: Statistical Narratives of African American Extinction in Turn of the Century America

“A race may be interesting, gentle and hospitable; but if it is not a useful race in the common acceptation of that term, it is only a question of time when a downward course must take place.”

Frederick Hoffman, 1896

By the late nineteenth century, Nathaniel Shaler, Dean of the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard, had established himself as one of the nation’s leading purveyors of popular science. Shaler provided scientific analysis on the issues of the day through his widely circulated essays in the Atlantic Monthly, Popular Science Monthly and the North American Review. Shaler was especially concerned with the “Negro Problem,” an umbrella term for the consequences of African Americans transition from bondage to freedom. Only a generation removed from slavery, blacks had seemingly exchanged the servitude of slavery for the debt peonage of sharecropping. Moreover, increased rates of tuberculosis and venereal diseases in the black community—and the ominous presence of “idle and shiftless Negro youth” in many southern towns—led many whites to question the ex-slave's fitness for modern industrial life. Shaler fused evolutionary theory with contemporary political economy to argue for a starkly biological interpretation of black inferiority: “despite the strong spring of life within the race, the inherited qualities of Negroes to a great degree unfit them to carry the burden of our own modern civilization.”

35 Shaler was a keen racial essentialist, arguing that, “there are reasons for believing that the Negros can be readily cultivated in certain departments of thought in which the emotions lend aid to labor; as for instance in music. There is hardly any doubt that they have a keener sense of rhythm than whites...these considerations lead me to think that music may be one of the lines on which careful inquiry may develop
Progressive era racial logic maintained that like the American Indian before him, the Negro was marked for extinction. Yet in contrast to the warlike and noble Indian brave, who had admirably resisted his fate, the Negro was destined to expire through sloth and indifference.\(^{36}\) The historian James Bryce observed: “the census just taken (1890) relieves...a source of anxiety. It is now clear that the Negro, long regarded as a factor in the community, is becoming physically weaker; nor is the prospect likely to be arrested.”\(^{37}\) From the acts portrayed on the minstrel stage, to the sentiment in the popular press and to the brutal spectacle of lynching, the lazy, violent black body was seen as both a cause and effect of racial depravity. This preoccupation with black bodies led many to locate Negro inferiority, not in his character, but in his genes.

In the waning years of the nineteenth century, biological theories of black degeneration were increasingly linked to the failure of Reconstruction. Characterizations of this period as a betrayal of white manhood functioned as a form of national reconciliation as imperial America began to encounter the world’s peoples both at home and abroad. For white elites empire, like slavery before it, was a civilizing force for ostensibly inferior colored peoples. Popular opinion maintained that slavery had insulated blacks from the enfeebling effects of the free market, and direct competition with the superior white wage laborer. Most importantly, slavery had compelled the seemingly indolent Negro to labor. Dr. Edwin Bushee, a Boston physician, argued that the high black mortality rate “was due to the many subtle influences which uniformly cause an inferior race to quickly disappear when in direct contact with a higher civilization.” It was great possibilities for the race.” N.S. Shaler, “Science and the African Problem”, Atlantic Monthly 66 (1890): 43 N.S. Shaler, ‘The Negro Problem’, Atlantic Monthly, Nov, 1884: 703.

\(^{36}\) Alexander Saxton argues that the sentimental domesticization of racial ‘others’ - i.e. the noble Indian-into popular culture became possible only through the discourse of degeneracy and extinction because it alleviated the racial anxiety of white Americans. See Alexander Saxton, The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America (NY: Verso, 1990): 342-345, and Phil Deloria, Playing Indian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

argued that without the protection of the “peculiar institution,” the colored race would wither and die. In 1893, Dr. E. Corson of Savannah wrote, “many of these Negroes now passing away, are survivors of the old regime, where they were well cared for, and had reached at emancipation a safe age which kept them out of the struggle for life...the younger generations have been deprived from birth from such protection.”

Elites viewed the enfeebled bodies of the first generation of freed people as cautionary tales. Diseased and dying black bodies were said to be testaments to reconstruction’s failure and the hubris of reformers and philanthropists who foolishly worked to uplift the Negro. The novelist and ex-Freedman’s Bureau employee John D. Forest offered a blunt appraisal of blacks racial fitness: “the Negro no matter how well educated, is not the mental or physical equal of the European, and the free ‘low-down’ Negro will pass into a sure and deserved oblivion.” Governor James Vardaman of Mississippi reiterated a typical, albeit extreme, view: “the Negro is a lazy, lying, lustful animal which no conceivable amount of training can transform into a tolerable citizen or worker.” Blacks seemed socially and congenitally incapable of making the adjustment from bonded to contract labor. The degraded black body became a repository for a shifting constellation of various social ills—including poverty, sexual deviance and violence—from which whites had to be protected. Yet, amidst rapid industrialization, urbanization,

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39 Frederickson, Black Image in the White Mind (Hanover: Wesleyan Press, 1973): 238. The analogy of African Americans as animals was pervasive in nineteenth century American culture. Slaves were often seen as analogous to farm animals in both their brute strength, and docile nature. With the coming of Darwinian theory, ethnologists continued to stress the animal nature of blacks by positing them as the ‘missing’ link between apes and white men. See John Haller, Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1859-1900 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Margaret Humphreys, Intensely Human: The Health of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
immigration and imperialism, there was still a great explanatory need for a Negro, even a vanishing one, in the white cultural imagination.  

This chapter examines the role of statistics—specifically actuarial science—in shaping narratives of African American degeneracy and extinction in turn of the century America. Historian Ian Hacking characterizes the late nineteenth century as an era beset by “an avalanche of numbers” in which quantification was privileged as a superior form of producing knowledge about the natural and human worlds. Social scientists poured over the latest census numbers, medical briefs and sociological studies for proof of a shrinking black population. Selective readings of the incomplete eleventh and twelve censuses (1890, 1900) led many to predict that African Americans would become extinct inside of three to four generations. In 1896, Frederick L. Hoffman, a statistician for Standard Life Insurance, produced the seminal tract on black extinction: *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*. Hoffman delineated black racial decline through venereal disease, criminality and respiratory health. Statistics, specifically actuarial science, allowed Hoffman to chart the relative rate and economic cost of rapidly deteriorating black bodies. Actuarial science—through its quantification and transposing of flesh and blood bodies into abstract statistical values—was a key example of the contentious nature of race-making in Progressive era America.

Actuarial narratives of racial fitness represented a middle ground between social and biological models of racial fitness. Historian Charles Rosenberg posits race as a biological frame,

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based in nature, upon which societal meanings are hung.\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Race Traits} linked the progressive mania for quantification to the demands of contemporary political economy by delineating and commodifying black degeneracy. As historian Jackson Lears argues, just as the movement for “sound money sought to tie ephemeral paper to the intrinsic value of gold...modern racism provided similar solidity to personal identity” in a secularizing and uncertain market society. Hoffman’s actuarial narratives of black decline were key to establishing what Lears defines as a “biological personhood,” a new bottom line which fixed the right races in the right places.\textsuperscript{43}

Whereas under slavery the black body had been amongst the most valuable of commodities, its value post-emancipation drastically decreased with each passing year.

Hoffman’s work was part of an emerging trend within modern social sciences to posit the Negro as a definitive object of social scientific inquiry during what Rayford Logan described as the “nadir of American race relations.”\textsuperscript{44} Invariably, the Negro as object was contingent on whites as objective observers. Following the publication of \textit{Race Traits} the editors of \textit{Dial} magazine hailed it as “a thoughtful work by an unbiased foreigner” and an essential read for all serious students of the race problem.\textsuperscript{45} Hoffman, a German émigré, cultivated himself as a dispassionate observer of American racial politics. He regularly traded on American elites’ deference to European, and specifically German, scholarly methodologies. Hoffman was the first in a long line—culminating almost half a century later in the work of Gunnar Myrdal—of seemingly objective, foreign observers of African Americans. Hoffman’s work demonstrates

\textsuperscript{43} Lears, \textit{Rebirth of a Nation}: 93.
\textsuperscript{44} Rayford Logan, \textit{The Betrayal of the Negro, from Rutherford Hayes to Woodrow Wilson} (NY: Collier Books, 1965)
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Dial Magazine} Jan. 1897: 17.
how the whitening of progressive era scientific expertise cut across racial, class and national lines.

Actuarial narratives determined what constituted a healthy body, and which bodies could do which kinds of work. According to the political scientist Brian Glenn, “actuaries rate risks in many different ways, depending on the stories they tell about which characteristics are important, and which are not.” These “stories” invariably adhere to prevailing gender and racial hierarchies that “may be irrelevant to predicting actual losses.” Glenn concludes that, “almost every aspect of the insurance industry is predicated on stories first, then numbers.” Such stories were also dependent on a compelling storyteller. Much of Race Traits’ popularity can be traced to its mixture of seemingly cold eyed empiricism and racial romanticism. Hoffman drew on European theories of degeneration describing “statistics as the science of numbers applied to the life history of communities, nations, or races.”

Statistics were a key vernacular in the writing of racial epics. Hoffman’s focus on African Americans sexual health, criminality and vital capacity reinforced prevailing myths of blacks as deviant, savage and inefficient. Race Traits eschewed empiricism, using statistics as a justification for pre-existing racial inequalities in turn of the century America. Actuaries helped justify segregation by identifying, and naturalizing, black pathologies as clear and present dangers to society and to the nation’s political economy. Actuarial science reified physiological blackness as the stigmata of a depraved and dying race. It bolstered both de facto and de jure segregation as socio-biological imperatives for maintaining national efficiency. At a time in which national vitality was expressed in organic or corporal terms, statistics were a key tool for diagnosing the racial health of the body politic. Under the direction of Francis Amasa Walker,

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the late nineteenth century U.S. census bureau was transformed into a key arbiter of racial categorization. Although Walker was primarily focused on delineating the various so-called European races, his bio-cultural model of measuring racial difference were readily applied to African Americans. 47

White elites used statistics and actuarial science to write African Americans out of the discourse of industrial evolution. From the halls of academia to the midways of the era’s grand expositions, the Negro was seen as incidental, if not detrimental to the progress of American civilization. African Americans were conspicuous by their absence at major exhibitions like the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Popular Science Monthly cited Hoffman’s work as a call to abandon “the misguided modern attempt of superior races to lift inferior races to their own elevated position.” To the great consternation of white elites, the 1880 census had revealed a dramatic increase in blacks’ share of the national population via natural increase – despite failing to correct for the foreign born immigrant population of white ethnics. Political scientist Gary Calkin noted that Hoffman’s “indisputable statistical evidence” of black decline dispelled rumors that “under our fostering civilization the freed negro is increasing in numbers so rapidly as to menace our republican institutions.” Dr. Paul Barringer, a prominent southern physician argued that “surely a race so given to savage license” lacked the capacity for modern civilization. 48 The majority of white social scientists greeted blacks’ impending racial suicide with a palpable sense of relief.

48 Baker, From Savage to Negro, 14-16; B.S. Coler, “Reform of Public Charity” Popular Science Monthly 55 (1899): 750-755.; Gary Calkin, Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 11 No. 4, Dec 1896; In the same breath that he predicted blacks eventual extinction Barringer remarked that “the freed negro’s reversion to type was a threat to the very survival of the white race in the south.” Paul Barringer, The American Negro: His Past and Future (Raleigh, 1900)
African American elites were keenly aware how scientific expertise, specifically statistics, could be made to produce and maintain racial hierarchies. Historian Dan Bender has argued that the black intelligentsia—cognizant of its power as a tool of white supremacy—had a fraught relationship with evolutionary thought. Yet African American scholars and activists realized that to be excluded from evolutionary debates about labor and industry meant exclusion from the nation’s future.49 Blacks tirelessly lobbied for inclusion in the era’s great fairs to counter notions of themselves as a degenerate and dying race. At the 1895 Atlanta Exposition, Booker T. Washington praised black labor as vital to the political economy of the New South. However, his plea for blacks to “cast down their buckets” in the south was informed by his own understanding that the Negro was lagging in evolutionary terms. Washington believed that for blacks to advance they would have to forego the political sphere and concentrate on developing a niche for industrial advancement. For Washington and his allies, the adoption of a respectable work ethic would liberate the race from its biology.50

W.E.B. DuBois—who would later became Washington’s chief black rival—also believed that Hoffman had erred in his methods, rather than in his conclusions. DuBois conceded that if indeed the Negro was degenerating, it was for want of social, rather than biological advantages. Rather than contest Hoffman’s statistics, DuBois referenced the black bourgeoisies’ march from matriarchal to respectable patriarchal models of family life as proof of the race’s civilized advance. In the Conservation of the Races (1897), DuBois noted that although races were distinguished by their specific organic “gifts,” they were not inferior or superior to one another in

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49 Bender, American Abyss: 89.
their capacity to produce exceptional individuals. DuBois’ later contention that a talented tenth of blacks would save the race was a rejoinder to the notion that the rule of the best was the exclusive purview of the whites.\textsuperscript{51} However, at the turn of the century, DuBois, Washington and Hoffman shared an abiding faith in race as a historical fact, the primary force of historical progress, and the race neutral character of the scientific method.

\textit{The Measure of Man: The Roots of Modern Statistical Science}

Statistical science was rooted in the development of the modern industrial capitalist state and early social Darwinism. Notwithstanding the pretensions of a pure statistical model, mid-nineteenth century statistics was an applied science of a bureaucratic nature. The Victorian definition of statistics referred to state numbers, or vital statistics, including indices of population, trade, manufacture and mortality, all of which aided in the shaping of public policy.\textsuperscript{52} For historian Theodore Porter, a highly disciplined discourse such as statistics or mathematics “helps to produce knowledge independent of the particular people who make it.” This trait was well suited to the creation of the broad, impersonal and institutional knowledge crucial to the functioning of the modern state. This was particularly true for states striving to become players in the vast transnational imperial economy. With the expansion of the American state and the increasing specialization of social scientific knowledge, statistics became a key mediator in developing and maintaining racial hierarchies at home and abroad. Lee Baker argues that while disciplines such as anthropology were used to define “out of the way” indigenous peoples, statistics served to delineate stubbornly “in the way” immigrant and black people.\textsuperscript{53}

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Racial hierarchies permeated late-nineteenth century American political economy. Though various taxonomies of race and racial differences had existed for centuries prior, in the mid-late nineteenth century race received the imprimatur of scientific expertise. In the late 1860s, Francis Galton, an English polymath and cousin of Charles Darwin, used the normal, or Gaussian, method of distribution to transform statistics from a science devoted to the accumulation of socially useful data to one characterized by systematic mathematical theory. Portrayed graphically, the normal formulation took on the shape of the bell curve, with a vertical line bisecting the bell in the centre and representing the mean of measurements and a curve expressing the frequency of deviation from the mean.\(^\text{54}\) Galton was especially interested in the distribution of deviations, or regressions, from the mean.

For Galton and his disciple, the English mathematician Karl Pearson, deviations were key for determining statistical norms. However, the Gaussian model’s focus on the degree or frequency of deviations from the norm—rather than on the production of norms themselves—rendered its practitioners blind to the very social contexts which they were trying to decipher. Believing that norms could be produced or inferred from an objective analysis of deviations, they ignored the assumptions which informed the collection and arrangement of the data set in the first place. Galton and Pearson’s focus on regressions in human populations stemmed from their mutual interest in human heredity and the possibilities of purifying the gene pool. Galton deemed this practice “eugenics,” a mixture of Greek terms literally defined as “well born” or as the

practice of “better breeding.”

The statistical measurement of human physiology, known as anthropometry, grew out of the destabilizing and enfeebling effects of mass industrialization. In Europe, these fears were mediated through the discourse of degeneration. As early as the 1840s, Friedrich Engels noted that the labor and housing conditions of the urban working class produced “mental and physical lassitude and low vitality” along with a “marked relaxation of all vital energies.” Elites feared that industrial civilization was enabling the proliferation of the most unfit in society. By the late nineteenth century, observers feared that even the middle classes were degenerating—via diseases such as neurasthenia—from the debilitating effects of an excessively civilized society. The physiological markers of alcoholism, venereal disease and criminality became the stigmata of degeneration. Historian Robert Nye notes, “degeneration was a medical metaphor of cultural crisis” which varied along national lines. In Italy, degeneration was embodied in the malformed body of the criminal; in France, the mentally ill were seen as the greatest threat to national health; while, in England, it was the specter of the working poor that constituted a cancer upon the national body.

Anthropometric science transformed racial thinking by literally mapping and quantifying physiological difference onto an abstract statistical body. This practice took previously commonsensical traits of racial physiology such as the “flat Negro nose and arch-less colored foot” and reinterpreted them into a definable commodity. Evaluating the health and labor

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55 Kelves, In the Name of Eugenics: ix, 13-14.
58 On sensory forms of racial difference in turn of the century America, see Mark Smith, How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation and the Senses, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
fitness of black bodies was a time honored practice in America. Under slavery, the black body was an invaluable commodity. Slave holders continually poked, prodded and smelled black bodies to gauge their health and respective labor fitness. Throughout the slave markets of the antebellum south, slave holders assessed the projected risks involved in the purchase of various bodies. The auction block was a key site in the development of early American actuarial science. 

The collapse of chattel slavery and the ex-slaves’ tentative forays into the free labor market required new racial labor hierarchies. Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale argues that the rise of mass consumer culture rendered traditional southern markers of racial identity, particularly in public spaces, increasingly irrelevant. Blacks readily embraced the expanding mass consumer economy to acquire status symbols—clothing, jewelry, household items—which further blurred racial lines. The long-term deterioration in black economic prospects was somewhat militated by a growing demand for unskilled and semiskilled labor at the turn of the century and into the first decade of the twentieth century. As a result, blacks made small but persistent gains in real estate, farm ownership and personal capital. To the dismay of many whites, the new Negro was wealthier, more mobile and assertive than his predecessor of only a few decades ago.

61 Because blacks faced discrimination in housing markets and had little capital for down payments, a relatively high proportion of their wealth was held in personal property—such as clothes and furniture—rather than real estate. Therefore it is hard to gauge black wealth at the turn of the century. Moreover, the situation differed for urban and rural blacks: in Atlanta blacks possessed only $37,000 worth of real estate in 1869 an amount which had grown to $855,561 by 1900. In contrast, in 1900 black farm ownership was only 8% in the black belt in compared with 54% of whites. Black farm ownership while somewhat higher in the Gulf Plain (42%) and the Atlantic Plain (39%) still trailed that of whites by more than a third—see Edward Ayers, The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction (NY: Oxford University Press, 1992): 70, 429, 449-450
Actuarial science was a key ideological mechanism in mediating African Americans’ transition from slavery to freedom. Through the rhetoric of degeneration, actuarial science worked to devalue black labor and consign it to the margins of the southern political economy. The diseased, degenerate and dying Negro was a familiar, and ultimately non-threatening, figure to whites. By characterizing the post-emancipation Negro as a victim of his own savagery, whites were engaging in what scholar Patrick Brantlinger refers to as “the fantasy of auto genocide.” For Brantlinger this “extreme version of blaming the victim has helped to rationalize or occlude” various forms of European conquest and control over the last three centuries. Statistical narratives of black degeneracy, gleaned from the fledgling industrial insurance industry, contributed to the maintenance of both southern and national white supremacy.

**Rise of the Industrial Insurance Movement**

Industrial insurance originated in the working classes. Beginning in the late 18th century, American workers banded together in their respective occupations to mutualize the various risks endemic to wage labor. Previously, working people lived in constant fear of losing their meager savings through an unexpected illness, accident, or job loss. In response, they formed mutual benefit societies where they invested in a commonweal to provide for their peers. These forms of insurance were almost entirely synonymous with burial insurance. Historian Dan Rodgers notes that while mutual aid societies were notoriously unstable and actuarially unsound—often functioning as little more than a lottery—“no form of organization set down deeper roots in the working classes.”

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Mutual aid societies were widespread amongst the coal miners of Appalachia, the industrial immigrant workers of Chicago and African American workers nationwide, whose situation was especially precarious. In *The Philadelphia Negro*, DuBois observed that the majority of the city’s black insurance societies such as the Avery and Crucifixion clubs had their roots in local churches. Unfortunately, most of these mutual aid organizations had “met disaster by bad management.” Like their white counterparts, black workers north and south also obtained forms of insurance through secret fraternal societies like the Masons, Odd Fellows and the Knights of Pythias. DuBois’ assessment of black insurance efforts was mixed: “some of these are honest efforts and some are swindling imitations of the pernicious white petty insurance societies.”

By the late nineteenth century, mutual aid societies were being increasingly displaced by corporate interests. Previously, commercial insurance had been the purview of the middle and upper middle classes, owing to its minimum premiums of $1,000, that well beyond the means of the working classes. Notwithstanding their high price nearly all the policies issued at mid century prohibited employment in industrial work. Small companies such as Prudential soon found themselves squeezed out by larger conglomerates. By 1875 the three largest insurance companies—Metropolitan Life, the Equitable and Mutual Life—had expanded into a corporate oligopoly that dominated sales in the cities of the northeast United States and maintained an impressive worldwide reputation. In 1875, Prudential Life Insurance turned to the mass market of the urban working classes and introduced industrial insurance in an effort to stem their

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growing losses. Years later, Frederick Hoffman described industrial insurance as “mass insurance” and ordinary insurance as “class insurance.” Industrial insurance differed from mutual aid in four significant ways: premiums were paid weekly as opposed to semi-annually; agents collected door to door rather than from a central office; premiums were adjusted on a flexible, rather than fixed, basis; and a worker could insure dependents on an individual basis.

Industrial insurance extracted the single most important aspect of the mutual aid society, burial costs, for use in a business contract with only one condition: payment. Historian Megan Wolff argues that as the availability of insurance was reduced to a matter of revenue—ostensibly divorced from social standing—this produced a leveling effect in the “corporal commodification” of the working classes. From its inception, life insurance was a controversial practice opposed by those who objected to the quantification of sacred entities and experiences like bodies, life, and death. The propensity of modern bourgeoisie society to reduce human life to a mere commodity was criticized by religious and secular thinkers alike. In The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, the young Karl Marx had deplored the devaluing of human life beyond the all encompassing cash nexus. Marx cited labor, prostitution and slavery as prime examples of the degrading and alienating process of capitalist commodification.

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Immediately following the Civil War, the major insurance companies insured African Americans on an equal basis with whites. This equality lasted until 1881, when Prudential became the first company to reduce life benefits to blacks by a third while requiring that they continue to pay premiums in their original amount. Prudential was supported in its efforts by the Insurance Commissioner of Massachusetts, who in a 1884 report concluded that this practice “was not a distinction on account of color, but on account of the differences in longevity between the two races apparently supported by mortality statistics.” The report dismissed any notion of racial prejudice stating, “that to compel a company to insure for the same rates, different classes of people, with different prospects of longevity, would be to establish a grossly unjust discrimination against the longer-lived class in favor of the shorter lived class.” The editors of the trade journal Spectator concurred arguing, “the color line is not drawn simply because the applicants are negroes—the world is too progressive for that but a distinction is made on account of the fact that companies cannot afford to grant policies at the same rates to colored as to white applicants and any legislation which is intended to force them to do so is particularly tyrannous.” For corporate elites, the principles of the free market economy were an outgrowth of evolutionary theory and the establishment of a political economy of the racially fit and unfit.

African Americans vigorously contested Prudential’s exclusionary practices in the courts. They achieved a measure of success at the local level by citing the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee of “equal protection of the laws.” In 1884, the Massachusetts legislature passed a law forbidding the custom of providing fewer benefits to blacks who were paying the same premiums as whites. Similar laws were passed in Connecticut in 1887, and in Ohio in 1889, thanks to protests from middle class blacks and as part of an overall push to regulate the industry at the

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federal level. When New York State introduced an anti-discriminatory bill in 1891, Leslie Ward, the vice president of Prudential, published a letter in an industry trade journal threatening to end sales to African Americans altogether should the legislation pass.\(^{72}\) Ward’s pleas fell on deaf ears and New York passed the measure in 1891, followed by Michigan in 1893.

Industry officials opposed this regulatory trend—citing its anti-business and antidemocratic features—and consistently worked to undermine it in court whenever possible. When state Senator Edward Stokes introduced the bill in New Jersey in 1893, Democratic Governor George Werts vetoed it, filing among his reasons a letter from a Prudential actuary detailing the comparative mortality between blacks and whites. However, within a year, the statute reappeared and passed over the governor’s veto.\(^{73}\) Actuarial expertise was key to making the case for the insurance industry’s discriminatory policy towards African Americans. Fortunately, a young statistician, Frederick L. Hoffman, boasted a set of recent publications that made him uniquely qualified for the task the insurance industry had in mind.

**The Making of an Actuary: The early career of Frederick Hoffman**

In November 1884, Frederick Hoffman, a nineteen year old journeyman laborer from Oldenburg in northwestern Germany, arrived in New York City. Hoffman’s family fortunes had recently been devastated by consumption and he was determined to redeem his family name in America. Despite lacking an extensive formal education, Hoffman was a fierce autodidact with an almost pathological desire for social advancement. Hoffman traveled first to the Midwest, but

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\(^{72}\) However Ward did note that, “there are no objections herein stated, except as to mortality, directed against that class of colored persons who are possessed of intelligence and thrift and whose social and moral lives are such that they are a credit to the community in which they reside. It may be that if this class could be separated from the colored race as a whole the mortality amongst them might be considerably less than among the entire body.” Hoffman, *History of the Prudential*: 211.

he soon tired of the harsh winters and menial labor, and quickly set off for the southland. A chance meeting on a Mississippi riverboat with an actuary led to a job as an industrial insurance agent with the Metropolitan Insurance Company, which set Hoffman to work collecting door to door premiums from working class clients in Boston. Hoffman’s riverboat encounter was fortuitous: it set him on his career path and introduced him to African Americans and the complexities of southern race relations.

Hoffman’s experience on the Mississippi provided the subtext for his future actuarial narratives of racial fitness. Initially, he was most struck by “the truly horrible brutality practiced upon the Negro deck hands.” Hoffman evinced genuine empathy for the “maligned Negroes,” yet he marveled at the “incredible performance of their labor.” Although “they were grossly ignorant, and hardly a man could write his name, they would carry for long hours heavy sacks of corn, up and down the gangplank, leading at a steep angle to the shore.” Hoffman’s astonishment at the brute strength of black bodies echoed the prevailing view of African Americans as little more than beasts of burden. Historians have noted that in the view of nineteenth century American social sciences, the civilized body was a domesticated and disciplined body, which represented a reasoned knowledge of self. This stood in stark contrast to African Americans and women, who seemingly lacked any sense of self-mastery over their basest instincts and were effectively prisoners of their physiology. The logic of white supremacy dictated that rational

75 F. Hoffman Unpublished memoir: 72-73, Box 9. Hoffman was also disturbed by the rash of lynchings throughout the south in the 1890’s. Away on business in the south he observed an advertisement for lodging and accommodations to a lynching party in May 1891 at Americas, Georgia. Writing to his wife Hoffman stated; “I am agonized about the lynching. Where are the so-called Christian churches in this? We are all brothers, if we are to have peace on earth and it is a hard task we all have to work for it-we must learn to live together”. Ella Hoffman Unpublished Biography of Frederick L. Hoffman Vol. 4, pg. 117- Box 31, Frederick Hoffman Papers, Columbia University Library Rare Book and Manuscript Collection.
mastery of the physical self, and fitness for industrial civilization, were the exclusive domains of white males. Hoffman would forcefully expand on this thesis in his subsequent actuarial investigations of African American health.

Hoffman’s staunch embrace of racial essentialism experienced a short respite in the late 1880’s. Despite enjoying his work in Boston, Hoffman left New England after only two years and returned to the south to take up a position with the Life Insurance Company of Virginia in its Norfolk office. In Norfolk, Hoffman met Frances Morgan Armstrong, who was helping to manage Hampton Institute, which had been founded by her husband Samuel in 1868 to provide vocational education to freedmen. Samuel Armstrong had preached the transformative benefits and potential of vocational work for those of the lesser races, such as blacks and Indians. Hampton sought to instill a work ethic of diligence and propriety through which its colored students could literally work their way to civilized respectability. To the chagrin of many blacks, Armstrong and his black supporters agreed to forgo any political demands and to adhere to the social imperatives of Jim Crow segregation in exchange for the freedom to practice their process of vocational uplift. Through his friendship with Frances Armstrong, Hoffman became an ardent supporter of the Hampton model of vocational uplift for blacks. For a short while, Hoffman was able to reconcile his belief in vocational uplift with racial essentialism by claiming a finite biological potential for the former: the Negro could evolve albeit within to a finite degree.

Hoffman’s first work on racial health was 1892’s *Vital Statistics of the Negro*. Observing black health across the nation, he claimed that congenital poverty, wrought by “the gross immorality, early and excessive intercourse of the sexes,” caused both unsanitary living

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conditions, high rates of venereal disease and tuberculosis among blacks. Hoffman concluded that “something must be radically wrong in a constitution thus subject to decay. Even if he (blacks) be placed on equal grounds (to the white) he still will exhibit ‘his race proclivity to disease and death.’”\textsuperscript{80} Clearly the “innate primeval savagery” of African Americans could not be remade through the virtues of manual labor. Hoffman’s work on \textit{Vital Statistics of the Negro} shattered his belief in the restorative benefits of vocational education. He now concluded that such education could only help to slow the pace, or at best ameliorate the effects of the Negro’s inevitable decline.

Insurance companies seized on Hoffman’s work to provide scientific rationales for their discriminatory practices against African Americans. In 1893, Hoffman became a regular contributor to the insurance trade journal the \textit{Spectator}. The following year, he took a job in Prudential’s new statistical department at its Newark headquarters and began work on \textit{Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro} (1896). Hoffman would remain with Prudential for nearly forty years as an expert on a variety of issues, such as race, cancer, suicide, alcoholism and national health insurance.\textsuperscript{81}

Following its publication, \textit{Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro} was hailed by many as a groundbreaking work on the Negro Problem. Hoffman gleaned most of his preliminary research on black health and mortality, from his previous work on \textit{Vital Statistics of the Negro} (1892). Both works drew on a number of disparate sources: the decennial federal census, urban public health records, government reports, civil war studies, actuarial studies from the Prudential archives and the vast popular literature on race. The sheer statistical audacity of \textit{Race Traits} obscured the fact that none of Hoffman’s conclusions were supported by his own

\textsuperscript{80} Frederick L. Hoffman, “Vital Statistics of the Negro”, \textit{Arena} (April, 1892).
\textsuperscript{81} Sypher, \textit{Undiscovered Prophet}. 
actuarial field work. Moreover, he recycled methodologies, continually delineating black
degeneracy through rates of venereal disease, criminality, repertory health or vital capacity. For
Hoffman, ideology took precedence over empiricism: the bestial nature of blacks was both the
cause and effect of their emaciated physiology.

Progressive-era evolutionary thought dictated that like produced like—a debased race
could only produce degenerate progeny—and that this truth would eventually lead to a declining
birth rate and the eventual extinction of the black race. In dispassionate yet ominous tones,
Hoffman confidently claimed that: “in consequence, the natural increase in the colored
population will be less from decade to decade and in the end a decrease must take place. It is
sufficient to know that in the struggle for race supremacy the black race is not holding its own.”
For Hoffman, “it is not in the conditions of life, but in race and heredity that we find the
explanation of the fact to be observed in all parts of the globe, in all times and among all peoples,
namely, the superiority of one race over another, and of the Aryan race over all.”

A Dying Race: Charting Racial Death through Natural Increase

Nineteenth century social scientists believed that mortality was the preeminent vital
statistic. Hoffman described mortality as “the life story of a people” and the ultimate marker of
racial health. His bold assertion that African Americans would become extinct in a few
generations was seemingly borne out by their declining share of the total population from 1830
through 1890 as illustrated in the following table:

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82 Frederick L. Hoffman, “Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro”, *Publications of the
Population of the United States 1800-1890

*previous to 1860, Chinese and Indians were counted as colored; for 1860 and 1890 they were excluded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>White Population</th>
<th>Colored Population</th>
<th>Percentage of white in total population</th>
<th>Percentage of colored in total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>4306466</td>
<td>1002037</td>
<td>81.12</td>
<td>18.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>10537378</td>
<td>2328642</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>26922537</td>
<td>4441830</td>
<td>85.62</td>
<td>14.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>54983890</td>
<td>7470040</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>11.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hoffman conceded that the decrease in African American’s share of the population, if not their actual decline in numbers, was in large part due to the massive influx of immigrants to the urban north. In contrast, the south, home to approximately 90% of the nation’s black population, remained relatively untouched by immigration. Hoffman took account of the regional dynamics of these numbers and subsequently confined his analysis to native populations—individuals who lived in their state of birth—of five southern states:

### Percentage of Decennial Increase in the Resident Native Population of Five Southern States\(^{84}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>Native White</th>
<th>Native Colored</th>
<th>White over Colored</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>19.81</td>
<td>15.01</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>21.74</td>
<td>17.82</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>30.37</td>
<td>19.57</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>24.75</td>
<td>22.17</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>23.89</td>
<td>6.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings revealed that in all five states, the rate of natural increase—the excess of birth over deaths—occurred exclusively in the white population. Alabama and Louisiana showed the greatest discrepancy, and Mississippi the lowest.

Actuaries tracked mortality rates using “life tables,” which indicated the probability of a person, for each year of their life, dying before their next birthday.\(^{85}\) An analysis of life tables in Hoffman’s early work, along with tables published in the journal of the *American Statistical Association* from 1892 to 1900, revealed a disproportionate rate of Negro and mulatto mortality with the passing of each year of their respective life spans. Further examination of white and black life tables in four northern and four southern cities, from 1880 through 1890, revealed that the rate of black mortality was in greatest excess of whites in two age groups: under the age of fifteen—approximately 300%—and between the ages of fifteen and forty-five—approximately 220%. African American mortality also broke along gendered lines. Under the age of twenty-five, mortality rates were much higher for males than females, a trend which continued without

\(^{84}\) Ibid: 6-7.
\(^{85}\) Zelizer, *Morals and Markets*: xii.
exception through all periods of life.\textsuperscript{86}

African American death rates had to be factored against corresponding birth rates to gather an accurate sense of the race’s natural increase. However, the analysis of black birth rates was hindered by the ineffectual and uneven bureaucracy of Jim Crow. Isolated rural blacks often neglected to register births or deaths in any official capacity. Statisticians often tried to compensate by inferring the number of live births through a comparison of the consecutive decennial census. The distinction of “live births” is essential in that it did not account for the massive infant mortality rate amongst blacks.\textsuperscript{87} Moreover, this proved to be a notoriously ineffective method as individuals tended to drop in and out of the census wholly unaccounted for. Nevertheless, Hoffman asserted that it was “probably true” that the African American birth rate was higher than that of whites, based on comparable data from the British West Indies. Hoffman argued that the only reliable data on African American birth rates came from the northern states of Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts. Despite the small black populations of these states, the figures revealed the white birth rate to be nearly double that of blacks.\textsuperscript{88}

Late nineteenth century social scientists argued for a direct correlation between increasing rates of black urbanization and black mortality rates.\textsuperscript{89} Hoffman was especially interested in the increasingly urban landscape in which blacks waged their losing battle of natural increase. He described black migration to the towns and cities of the new south as “one of the most distinct phenomena of the past thirty years.” Historian Leon Litwack states that blacks’ idea

\textsuperscript{86} Hoffman saw the gender imbalance as resulting from differing occupational trajectories between black men and women. Hoffman, \textit{Race Traits}: 113, 48.
\textsuperscript{87} Of the 431 black babies born in Atlanta for the year-1895 a staggering 194 or 45% died before their first birthday; however as deaths were recorded more often then births the real infant mortality rate was likely somewhat less. Leon Litwack, \textit{Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow} (New York:Knopf, 1998):
\textsuperscript{88} Hoffman, \textit{Race Traits}: 64-68, 33-37.
\textsuperscript{89} Hoffman, “Vital Statistics of the Negro”, \textit{Arena} (April 1892).
that “freedom was free-er” in the towns and cities of the South stimulated a mass intra-regional migration which became particularly pronounced by the 1890s. From 1865 to 1895, the percentage increase of the black population of the sixteen largest southern cities had risen just over 242%, compared to an increase of 94% for whites. Following the collapse of reconstruction, many of the rural counties of states, such as Missouri, Indiana and Ohio experienced a constant decrease in the black population, while their respective urban centers boasted a constant increase in their black populations. Litwick and others have noted the seasonal nature of this migration, defined by the rhythms of the cotton harvests and regulated by the restraints of regional black codes.90

The degenerate urban Negro was a major theme in Hoffman’s work. He believed that a greater exposure to urban civilization was destructive to blacks because it placed an undue amount of strain on their primitive physiologies. City life only served to exacerbate the race’s inferior traits and tendencies. Hoffman argued that “colored farm labor is becoming scarce in certain sections of the country, and the loss of the farmer or planter will be the gain of the undertaker, for the drift of the Negro into the cities is usually a drift into an early grave.”91 In turn of the century Atlanta—showcase of the New South and home to a vibrant African American community—the black death rate exceeded that of whites by 69%. This translated to 19.5 deaths per 1000 population for blacks, as opposed to 11.6 for whites.92 Yet, for Hoffman, perhaps the most deleterious effect of black urbanization was the rise in venereal diseases and the dreaded practice of miscegenation.

91 Hoffman, "Vital Stats of the Negro", Arena, 534.
Sexual Deviance and Racial Decline

White progressives held contradictory views of African American sexuality, seeing it as both a violent threat and an enfeebling trait. On the one hand, the rapid rise in lynching exposed southern anxieties about unregulated black sexuality. During the 1890’s, lynchings claimed some 139 lives each year, 75 percent of which were black. Though the overall number of lynchings declined in the next decade, the percentage of black victims rose to 90. Historian Leon Litwick estimates that from 1890-1917, two to three black southerners were “burned, hanged or quietly murdered” each week. Likewise, the high rates of venereal disease amongst urban blacks rarely failed to escape the attention of any student of the race question. While, in the country, the vices of gambling, drinking and prostitution were tempered by social sanction, the anonymity of the big city often placed them at the very centre of black life. Black men residing in cities such as New Orleans and Richmond between the years 1880-1890 were afflicted with syphilis at a rate almost triple that of their rural peers. In Atlanta between 1890-1894, deaths from venereal diseases were 4.5 per 100,000 for whites, compared to 31 per 100,000 for blacks. During this same period, residents of Washington and Baltimore experienced similar racial disparities in venereal mortality rates.

For Hoffman, the sexually promiscuous urban Negro was the author of his own destruction. He argued that “immense immorality was a race trait of which scrofula, consumption and syphilis are the inevitable consequences.” Syphilis, in particular, took a terrible toll on the body, resulting in skin lesions, respiratory problems and mental insanity. The disheveled and mentally ill syphilitic—an increasingly common site in the black sections of many southern towns and cities—was living proof of the ill effects of city life on blacks.

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93 Litwack, Trouble In Mind, 284.
94 Ibid. 92-95.
95 Ibid. 96.
were whites alone in condemning the sexual deviance of urban blacks. A black minister from Montgomery echoed interracial anxieties about the depravity engendered by urban life: “in the lynchings I have known about, the victims were always men in the community no one could say a good word for. They came out of the slums at night, like the diseased raccoon and stole back again.”

Blacks’ seeming inability to tame their sexual urges destroyed their bodies, threatened respectable society and revealed their inability to internalize the work ethic of modern industrial life

While Hoffman’s analysis of black sexual deviance focused primarily on men, it also addressed the role of female sexuality in racial health. Historian Mia Bay argues that popular understanding of social Darwinism and the process of sexual selection assigned women a clearly defined role in racial uplift which could effectively “make or break a race.” Hoffman claimed that the high rates of venereal diseases amongst blacks were due to an “immense amount of immorality, which is a race trait and of which scrofula and syphilis are the consequences.”

Hoffman located the bulk of this immorality in the “enormous waste of child life” engendered by the debased women of the race. Characterizations of licentious African American women had long infused American racial thought and persisted into the progressive era. Reformer Eleanor Tayleur, writing in *Outlook Magazine*, cited black women’s “moral decadence” as detrimental to racial health, arguing, “it is her hand that rocks the cradle in which the little pickaninny sleeps.”

*Race Traits* conflated racial fitness with racial purity. One of the most damaging effects of the nation’s shifting racial demographics was miscegenation. In 1892, Joseph LeConte, the south’s most prominent natural scientist, proposed an intriguing alternative to the seemingly inevitable fate of the Negro’s extinction: “at present for the lower races everywhere there is

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96 Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*: 158.
98 Hoffman, *Race Traits*: 95-96; Bay, 190-191
eventually but one of two alternatives - vis a vie either extermination or mixture. But if mixture involves and makes a feeble race then this also is only a slower process of extermination.”

LeConte believed that while the mixing of extreme types such as the Teuton and the Negro would produce only the “worst results,” amalgamation between “marginal varieties of the primary races” could serve to stave off extinction for the lower races.99 The Negro could be potentially saved by a limited infusion of white blood.

For Hoffman, however, only the inferior, degenerate races failed to protect their racial integrity: “it may be said, only with emphasis, that the cross-breed of white men and colored women is, as a rule, a product inferior to both parents, physically and morally.” The “law of similarity”—the idea that like produced like—required “affection between groups and individuals based in large part on sympathy.” According to Hoffman, sympathy developed out of similar interests, ideas and habits that bound social groups together. Accordingly, a lack of sympathy made affections, and thus reproduction, impossible.100

Progressives viewed race mixing as both a social and biological perversion. However, despite the fact that transgressions of this law should have proven to be impossible by its own logic, individuals strayed with disturbing regularity. Hoffman argued that black urbanization had led to an increase in the population of mulattos. Indeed, recent census data revealed an increase of mulattos in the black population, from 12.0 percent (584,000) in 1870, to 15.2 percent (1,132,000) in 1890.101 Still, Hoffman maintained that hereditarian impulses punished race mixing by reducing the ability of hybrid offspring to reproduce. Thanks in part to Hoffman, the

101 These findings were complicated by the fact that mulattos were not listed in either the 1880 or 1900 census. Joel Williamson New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States (NY: NY University Press, 1984):112.
infecund mulatto became a staple of the progressive era social sciences.\textsuperscript{102} In *Race Traits*, Hoffman argued that mixed race unions produced an average of one child, compared to 2.8 children born to intra-racial couples. As the editors of *Spectator* magazine claimed, “the mortality of the negro may well be considered the most important phase of the so-called race problem; for it is a fact which can and will be demonstrated by indisputable evidence, that of all races for which statistics are obtainable.....the negro and in particular his hybrid character, shows the least power of resistance in the struggle for life.” The African American community’s high rate of VD, coupled with a small but significant infertile portion of their population meant that the “negro race was lagging, and sure to expire” in the zero-sum race of evolution.\textsuperscript{103}

Late nineteenth century debates over “race-mixing” and interracial marriage divided the black community between those who saw it as the surest path to social, economic and biological equality, and those who believed that despite the need for decriminalization, rampant intermixture would lead to racial extinction. The most famous advocate for the former—amalgamation—was the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who in 1884 shocked both critics and supporters by marrying a white women, Helen Pitts. Just before his death in 1895, Douglass reaffirmed his commitment to racial pluralism: “the American people are essentially one race, united by blood, by a common origin, by a common language, by a common literature, by a common glory, and by the same historic associations and achievements.” Douglass’ contemporary, William Wells Brown, drew on prevailing evolutionary theory to argue for “racial amalgamation, that great civilizer of men” as necessary for social and national progress.\textsuperscript{104} The evolutionary logic of contemporary racial thought forced many African Americans into the


\textsuperscript{103} *Spectator*, June 1897; Hoffman, *Race Traits* pg. 186.

contradictory position of rejecting theses of the degenerate hybrid as a means to assert the ‘purity’ of Negro blood.

Yet many black leaders rejected any and all forms of miscegenation as utterly incompatible with racial progress. Darker skinned leaders like W. Calvin Chase, the editor of the influential *Washington Bee*, refused to associate, even implicitly, phenotype or phrenology with cultural and mental accomplishment. Moreover, Chase dismissed any notion that hybridity represented a “higher” form of racial evolution or civilization. Chase routinely pilloried the pretensions of the light-skinned elite, labeling them “colored aristocrats” or “would be whites” who disingenuously spoke of “race pride” while actively deceiving the trusting dark masses. For Chase and allies such as Martin Delany, “race pride” was predicated on social, cultural and biological racial integrity. The high rates of venereal disease and illegitimacy in the community would only decrease once blacks embraced self referential and self perpetuating models of sexual propriety that eschewed white cultural norms.105

**Race and Space: Criminality and the Spatial Dimensions of Black Degeneracy**

The law of similarity, which characterized race mixing as a biological aberration, allowed social scientists to delineate racial degeneracy in spatial terms. However, the apparent congenital want of sympathy between southern whites and blacks was the result of the legal and social strictures of Jim Crow. De jure segregation forced black migrants into rigidly segregated neighborhoods throughout the cities and towns of the south. Hoffman argued that because of the “intemperate habits” of their inhabitants, these sites devolved into breeding grounds of disease, vice and crime. In Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, Cincinnati and Atlanta, the “large majority of

the colored population is found to be living in the worst sections of the city, a section in which vice and crime are the only formative influences.” Though blacks shared similar “conditions of life” with Italian, Russian and Irish immigrants, unlike these newcomers, the black crime rate was disproportionately in excess of their population. Hoffman concluded that, “the colored race shows of all races the most decided tendency towards crime in the large cities.”

Hoffman drew heavily on the work of the renowned Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso for his description of black’s pathological criminality. Whereas Lombroso cited sloping foreheads, narrowed eyes or recessed chins as proof of a criminal physiology, Hoffman posited blackness itself as proof of a congenitally diseased physiology. For Hoffman, black criminality was especially violent in nature: “as regards the most serious of all crimes, that of crimes against the person, the number of Negro criminals is out of all proportion to the numerical importance of the race.” Black prisoners were also disproportionately represented in national convictions for homicides (36.1 per cent) and rape (40.88 per cent). According to the census of 1890, there were approximately 82,239 prisoners in the United States, 24,000 of whom were black. Though blacks made up only 11.9% of the U.S. population, they comprised a disproportionate 29.18% of the national prison population. Hoffman’s research revealed that, nationwide, black men made up 38.21 percent of those charged with assault crimes. Without slavery’s discipline, blacks “became more lazy, thriftless, and unreliable, until they will soon attain a condition of total depravity and utter worthlessness.”

Race Traits’ analysis of black criminality revealed the contradictory logic of biological theories of racial fitness. Historian Khalil Muhammad argues that black criminality often

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106 Hoffman, Race Traits: 226, 263-265.
108 Hoffman, Race Traits: 218-220.
outpaced other competitors—disease, intelligence, body odor—as scientific proofs of black inferiority. Invariably, arguments for slavery’s salutary effects upon blacks ran counter to characterizations of former slaves and their progeny as innately and irrevocably degraded. Hoffman conceded that viable statistics for black crime during slavery were non-existent or fragmentary at best. Nevertheless, he still believed that slavery had constrained blacks’ persistent criminal degeneracy. Freedom had resulted in blacks losing the virtues of thrift and propriety instilled by the “peculiar institution.” For Hoffman, the “negro’s desire for finery” was proof of their impetuous nature and lack of self-restraint. Instead, blacks rejected honest labor for gambling, prostitution and narcotics. Hoffman noted the “roustabout” black male who, in his “pitiless search for employment honest or otherwise,” was often the victim of “accidental death, frequent exposure to the inclemency of the weather, and not least his pronounced criminal tendencies.” Hoffman found that young black men were far more likely to die a violent death, suffer injuries from gunshot wounds, knife fights or “various other offray’s” than were their white counterparts. 109

Corporal models of black degeneracy coexisted with theories of the black mind as instinctively primal. Hoffman and his peers believed that blacks’ mental inferiority undermined and exacerbated their innate savage vigor. Dr. J.B. Andrews attributed a disproportionate increase of mental illness among blacks to “enlarged freedom, excessive license, excessive use of stimulants, and excitement of the emotions, already unduly developed.” Professor J.F. Miller of Columbia University credited an increase in the number of blacks in lunatic asylums to “the modern influences and agencies on his less developed nervous organization.” Mental illness in African Americans was seen as the result of a primitive mind taxed beyond its limits by the

exigencies of modern life. Hoffman argued that blacks lack of “moral and intellectual capital made them unequal to whites in their power to resist disease.” This mind and body imbalance—evidenced by the “colored race’s capricious and intemperate character”—was acutely manifested in blacks’ diminished vital capacity and the metaphor of the “tropical lung.”

“The Lazy Savage Self”: Vital Capacity as an Index of Racial Fitness

Hoffman resolved the contradiction between environmental and hereditarian models of black fitness through the measurement of vital capacity and the metaphor of the tropical lung. In nineteenth century actuarial science, “vital capacity” broadly defined an individual or group’s general health. Eventually, the term came to denote an individual’s respiratory health: lung capacity, circulation and resistance to pulmonary diseases such as tuberculosis. Historian Anson Rabinbach illustrates the process by which late-nineteenth century social scientists, via the discourse of vital capacity, “constructed a model of work and the working body as pure performance, as an economy of energy.” The metaphor of the human motor—informed by the emerging theory of thermodynamics—posited the working body as a self contained dynamo locked in a constant struggle to transcend the human element, otherwise known as fatigue. Physicians and social scientists measured the health and worth of working bodies by determining the rate at which they could efficiently labor before succumbing to fatigue. The enfeebling effects of poor respiratory health were a tremendous drain on working bodies. Groups or races suffering from diminished vital capacity and a susceptibility to respiratory diseases were deemed congenitally unfit for the rigors of modern industrial work.

Actuarial narratives of racial fitness were part of a broader attempt by the era’s social scientists to rationalize production in both the public and private spheres. Literary scholar Martha

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110 Hoffman, Race Traits: 140.
111 Zelizer, Morals and Markets: 52.
112 Rabinbach, The Human Motor; 23-25.
Banta describes this utopian impulse as the pursuit of a “managed life.” Banta argues that modern cultures of management efficiency, both on and off the shop-floor, reified existing gender and racial hierarchies. The narratives of turn of the century management theory maintained that subaltern bodies—women and non-whites—represented the “wasteful intractability of the savage element...introducing ‘wild facts’ into a situation where managers feared unmanaged, unpredictable irrationality above all else.” The racial imperatives of progressive-era political economy ensured that the rhetoric of social efficiency was a language of whiteness. The category of vital capacity constructed by industrialists, managers, scientists, medical professionals, social scientists and actuaries allowed for the quantification of bodies that otherwise defied classification.

Respiratory health was contingent on a number of factors: lung capacity, chest circumference and height-to-weight ratio. In the mid-nineteenth century, the science of spirometry was the primary medium for measuring respiratory health. Spirometry was employed for the first time on a major scale by the Union army during the Civil War. Hoffman drew heavily on the wartime studies of Colonel Benjamin Gould for analysis of disparities in racial respiratory health. Though Gould found minimal differences in chest circumference—35.1 inches for black and 35.8 inches for white recruits—the disparity in lung capacity was especially striking. Army medics measured the lung capacity for whites at 184.7 cubic inches, 163.5 for blacks and only 158.9 for mulattos. Gould also found that whites possessed higher rates of respiration than their blacks or mulatto counterparts. Hoffman argued that during the antebellum era blacks’ “innate lack of exertion” resulted in them squandering opportunities to excel in the

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113 Banta, Taylored Lives: 27.
mechanical arts offered to them by their kindly masters. Though blacks did possess “latent mechanic aptitude,” an inferior vital capacity and lack of “civilized stamina” hindered their industrial progress.\textsuperscript{116}

Hoffman remained convinced that the source of blacks’ inferior respiratory health, as well as their seemingly high rates of tuberculosis, lay in their low height-to-weight ratio. Although low body weight was not seen as a direct causal agent of respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis, it was an indicator of possible infection. Hoffman shied away from drawing a direct correlation between low body weight and tuberculosis, stating, “the uniform result of statistical investigations of life insurance companies has proven that persons under average weight have a decided tendency toward pulmonary diseases.”\textsuperscript{117} An 1895 study by Prudential seemingly confirmed that a low body weight to height ratio was a determining factor in consumption. To Hoffman’s surprise, blacks on average were actually heavier in proportion to their height than whites. Nevertheless, he remained adamant—even in the face of blacks superior rate of respiration, approximate chest measurement, and average body weight—that the, “lung capacity of the colored race is in itself proof of an inferior physical organism.”

Progressives viewed the high rates of tuberculosis amongst blacks as proof of the race’s inferior constitution. Robert Koch’s 1883 isolation of the tuberculosis bacillus reconfigured the ancient affliction of consumption in the etiological terms of germ theory. Subsequently, tuberculosis was understood as a product of environmental factors which created and or exacerbated an individual’s predisposition to the disease.\textsuperscript{118} Koch’s discovery occurred during a time of rapid industrialization and urbanization in which cities became inundated with masses of

\textsuperscript{116} Hoffman, \textit{Race Traits}: 310-312.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid: 183-185.
\textsuperscript{118} Katherine Ott, \textit{Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture since 1870} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.)
the working poor. In sociocultural terms, tuberculosis was characterized as a contagion resulting from the congestion, poverty and filth which accompanied the rapid rise of modern civilization. Historian Katherine Ott outlines the ways in which consumption was defined as a disease of “over-civilization” and the tubercular as victims of industrial modernity. While the ravages of consumption continually threatened the upper and middle classes, it was society’s under classes who suffered most from the white plague of tuberculosis.

*Race Traits* noted that the high rates of tuberculosis amongst blacks was a fact that “few observers of negro mortality had neglected to comment on.” Hoffman drew on a smattering of urban health records and decades-old Civil War medical evaluations of Union recruits to advance his thesis of a race rapidly being destroyed by tuberculosis. He was adamant that this deterioration had accelerated in the years following slavery’s demise. Civil War records revealed that while whites had been rejected for consumption at a rate of 11.4 per 1,000, black rejection rates were substantially lower at 4.2 per 1,000. Hoffman contrasted these numbers with tubercular mortality rates in South Carolina over a period of approx. seventy years.¹¹⁹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Colored</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1822-1830</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831-1840</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>320</td>
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<tr>
<td>1841-1848</td>
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<td>266</td>
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<tr>
<td>1865-1874</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875-1884</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885-1894</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>627</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Hoffman maintained that while mortality rates from consumption had been relatively equal between the races during the antebellum era, the years since emancipation had witnessed a dramatic rise in black mortality rates. He buttressed this theory with data from the 1890 census and an examination of tuberculosis rates per 100,000 of the fourteen cities nationwide with the largest black populations.\(^{120}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Colored</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charleston, S. C</td>
<td>335.4</td>
<td>656.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans, La.</td>
<td>250.3</td>
<td>587.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannah, Ga</td>
<td>371.1</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile, Ala.</td>
<td>304.1</td>
<td>608.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta, Ga.</td>
<td>213.8</td>
<td>483.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond, Va.</td>
<td>230.5</td>
<td>411.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore, Md.</td>
<td>250.6</td>
<td>524.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington D.C.</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>591.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn, N.Y.</td>
<td>284.9</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York, N.Y.</td>
<td>379.6</td>
<td>845.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston, Mass.</td>
<td>365.8</td>
<td>884.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia, Pa.</td>
<td>269.4</td>
<td>532.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis, Mo.</td>
<td>159.9</td>
<td>605.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati, Ohio</td>
<td>239.1</td>
<td>633.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{120}\) Ibid: 84.
Without exception, urban mortality rates for blacks far exceeded those of whites. Even in northern centers such as Boston and New York, which had relatively small black populations, the racial disparities in tubercular mortality rates offered staggering proof of a degenerating black race.121

For Hoffman, blacks’ diminished respiratory health was a cause and effect of their downward evolutionary trajectory. Though he was willing to see slavery as a transformative or ameliorative force, he was unable, or unwilling, to conceive of the negative effects of urban life on the black working poor. Blacks’ innately degraded habits—not their environment—spawned the squalor that allowed the tuberculosis bacillus to thrive. Hoffman argued that blacks’ undisciplined and diseased nature necessitated their expulsion from mainstream society and the labor economy. The arrival of rural blacks in southern cities was an added strain on a job market already weathering a deep nationwide depression. Within this socioeconomic context, tuberculosis functioned as both an etiological condition and an imperative of a white supremacist political economy. W.E.B. DuBois noted the shift in tuberculosis from an immigrant to a black disease at century’s end: “Negroes are not the first people who have been claimed as its particular victims; the Irish were once thought to be doomed by that disease—but that was when Irishmen were unpopular.”122 The increasingly malleable boundaries of whiteness allowed groups such as the Irish and Jews to shed their identities, albeit with varying degrees of success, as consumptive races.123 In contrast, observers like Dr. F. Billings of the U.S. Army maintained that “the Negro’s extreme liability to consumption alone would suffice to seal his fate as a race.”

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121 Ibid. 84.
123 For more on how TB contributed to a fracturing of working class whiteness along racial and gendered lines for Jewish immigrants see Dan Bender, Sweated Work, Weak Bodies: Anti-Sweatshop Campaigns and languages of Labor (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004)
As one southern public health official bluntly stated, “disease is today almost a synonym for the word ‘Negro.’”\textsuperscript{124}

Characterizations of African Americans as a consumptive race lacking in sustainable vital capacity were informed by the spatial dynamics of the progressive era political economy. In 1880, approximately 80\% of blacks resided in the states of the former confederacy. Black labor and capital, even in their marginalized forms, were vital to the economy of the New South. Indebted black sharecroppers figured prominently in the rural economy and unskilled black labor formed the backbone of the burgeoning regional iron and textile industries.\textsuperscript{125} Hoffman’s actuarial assessments of black bodies as defective commodities reinforced their subordinate position within the southern labor economy. He rationalized organized labor’s nationwide hostility to blacks on the grounds that the latter was “a cheap liver who demands less wages” due to his “natural proclivity for filth and debasement.”\textsuperscript{126} Hoffman believed that evolution had engineered specific bodies for specific environments along strict racial lines. According to an ascendant Mendelian biology, which privileged racial traits over acquired characteristics, removing a race from its natural habitat led to a marked decrease in vital capacity. Hoffman insisted that blacks had experienced irrevocable long term physiological damage via their removal from Africa and subsequent manumission from a benevolent slavery.

Turn of the century social sciences often mediated racial anxieties through corporal metaphors. Socio-medical models of racial health worked to place clearly defined races in their proper place and time. Chief amongst these evolutionary metaphors was the respiratory tract. For Hoffman, blacks’ lack of respiratory health and their small lung size were the result of their “tropical heritage” in sub-Saharan Africa. While the “arctic lung” of whites required a large

\textsuperscript{125} John Hope Franklin, \textit{From Slavery to Freedom}: 400-401.
\textsuperscript{126} Hoffman, \textit{Race Traits}: 70-77.
oxygen capacity to maintain animal heat in cold regions, “it would be in accordance with the economy of nature to suppose that the oxygen capacity of a tropical lung would be smaller than that of the arctic in the same ratio to maintain animal heat in the sultry climate of the Equator.” As proof, Hoffman cited the work of Ira Russell, a member of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, who during the Civil War had made a study of racial lung weights. Based on an indeterminate sample, Russell had found that the average weight of the “negro lung” was approximately four ounces less than that of whites.127

America’s imperial forays into the Pacific and Caribbean brought its social scientists into a transnational discourse of racial environmentalism. American observers along with their European peers became concerned about the ability of white bodies to adapt and thrive in tropical climates. Sir George William Des Voeux a British colonial administrator had: “grave doubts whether any tropical country can became a prosperous white man’s colony...where white men are laborers as well as employers, able to rear a healthy progeny, inclined to and physically able of work with the hands.”128 American officials such as Col. George Gorgas and Col. Leonard Wood made extensive studies of American troops abroad and their susceptibility to diseases such as malaria and yellow fever as well as to a pervading ‘lassitude’ brought on by exposure to the tropical sun. Historian Warwick Anderson has argued that domestic fears over the tropics as a “white man’s graveyard” led to a revaluation of the interconnections between manhood, whiteness, and civilization.129 Both black men leaving the rural south and white men going abroad suffered the enfeebling physiological effects—a decline in respiratory health—of a

civilization which prized and required vigorous, efficient labor. Hoffman’s metaphor of the tropical lung was a key tool for rationalizing the regional racial imperatives of progressive era labor economy.

The Reception of Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro

Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro achieved immediate notoriety following its publication in the spring of 1896. Hoffman’s work spread in popularity far beyond the narrow confines of actuarial science and became one of the era’s definitive texts on the Negro question. White intellectuals greeted it with near unanimous praise for its objective analysis of what one reviewer called the “ever vexing Negro problem.” Professor W.F. Blackman of Yale University claimed that “in dealing with the Negro question we have had enough of assumption, prejudice, sentiment and timidity; what we need is exact research in accordance with the methods of anthropology and statistics.” The biologist J. Scribner commended Hoffman for the way in which his conclusions were “intelligently and impartially combined and secured in a clear and attractive manner.” Reviewers argued that unlike previous “amateurish” and “rank scientific” racial analysis, Hoffman had produced a work of ineluctable scientific fact. Professor W.B. Smith of Tulane University cited Hoffman’s work as a reminder that evolutionary and national progress necessitated the death of the Negro: “the vision of a race vanishing before its superior is not at all dispiriting, but inspiring.”

The African American response to Hoffman’s work was predictably mixed. Reactions to Race Traits came from two primary sources: black intellectuals and the fledgling black insurance

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industry. DuBois, an ambivalent exponent of evolutionary theory, was one of the first black intellectuals to respond to *Race Traits*. He praised it for its exhaustive research but condemned its “shoddy methodology” and improper “application of the statistical method.” According to DuBois, Hoffman had failed “to see that such a method is after all nothing but the application of logic to counting, and that no amount of counting will justify a departure from the severe rules of correct reasoning.”\textsuperscript{133} For DuBois, a devout Germanophile, Hoffman’s refined continental methodology and rules of reasoning had been compromised by his co-option of American racial biases and preconceptions.

Ultimately, DuBois remained committed to the idea that rational inquiry was immune to the coarse subjectivities of racism. Even as the era’s most insightful and prescient racial critic, he did not dispute Hoffman’s privilege or intent in counting, only the manner in which he had done so. A few years later, DuBois would adopt similar statistical methodologies in his seminal sociological analysis, *The Philadelphia Negro*. However, he would take great care to distinguish his analysis of black criminality and health from popular interpretations that linked these tendencies to biological characteristics. As DuBois undertook research for *The Philadelphia Negro*, he was motivated “in my own sociology by a firm belief in a changing racial group, I easily grasped the idea of a changing developing society rather than a fixed social structure.” Indeed, upon *The Philadelphia Negro*’s release in 1899, its author had already moved away from the racial essentialism evoked in *The Conservation of the Races* towards an understanding of race as both a sociological and historical phenomena.\textsuperscript{134}

Another major African American critic of Hoffman was Kelly Miller, a professor of...
mathematics at Howard University. Following his arrival at Howard, Miller founded the school’s sociological department to “study and implement scientific solutions to the problems of the race.” Miller’s academic background, reformism, and his steadfast faith in the scientific method made him uniquely positioned to counter Hoffman’s statistical claims of black degeneracy. Like DuBois, Miller was effusive in his initial praise of *Race Traits* declaring it the most “important utterance on the subject of race since the publication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” Much like the “interest which the famous novel aroused in the domain of sentiment and general feelings, the present work seems destined to awaken in the field of science and exact inquiry.” However, Miller vigorously disputed Hoffman’s assertion that blacks had flourished under slavery but were disintegrating in freedom. Miller noted that in the previous eight decades, the black population had quintupled with little aid from external migration. He asked “how a people who had shown such physical vitality for so long a period, has all at once, in the past decade become relatively infecund and threatened with extinction?” For Miller, the answer did not lie in any innate racial traits or tendencies but in blacks’ “various conditions of life.”

Progressive era social sciences’ unwavering devotion to empiricism transcended racial lines and hampered African American critiques of Hoffman. This privileging of method over theory divested Miller and DuBois of the tools to dispute the epistemological basis of Hoffman’s thesis of black extinction. Miller, for his part, remained convinced that “a sound and objective application” of statistical analysis to the black experience would yield an accurate picture or theory of black racial fitness. Miller offered the following advice to his racial peers: “to the Negro I would say, let him not be discouraged at the ugly facts which confront him...the Negro should accept the facts with becoming humility and strive to live in closer conformity with the

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135 In 1810 there were 1,377,808 blacks in the U.S., a number which had swelled to approx 7,470,040 in 1890. Kelly Miller, “Review of Race Traits”-The American Negro Academy Occasional Papers No. 1 1897.
requirements of human and divine law. He does not labor under a destiny of death from which there is no escape. It is a condition and not a theory that confronts him.” Nevertheless, Miller and DuBois were well aware that, contrary to any pretensions to scientific objectivity, the theoretical frameworks which confronted African Americans were fashioned entirely by whites.

The fledgling African American business community responded to actuarial narratives of the race’s decline with entrepreneurial zeal. Shortly after the publication of *Race Traits*—and the subsequent segregation of the insurance industry—a small group of black businessmen moved to reorganize local fraternal aid societies along a systematic corporate model. The first black insurance company formed on this basis was the National Benefit Insurance Company, founded in 1898 by S.W. Rutherford in Washington D.C. That same year, C.C. Spaulding and a consortium of black businessmen organized the North Carolina Mutual Benefit Insurance Company. One black businessman thanked Hoffman for discouraging white firms from insuring blacks: “without Hoffman’s pernicious propaganda there would have been no North Carolina Mutual.” In 1908 Herman Perry of Atlanta, Georgia began organizing Standard Life which would soon become the largest black life insurance company in the world.

Contrary to their avowed petit bourgeois ethic, black insurance companies forcefully challenged the constraints of a segregated political economy. Black owned insurance companies were some of the first institutions in the New South to allow the race to acquire both financial and social capital. DuBois noted the subversive character of black entrepreneurialism, claiming

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136 Ibid.
137 Reed, *W.E.B. DuBois and American Political Thought*.
that while white southerners feared “negro crime” they feared Negro success and ambition more. The south can conceive neither machinery nor place for the educated, self reliant, self assertive black man.” One industry pamphlet advised black agents that “we cannot write any white insurance business and the white agent is controlling the insurance situation in our homes. This will never do! Break it up! Get the Business! Be enthusiastic, alive to the task; hard driving, never satisfied until you get the business.”

Historian Kevin Gaines has describes the era’s black middle class as a group bound by a shared ideological preoccupation with bourgeois status, rather than one sharing in the material benefits commensurate with the white middle class. Black uplift ideology and economic self sufficiency formed the basis for a racial elite identity which equated class stratification with racial progress.

Frederick Hoffman’s work was essential in maintaining African Americans’ exclusion from the mainstream insurance industry until the eve of the Second World War. In 1940, the vast majority of white underwriters still refused to insure blacks at all and of the fifty-five firms which did, only five did so at standard rates. Hoffman was vocal about his role in persuading the nation’s major insurers to exclude blacks, claiming that “in light of my prior work in charting blacks’ excessive mortality and debased character traits, Prudential has long since stopped soliciting risk policies from the colored population.” White resistance to insuring blacks began to fade in the post war era and by 1957 over one hundred white companies competed for black policyholders, often at standard rates. By the early 1960’s, Congress admitted black insurance companies such as North Carolina Mutual into the select pool of companies underwriting group life coverage for federal employees and military personal and in 1962 the American Life Convention and the Life Insurance Association of America, the lily-white paragons of the life

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139 Ayers, The Promise of the New South: 430.
140 Gaines, Uplifting the Race: 14.
insurance trade associations, made the Mutual their first black member.\footnote{Hoffman 'Race Pathology'-Frederick Hoffman Papers, Box 11 , Butler Library Rare Book and Manuscripts, Columbia University; Weare, \textit{Black Business in the New South}: 280-281.}  

\textbf{Conclusion}  

\textit{Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro} spawned a veritable cottage industry in works detailing Negro extinction. The turn of the century saw a surge in works dispassionately predicting blacks’ imminent demise in sober scientific terms: Charles Carroll’s, \textit{The Negro a Beast; or in the Image of God?} (1900), W.P. Calhoun’s, \textit{The Caucasian and the Negro in the United States} (1902), W.B. Smith’s, \textit{The Color Line: A Brief in Behalf of the Unborn} (1905) and Robert Shufeldt’s subtly titled, \textit{The Negro, A Menace to American Civilization} (1907).\footnote{Gossett, \textit{Race: The History of an Idea in America}: 280, Smith, \textit{The Color Line: A Brief in Behalf of the Unborn} (NY: 1905):186-187, 190-191.} In 1907, historian Edward Eggelston published the chilling racist screed, \textit{The Ultimate Solution to the American Negro Problem}. Eggelston contrasted the robust body of “the darkey under slavery” with the “diseased carriage of today’s negro vagrant” as proof of blacks atavistic character and inability to survive industrial modernity. He enthusiastically cited Hoffman’s “unerring statistical proof” as evidence that the “natural flow of evolution would soon dispense with the negro.”

Throughout this literature, black degeneracy was characterized as a threat to blacks and whites alike. Dr. Paul Barringer, Chairman of the University of Virginia and one of the south’s leading race thinkers, noted Hoffman’s work in his own arguments for “the Negro’s generic tendency to enfeebling savagery.” Barringer believed that, for whites, “the Negro Problem rises above a question of altruism and becomes a question of self preservation.” If nothing else, Hoffman hoped his work served as a clear “condemnation of modern attempts of superior races to lift inferior races to their own elevated position,” a process so futile that “it would seem
criminal indifference on the part of civilized people to ignore it.” For many progressives, it was exceedingly clear that the Negro was on a downward trajectory and was living on borrowed time.¹⁴³

Spectral images of degenerate Negroes also took on literary forms. Thomas Nelson Page’s stories of the Old South and placid “darkeys” contrasted with the violent and shiftless blacks of the contemporary racial imagination. Thomas Dixon Jr.’s reconstruction trilogy: *The Leopard’s Spots* (1902), *The Clansmen* (1905) and *The Traitor* (1907) was key in popularizing notions of blacks as “crazed and monstrous beasts.” Scientific and popular mediums conspired to characterize blacks as a diseased, degenerate and dying race utterly unsuited to the demands of work and citizenship in a modern industrial republic.¹⁴⁴ Hoffman’s actuarial narratives of racial decline posited philanthropic support for black vocational education as a losing evolutionary proposition. Though Hoffman never wavered in his belief of Negro inferiority, by the mid 1920’s he had revised his earlier theories regarding blacks extinction, arguing that blacks would more likely assume a “stagnant position much like the American Indian and the Gypsies of Europe.”¹⁴⁵

Following the publication of *Race Traits*, Hoffman turned his sights towards an analysis of racial fitness and mortality in a transnational context. Prior to embarking on his travels, he stated that he wished to gain a clearer understanding of the “vicissitudes of racial health on a global scale,” which heretofore had been “tainted by race prejudice causing even the most fair minded observer to err in judgment.” Many of the themes Hoffman developed in *Race Traits*, such as the primacy of venereal disease, miscegenation, criminality and vital capacity in determining racial health, continued to inform his research throughout his extensive travels.

¹⁴⁵ Hoffman Papers, Box 13, Butler Library Rare Book and Manuscripts, Columbia University.
through the Pacific and the Caribbean during the pre WWI era. Regarding Pacific Islanders, he noted that “there are probably now living men of voting age who will see the last full blooded Hawaiian native—there is something tragic in the utter annihilation of a race, especially one so amiable in many respects as are the Hawaiians and it is to be hoped that something may be done to check the tendencies that are causing the decay.”\textsuperscript{146} Hoffman’s renown enabled him to help develop a transnational political economy of racial health which he would continue to expand upon for the rest of his career.

Actuarial science was a key tool in the production and maintenance of a white supremacist political economy in turn of the century America. The progressive era witnessed a shift in understandings of political economy from the social relationships between production and consumption, to one dominated by economic theories seeking to reframe these relations on a more axiomatic and mathematical basis. Frederick Hoffman’s actuarial narratives of black degeneration represented a key example of this transformation as it regarded the quantification of racial difference. As historian Joan Scott reminds us, the practice of quantification is rooted in the imperatives of power. The very nature of scientific inquiry, or in this case actuarial science, implicated its practitioners in the construction of racial hierarchies.\textsuperscript{147} Hoffman worked to define African Americans not only as they were, but as white elites wished them to be: a docile, malleable labor force on the margins of contemporary political economy. In short, the actuarial science employed by Hoffman was as much about creating new bodies as it was about evaluating existing ones. The demands of rapid industrialization, imperialism and mass consumerism necessitated the creation of the vanishing Negro.

Hoffman’s narratives provide key insights into the persistent influence of non-economic

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Scott, \textit{Gender and the Politics of History}: 113-139.
factors, such as race, on a progressive era economics ostensibly reconfigured along rational lines. Recent historians have described southern segregation not as a reactionary impulse but as a decidedly progressive effort to link seemingly pre-modern socio-economic traditions to modern forms of political economy. Historian Theodore Porter describes statistics as a “technology of distance” that is well suited to conveying concise, accurate and easily understood information about ambiguous subjects such as racial identities. He cites the progressive belief that “quantities were more exact than qualities—less subject to the uncertainty and caprice of personal judgment.” Statistics allowed those who had never encountered an African American to gain a working knowledge of the Negro’s supposed traits and tendencies.

Statistics and actuarial science allowed progressives to chart the precise rate and value of black proletarianization. White elites believed that mastery of this racial knowledge was crucial to the development of a rational and efficient social order. Scholar Susan Schweik, in her analysis of the socio-medical discourse surrounding turn of the century “Ugly Laws,” or anti-vagrancy laws aimed at the physically disabled, details how race has long played a role in the “symbolic economy of disease.” Like vagrancy law in the South, northern ugly laws were used as a form of labor control, as well as being selectively employed for the purpose of racial control. Schweik notes that the “concept of disease has long been tied to racial hierarchization, and the barrage of statistics brought forth in the name of socio-medical racism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries hammered home the point that blacks posed a major health and social menace.” As a guest at the First National Conference on Race Betterment, Booker T. Washington inveighed against this rising eugenic tide, “The American Negro is worth saving,

149 Porter, Trust in Numbers,
and making a strong, helpful part of the American body politic.”

Eugenics and racial segregation were two of the most influential ideologies and social policies to emerge from the progressive era. Socio-medical theories of black degeneracy were developed and disseminated through various forms of racial control such as de-facto segregation, convict labor, sharecropping and lynching. Through this praxis, white elites rationalized the labor marginalization of blacks—and even their eventual extinction—as a social and biological necessity. Hoffman’s statistical narratives of black extinction evinced an early attempt on the part of progressives to wed social policy to biological imperatives. Actuarial science operated at the nexus of the public and private spheres to exclude the Negro from the discourse of industrial evolution. However, African Americans would be afforded an opportunity to re-enter this discourse with America’s entry into World War One and the ensuing demands of the wartime political economy.

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151 Bender, American Abyss: 240-242.
Chapter Two

“Adjusting the Colored Worker’s Industrial Consciousness”: The Department of Negro Economics and Wartime Racial Labor Policy 1917-1921

“The wonderful metamorphosis now in process, by which cotton-pickers are being transformed into steel workers, is quite as interesting and has as many approaches and slants toward industrial economy as any event that has occurred in our history.”

Philip H. Brown
‘The Negro Migrant’ (1923)

“There is no such thing as economic growth which is not, at the same time, growth or change of a culture; and the growth of social consciousness, like the growth of a poet’s mind, can never, in the last analysis, be planned.”

Edward Thompson
Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture

In July 1917, less than four months after the United States had entered the Great War to make the world safe for democracy, the whites of East St. Louis, Illinois massacred scores of their fellow black citizens. White workers, incensed by increased job competition and the use of black strikebreakers at the local packing plant the previous summer, exploded with rage when rumors spread of fraternization between black men and white women at a union gathering. For three days in early July, whites clubbed, beat, shot and burned alive close to 125 black men, women, and children. As one Congressman remarked at the time, “It is impossible for any human being to describe the ferocity and brutality of that mob.”

Surveying the aftermath, Oscar Leonard, Superintendent of the local Jewish Educational and Charitable Association observed: “When I went to East St. Louis to view the sections where the ‘riots’ had taken place I was struck that the makers of Russian pogroms could learn a great

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deal from the American rioters... The Russians at least gave the Jews a chance to run while they were trying to murder them. The whites in East St. Louis fired the homes of black folk and either did not allow them to leave the burning houses or shot them the moment they dared to escape the flames.” The ferocity of the rioters left observers across the color line, even those previously nonplussed over race relations, in a state of shock.153

On July 28, 1917 ten thousand black New Yorkers marched through Harlem in silent protest against the massacre in East St. Louis. Marchers brandished banners reading: “We are Maligned as Lazy and Murdered when We Work”, “Patriotism and Loyalty Presuppose Protection and Liberty”, and “Give Us a Chance to Love our Country.”154 The participants’ linking of race, labor and citizenship under the rubric of wartime patriotism struck a rhetorical chord with many white progressives. Previously, white Americans, especially those in the north, had been rather ambivalent about racial violence, dismissing it as a macabre southern fetish. However, the war turned the events of East St. Louis into a matter of national security. Racial violence undermined national unity and the efficient standardization of wartime labor. In the weeks following the riot, Louis Post, Assistant secretary of Labor, called on his Department to redouble its efforts in investigating the racial dynamics of wartime labor to “forestall further violence as recently witnessed in East St Louis.”155

Progressives viewed the wartime state as the ideal medium for a large scale restructuring of the nation’s political economy. The exigencies of war blurred the lines between military and industrial labor. Shifts in international labor markets, a cessation of European immigration, and increased black migration to the north complicated ideas regarding which workers could perform

153 Survey July 14 1917: 331, 333.
154 Winston, James, Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early-Twentieth America (NY:Verso, 1999) pg. 96-
155 Memo to Post, Aug, 1, 1917, Records of the War Production Group, Record Group 179, NARA, Washington D.C.
which kinds of work. Progressives believed that a vast expansion of the regulatory state was necessary for the efficient rationalization of wartime labor. The nation’s political leaders hoped that the very act of wartime mobilization would sustain the existing social order and productive capacity.

At this time, social scientists rushed to secure government advisory positions or commissions in the armed forces to gain support for their various pet projects. Though some were motivated by a sense of selfless patriotism, crass careerism and the opportunity to avoid combat were undoubtedly key motives for many. The conflict gave theorists of industrial evolution—those who viewed industry as an expression of racial fitness—the opportunity to reconfigure social policy along biological lines. Social scientists believed that mastery of this racial expertise was especially vital to their attempts to come to terms with the emergence of African Americans as factors in industrial modernity. This spoke to the utopian strain at the heart of progressivism, which placed its faith in the perfectibility of social or racial relations through rational scientific inquiry.\textsuperscript{156}

This chapter examines the wartime state as a key mediator in African American proletarianization. An analysis of the Department of Negro Economics (DNE)—the first post-reconstruction federal agency devoted exclusively to black labor—reveals a key attempt by progressives to reconcile the Negro problem with the Labor problem within the institutional nexus of early twentieth century sociology. DNE officials drew on Chicago school sociology—specifically theories of social disorganization and organization—in delineating black migrants’ sudden shift from primary (rural) to secondary (urban) relations. While DNE sociologists readily acknowledged these migrants as “maladjusted,” they located these deficiencies in social rather

\textsuperscript{156} Shenk, \textit{Work or Fight}: 2-3.
than biological sources. The DNE pursued a three-pronged strategy for incorporating black workers into the wartime labor economy: developing a cadre of black labor experts, instilling blacks with a new industrial consciousness through worker efficiency campaigns and using the state to forge stronger links between white capital and black labor. Department officials fused vocational uplift with sociology to create a unique form of applied racial expertise designed to counter prevailing narratives of congenitally unfit Negro industrial laborers.

An examination of the DNE complicates prevailing theories of black proletarianization in progressive era America. Previously, historians have primarily conceived of the war as merely a midwife to the great migration, the latter being the true crucible of black modernity. World War One has been viewed as a catalyst—via labor shortages and immigration restrictions—rather than as an agent of black proletarianization. Yet an analysis of the DNE foregrounds the institutional mechanisms of the wartime state as a fundamental vehicle for incorporating African Americans into the modern industrial political economy. The expansion of the wartime state—in addition to the increasing symbiosis between military and industrial labor—allowed officials to reach across regional lines and regulate the masses of blacks who were not part of the first wave of the Great Migration. DNE officials hoped that through the production and application of sociological expertise and the forging of greater ties between capital and the state, they could replace coercion with rational persuasion as the impetus for black labor efficiency.

Despite being the first federal agency since Reconstruction exclusively devoted to the black worker, the DNE is largely absent from African American and Progressive historiography. Until quite recently, much of this ambivalence was due to historians’ tendency to interpret the modern African American experience through the narrow lens of Washingtonian accommodation

and DuBoisian radicalism. For the former, Haynes’ moderate racial liberalism was a corrective to the perceived excesses of the black power movement of the late sixties and early seventies. For scholars committed to detailing the agency and forms of resistance of the black working class, Haynes’ brand of bourgeois respectability was seen as irrelevant or detrimental to the cause of black equality. However, recent works by historians Toure Reed and Francille Wilson have helped to re-conceptualize Haynes’ commitment to developing black labor expertise and his efforts to instill in migrants an industrial consciousness as complex and nuanced attempts to assert black labor fitness at a high tide of eugenics and Jim Crow.

**Prewar Sociology and the Negro Problem**

The early twentieth century shift from biological to cultural models of racial fitness was evidenced by the shifting methodologies of anthropology and sociology. Lee Baker notes that while “anthropology marshaled its nascent authority to describe the difference of exterior others (such as colonial and indigenous peoples), sociology worked to document the sameness of exterior others (such as immigrants and in time blacks).” Anthropology was chiefly concerned with preservation while sociology focused on the means to assimilation. Though both disciplines eventually came to understand race in cultural terms, the route to this understanding was especially circuitous. At the turn of the century, sociologists still viewed political economy as an organic outgrowth of racial difference. For many, physiological differences were an index of

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racial fitness. In 1901, Edward Ross, one of the nation’s leading sociologists, confidently declared, “the economic virtues are a function of race.” Ross was perhaps best known for his theory of “race suicide,” which contrasted the troubling infecundity of elites with the high birth rates of the inferior masses. Daniel Bender outlines the process by which “race suicide linked a range of urban and industrial problems, from child labor to women’s work to immigration, and tied them to the family behavior of elites.”\textsuperscript{162}

These views were embraced by wide swaths of the progressive intelligentsia, most notably President Theodore Roosevelt, and were instrumental in foregrounding race, rather than class, as the predominant marker of social divisions in modern America. For Ross and his allies, the biological imperatives of race, not economics, drove the progressive era labor economy. When early sociologists talked of “race” it was generally in reference to the disparate peoples inhabiting the industrial centers of the north. In contrast, the Negro, when he was considered at all, represented a fixed pastoral figure, immune to modern processes of socialization and unknowable through standard empirical methodologies. An analysis of the first five volumes (1895-1900) of The American Journal of Sociology reveals that while the term “race” appears with regularity, there is not a single mention of the “Negro.”\textsuperscript{163}

By the early twentieth century, theories of industrial ethnography contended with new sociological theories emerging from the University of Chicago. Biological models of racial fitness began to give way to more flexible cultural models of racial labor fitness. Chicago school sociology posited a model of human progress that detailed the maladjustments and accommodations of disparate peoples through successive stages of social development. Primary (gemeinschaft or rural) relations were bound by custom and tradition, while secondary

\textsuperscript{162} Painter, History of White People: 252; Bender, American Abyss: 124-125.
relations were the voluntary and pragmatic behaviors engendered by modern capitalist societies. Early Chicago sociology based its models of assimilation and progress around a rural-urban axis. Scholars such as Ross, Robert Park and W.I. Thomas blended theory with intensive empirical research to chart how the transition from primary to secondary social relations altered social mores, or “folkways.” The theory of folkways, developed by Yale sociologist Charles Sumner, provided a means to trace racial progress in sociological rather than biological terms.164

Yet social and biological theories of racial progress continued to co-exist in the minds of contemporary sociologists. In February 1907, the young sociologist Robert Park addressed students at Tuskegee Institute on the subject of the “Negro Problem.” Juxtaposing the racial heritage of African Americans with the Japanese, Park remarked that “while the Japanese had acquired great technical skill in manual labour and had attained such habits of thrift and industry that no laborers in the world, save the Chinese, could or can now compete with them, the negro has these two things yet to learn.” While the Japanese had developed a complex civilization of their own prior to their encounter with the west, “the negro of course had not found himself in such a condition for he had nothing in particular to throw overboard save his religious superstitions.” Yet Park remained hopeful about blacks’ ability to adjust to the rigors of industrial modernity and concluded his lecture on an optimistic note: “least of all should you or any of your race be discouraged by any facts in regard to your people that investigation and science makes known to you...As soon as the negro finds out where he is supposed to be racially

164 Reed, Not Alms But Opportunity, 20
inferior he will rouse himself and prove that he is not....... Knowledge is power and when he realizes his weaknesses, knowledge will give him the means to overcome them.”

Park’s sociological models of racial development were imitated by many of his progressive peers. At the 1908 meeting of the American Sociological Society, Alfred Stone reiterated Park’s optimism: “I know of no other race in history which possess in equal degree the marvelous power of adaptability to conditions which the negro has exhibited through many centuries and in many places.”

Months later, in the pages of the American Journal of Sociology, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote, “the negro is developing an ability to enter upon a plane of business life and further admitting, most cheerfully, that this proves the ultimate capacity of the race to do so; however there remains the practical problem of how to accelerate the process.” Though Gilman held out hope for reforming the Negro, she remained convinced of blacks’ innate inferiority, believing it to be the “very condition of our (whites) advantage.” After years of unchallenged acceptance, the discouraging facts of black degeneracy, propagated by the likes of Frederick Hoffman, began to lose credibility amongst biologists, who gradually yielded the Negro problem to social scientists. Sociologist Franklin Giddings, in a direct repudiation of Hoffman, stated, “the negro is plastic. He yields easily to environing influences. Deprived of the support of the stronger races, he relapses into savagery, but kept in contact with whites, he readily takes the external impress of civilization, and there is no reason to hope that he will not acquire a measure of its spirit and life.”

Meanwhile, African American sociologists engaged with both the dominant narratives of Chicago school sociology and industrial ethnography. W.E.B. DuBois established himself as the leading black sociologist of the era on the strength of works such as *The Negroes of Farmville* (1896), and *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). He was also instrumental in establishing the renowned sociology department at Atlanta University. Historian Alice O’Connor argues that in the decade after 1898, DuBois led all American sociologists in working to infuse an authentic empirical objectivity into social science, “to put the science into sociology through a study of the conditions of [his] own group.”\(^{168}\) Despite a lingering faith in racial essentialism, DuBois generally cited social rather than biological factors in the development of racial difference and racial fitness. His commitment to empiricism, social reform and elite expertise created a model of racial uplift in stark contrast to Booker T. Washington and other advocates of black vocational education. DuBois’ linked the practice of sociological inquiry to a belief that the race would be saved by its best men to create a praxis of racial uplift that was emulated by a generation of African American sociologists.

The sudden appearance of the Negro as industrial agent was the result of the unprecedented migration of southern blacks into the nation’s northern industrial centers. In 1900, 10% (880,771) of blacks lived in the north while 89.7% (7,922,969) resided south of the Mason Dixon Line. Between 1900-1915 just over 150,000 blacks moved north followed by an additional 500,000 more in the years 1916-1918. From 1909-1919 Chicago’s black population increased by a staggering 148 percent (from 44,103 to 109,594) while New York witnessed an increase of 66 percent (91,709 to 152,467) between the years 1910-1920. This migration, both north and south, was almost exclusively urban in character, creating a “divorce from the soil on

the part of the colored race.” These shifting demographics brought the previously ignored figure of the “American Negro” into the mainstream of sociological investigation. Indeed, the very act of migration on the part of blacks undermined prevailing notions of their innate lassitude and docility. Rather than viewing urbanization as evidence of racial decline, sociologists like Franklin Giddings saw it as the best “remedy for the Negro’s innate racial handicap of indolence.” Giddings believed that the “dynamic association” provided by city living would stimulate blacks to ever higher levels of civilization. 169

Unlike the physical sciences, the data of the social sciences usually did not fit into general or abstract principles with predictive qualities. Infused with the practical imperatives of social reform, social scientific theory was invariably linked to practice. 170 One of the most adept practitioners of this applied racial sociology was George Haynes. Born to former slaves in Pine Bluff Arkansas in 1880, Haynes matriculated at Fisk, Yale, and became the first African American to be awarded a PhD from Columbia University. 171 His doctoral thesis, The Negro at Work in New York City (1912), was guided by three overarching questions: where were blacks employed, were they efficient and successful and how were they viewed by their employers and fellow employees? Haynes sent questionnaires to one hundred New York City employers inquiring about their experience with Negro labor. Employers were asked, “in comparison with white workers were blacks, faster, equal or slower in speed, better, equal or poorer in quality of work done and more, equally or less reliable?” The majority of respondents stated that while blacks had generally measured up to the white, the “negroes usually had to be well above the average to secure and hold a place in the skilled trades.” Unlike DuBois in The Philadelphia

170 O’Connor, Poverty Knowledge:17.
171 While still a student at Fisk, Haynes arranged for DuBois to give the 1898 commencement address which coincided with the tenth anniversary of DuBois own graduation. Perlman: 176.
Negro, Haynes did not attempt to forge a theoretical model of sociological inquiry. Instead he hoped his study would serve as “a small contribution to the end that efforts for betterment of urban conditions of Negroes be founded upon facts.”  

Haynes rejected the prevailing social scientific consensus that migration and urbanity were contributing to African American degeneracy. In contrast, he saw the “increasing urbanization of the colored race as an inevitable process” and as a sign of racial progress. Haynes argued that black migration to urban centers was driven by the same factors that drove whites, citing “the divorce of workers from the soil brought on by technological advances which reduced the relative need for agricultural workers; the shift from handicrafts to the factory and the subsequent growth of commercial and industrial centers.” These factors were linked to additional secondary social causes like better health care, education and the lure of the city’s “varied amusements and the contact of the moving crowds.” He directly challenged Hoffman’s thesis of the congenitally degenerate urban negro, arguing, “the problems which grow out of his (blacks’) maladjustment to the new urban environment are solvable by methods similar to those that help other elements of the population.” Instead, Haynes cited the need for “good housing, pure milk, water, sufficient clothing which adequate wages allow, and street sanitation all of which have their direct effect upon health and physique.”  

African American sociologists increasingly argued for the liberating potential of urban political economy in the immediate pre-war era. Sociologists such as Haynes based their arguments on a radical reconfiguration of Sumner’s folkways. Haynes acknowledged the importance of folkways in charting the shift from primary (rural) to secondary (urban) social relations, but refused to see them as fixed and necessary customs. Instead, he characterized them

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172 Ibid.: 42.
173 For an extended critique by Haynes of Hoffman’s index of the negro death rate in southern cities see Haynes, Negro at Work: 34-38, 42-44.
“as human social forces with trends that may be directed or altered by means of well planned educational methods.” However, the breakdown in social mores which accompanied this shift—and the atomized nature of urban life—ostensibly benefited blacks by diminishing the customs of white supremacy. Within the vacuum of industrial modernity, black workers could potentially shed the debilitating taint of blackness and its connotations of laziness, ignorance and inefficiency. Haynes drew on the Chicago school theories of ethnic cycle theory to argue that familiarity over time would eliminate animosities between peoples and eventually foster mutual empathy.\textsuperscript{174}

Like Booker T. Washington, Haynes maintained an abiding faith in the liberating nature of the free market. Accordingly, Haynes linked community development to questions of worker efficiency and wages. He firmly believed that that race prejudice “would wither in the face of reason and it will then follow that our attitudes and ideas of an inferior and superior race will change, and our ideas of we the people will expand to include black and brown as well as white.” For Haynes, “folkways” offered a “reassuring framework for understanding group conflict and maladjustments as an inevitable part of urbanity and modernization” as well as a powerful rejoinder to biological explanations and eugenic remedies for racial unrest. Due to his pioneering efforts, studies of black workers in New York City, Chicago and Pittsburgh began to fill the landscape of urban sociology and bring black labor studies to the North a decade before the Great Migration.\textsuperscript{175}

Applied sociology and racial uplift coalesced in the formation of The National Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (NUCLUN) in the winter of 1912. The New

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid: 45-55. Reed, \textit{Not Alms, Opportunity}: 22.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid pg. 20. Decades before E. Franklin Frazier’s \textit{The Negro Family in Chicago}, Haynes’ \textit{The Negro at Work in New York City} was one of the best known works regarding the racial dimensions of urban ecology theory. Reed: 23.
*York Times* described the committee as dedicated to “the integration of Negroes into the urban order.” NUCLUN—which in 1920 became the National Urban League (NUL)—grew out of the “new scientific philanthropy” emanating from the New York School of Philanthropy at Columbia University. Professor Albert Wright of the University of Wisconsin elaborated on the new philanthropy: “on the philosophical side it studies causes as well as individuals and groups, while on the practical side it tries to improve conditions. Philanthropy must be raised to the rank of a science where the practical and the theoretical are yoked together.” The *Times* deemed NUCLUN unique not only for its focus on the “previously neglected urban Negro,” but also for its “frank recognition of the prevalent duplication and overlap of social work” and its use of social scientific methodology in addressing “the growing Negro problem.” In its first annual report the group pledged to “do constructive and preventive social work regarding the economic conditions of urban Negroes; cause cooperation and coordination among existing agencies where necessary; and to secure and train Negro social workers.”

The emergence of NUCLUN cemented the coalition between black and white progressives by linking the social sciences to racial uplift at the intersection of the private and public spheres. With the outbreak of war in Europe and the cessation of immigration, the demand for industrial labor rose precipitously. To fill this gap, American capital turned to the mass, restive, black southern masses. New job opportunities, Jim Crow and the insidious effects of the boll weevil on the southern cotton economy all combined to drive hundreds of thousands of blacks north. The NUL and its affiliated sociologists became the prime institutional mediator of the first wave of the Great Migration, especially in New York. Through vocational education,

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177 *NY Times* Jan 28, 1912. In 1900 80.9% of the black population of Manhattan was contained within 12 of the 35 Assembly districts. A third of which was concentrated in only three districts 11th (10.4%), 19th (13.8%) and the 27th (9.2%), Haynes, *Negro at Work*: 48-49.
health, housing and job placement programs, the league tried to tie black labor to the various mediums of capital and the state. Historian Nancy Wiess contends that, due to financial and organizational difficulties, the league’s initial efforts were largely unsuccessful. In 1913-14, despite aggressively courting New York’s business community, the NUL found work for only 181 of 800 black job seekers and the next year it placed a mere 308 workers out of 1,557 applicants in jobs.\(^{178}\)

Through his work at the NUL—with its racially mixed executive—Haynes conceded that while circumstances dictated that blacks temporarily cede financial control to their white allies, the production of sociological knowledge capital remained within the grasp of African American elites. To this end, Haynes established a training centre for black social workers in the school of Social Work at Fisk University. Following the successful completion of their coursework, these young black social workers were dispatched to various NUL affiliates to develop vocational and efficiency training bureaus. These bureaus were designed to inculcate southern black migrants with an understanding of time work discipline and provide the requisite mechanical skills and knowledge needed to become efficient industrial laborers. NUL staff published material instructing recent migrants to “husband one’s private time accordingly in order to fully reap the benefits of their labor.” Night classes in labor economics outlined the socioeconomic obligations of the wage contract in the hopes of alleviating labor turnover, which was one of the biggest complaints leveled at black workers by white employers. Finally, the league organized fresh-air outings for migrant children to escape the congested degradation of the city and experience the physically invigorating virtues of rural life. This was an interesting contradiction, given the

\(^{178}\) Parris and Brooks, *Blacks in the City*: 191.
league’s constant efforts to divest migrants of their rural heritage in almost every other endeavor.\textsuperscript{179}

The NUL enjoyed its greatest success providing employment to black migrants in the tobacco fields of Connecticut in the spring of 1916. Haynes successfully lobbied the Connecticut Tobacco Company to recruit close to 50 black families and 1,000 college students for work, in addition to paying for their transportation from Norfolk to Hartford. By June, almost 100 permanent workers and close to one thousand student contracts were signed. Before midsummer 1917, there were close to 3,000 blacks in Hartford. “Thus was born, right in the heart of Yankee land,” exclaimed the \textit{New York News}, a leading black daily, “the first significant move to supplant foreign labor with native labor, a step which has resulted in one of the biggest upheavals in the North incident to the European war, which has already been a boon to the colored American, improving his economic status and putting thousands of dollars into his pockets.”\textsuperscript{180}

The NUL’s greatest success stemmed from its efforts in the production and institutionalization of black labor expertise. Speaking to the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, Haynes argued that it was necessary to place social work training programs at black colleges because the best candidates were to be found “among those large groups of select, capable, enthusiastic Negro youth at these colleges......(and) because the city conditions among Negroes demand minds and characters which have been moulded by a broad course of education. It was essential that the rational expertise of all educated blacks be brought to bear on the “problem of social uplift.”\textsuperscript{181} Haynes insisted on a college education, field placement and

graduate training for black social workers to prevent them from devolving into a wholly inferior caste in the segregated social work profession. The NUL faced serious hurdles in its development of black expertise at a time when most black professionals were confined to the ministry and teaching both of which did not require college degrees. Haynes and his colleagues at the league hoped that education at institutions like the Atlanta and Howard Schools of Social Work would produce a sustainable body of black social scientific expertise, contribute to the material betterment of the race and lessen dependence on white philanthropy.\textsuperscript{182}

**Rationalizing Wartime Racial Labor: Founding the Department of Negro Economics**

Wartime labor demands required the efficient application of black labor expertise. Previous federal investigations of black labor had been sporadic and generally incoherent. In late 1916, the Department of Labor created its employment service within the federal immigration bureau to alleviate labor shortages by directing workers into occupations commensurate with their supposed racial capabilities. Professor Emily G. Balch of Columbia University noted the need for racial labor specialization, claiming, “cooperation of an advanced type implies and requires difference; it involves division of labor in the sense of specialization along differing lines.”\textsuperscript{183}

Following America’s entry into the war, the U.S. Department of Labor was charged with “the rapid restructuring of the peacetime workforce onto a wartime footing.” Cessation of European immigration forced the DOL to look for new sources of labor. In response to northern industrialists’ requests for additional labor, the department colluded with railroad companies to

\textsuperscript{182} Haynes launched the Urban League Fellows Program -in conjunction with the NY School of Philanthropy- which funded graduate training at the Master’s level in sociology, economics or social work at a number of universities. This provided the NUL with highly skilled employees at no cost and avoided having to integrate placements. The fellows program became a feeder program for NUL branch executives and supplied many future black social scientists such as Abram Harris and Ira Reid, Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*: 86.

bring southern blacks to the North. Northern labor leaders were furious, accusing the federal
government of importing scab labor, while southerners denounced the practice as a poaching of
their local labor supply. In response, the Department of Labor tapped James F. Dillard, a Jeanne
and Slater Fund fellow and acknowledged expert on the Negro problem, to prepare a study on
the national implications of African American migration.\(^{184}\)

The war turned African Americans into an industrial factor on a national scale. Previously, Negro workers had been generally absent from the major works in industrial
ethnography, such as the multi-volume *Pittsburgh Survey* (1908), the massive *Dillingham
Commission* (1911), and Edward Ross’ opus, *The Old World in the New* (1914). However, the
European conflict quickly brought African Americans into the industrial fold. To study this,
process Professor Dillard quickly organized a force of five investigators, all southern and all
white, save one black professor from Hampton University. Dillard was viewed as a moderate, an
advocate of Washingtonian uplift who had the sympathetic ear of the new south elite. The
committee advised Secretary of Labor William Wilson to appoint a permanent official Negro
advisor to the department to oversee an affiliated Negro labor agency. While some in the black
community argued that a Negro agency further entrenched segregation, many members of the
talented tenth clamored for an appointment to this prospective agency.\(^{185}\)

The selection process to choose the head of the Department of Negro Economics revealed
key divisions within the black community over the strategic limits of accommodation and the
racial politics of expertise. One of the leading early candidates for the job was Giles Jackson, an
attorney and rabid anti-migration advocate. Jackson was a notorious figure due to allegations of
financial irregularities regarding his use of a $250,000 approbation for the Negro exhibit at the

\(^{184}\) Ibid.
1907 Jamestown tercentenary. Throughout the black press, Jackson was pilloried by the likes of DuBois as “a disreputable scoundrel” and a “disgrace to the race.” The editors of The Bee, Washington D.C.’s leading black daily, wrote, “Giles Jackson has about as much to recommend him for any position, save as dog catcher, as the devil has to recommend himself for a position on the right side of the Lord in Heaven.” African Methodist Bishop George C. Clement wrote to President Wilson warning that Jackson’s appointment “to any responsible place in government would be regarded by many self respecting Negro leaders as a calamity.”

The invective directed at Jackson was the result of both his alleged financial misdeeds and his hyper-accommodationist politics. For DuBois and his allies, Jackson’s greatest sin was his fidelity to the doctrines of Washingtonian uplift. Some even went so far as to accuse Jackson of being in the pay of southern capitalists that were eager to maintain a captive and pliant black workforce. For proof they pointed to Jackson’s The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States, which, despite arguing for African Americans labor fitness, nevertheless disparaged the idea of migration north as a “pointless endeavor.” Moreover, Jackson’s candidacy was dismissed by certain African American elites as corrupt patronage, which heretofore had been blacks’ sole means of entry into the federal government. Encouraging the shift from patronage to expertise, the heads of the NAACP, NUL and the John Slater Fund pleaded with Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson that wartime demands required a “Negro expert on Negro problems be appointed to lead the proposed bureau.” The three top administrators at the Labor Department, Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson, Assistant Secretary Louis Post and War Labor Administrator Felix Frankfurter, all held deep roots in the reform movement. All three

\[186\] In 1907 DuBois issued a public statement rejecting suggestions that he had prepared the Jamestown exhibit-attacking the whole affair as a “shameful and discredited enterprise”. - Segregated Scholars:128-129.
were sympathetic to the NUL and the NAACP and were more interested in professional solutions to black labor problems than quick political fixes.\textsuperscript{187}

The anti-Jackson campaign’s focus on professional expertise changed the expectations for a Negro labor advisor in such a way that only a social scientist could be considered for the post. George Haynes’ sociological training, moderate politics and ties to the broader, and bi-racial, progressive movement made him an ideal candidate. He enjoyed close relationships with the editorial boards of leading reform journals such as \textit{The Survey}, \textit{World’s Work} and the \textit{North American Review}. Paul Kellogg, publisher of \textit{The Survey}, designated Haynes his resident expert on African American migration. Between 1914 and 1918, Haynes published a number of articles in the reform press: “The Negro Comes north,” “Cotton Pickers in Northern Cities,” and “The Negro Migration.” These articles detailed the many maladjustments experienced by migrants while maintaining an unyielding faith in the ability of a “respectable work ethic to overcome any of the “the racial peculiarities of the colored worker.”\textsuperscript{188} For Haynes, black migrants’ industrial marginalization was due to white racism engendered in part by blacks’ inefficiency and ignorance of modern industrial work habits.

George Haynes was named director of the Division of Negro Economics (DNE) in the spring of 1918, becoming the first black administrator in the history of the Department of Labor. Haynes’ mandate was threefold: produce and develop black labor expertise, develop worker efficiency campaigns to “systematically inculcate in the Negro a sense of hygiene, skill development and contractual obligation” and forge stronger contacts between white capital and black labor by way of Negro Workers Advisory Boards. Mixing Washingtonian uplift with DuBois’ brand of radical activism, Haynes envisioned the DNE and its “social technicians,” or

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
social workers, alleviating migrants’ maladjustments by endowing them with a new “industrial consciousness” that stressed pride of achievement in personal and collective “thrift and constancy.”

From its inception, the DNE was plagued by issues of under funding, understaffing and equal measures of indifference and hostility from large swaths of the Department of Labor. The white southern executives who had supported Haynes’ candidacy hoped that improvements in the productivity of black workers would result in a more stable workforce without undermining the core tenets of segregation. Many in the black community hoped that Haynes’ experience at the NUL and his desire for an all black staff at the DNE would expedite the race’s industrial progress. Yet an analysis of the DNE’s activities reveals a mixed record. Despite support amongst the department’s leadership and some success in developing black expertise, the DNE ultimately yielded ambiguous results for black wartime labor.

**Developing African American Labor Expertise in the Department of Negro Economics**

Haynes’ first task following his appointment was staffing the new division with a cadre of African American professionals. Notwithstanding his forays into white reform circles, it had always been his intention to hire and maintain an exclusively black staff. However, Haynes soon found himself struggling to secure capable black men and women, echoing his earlier struggles at the NUL. There was a strong tendency for young would-be professionals, especially young African Americans, to regard social work as a refuge for those unable to make good in the seemingly more demanding professions of medicine and law. Roger Baldwin of the NUL agreed, claiming that “black social work throughout the country numbers many incompetents who have gone into it for sentimental reasons and the relative lack of competition.” To make social work a more attractive career for the “race’s most vigorous members,” the department adopted a five

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189 Ibid pg. 128.; Reed, 21-25.
point strategy: a letter campaign to deans and professors of leading black colleges, distribution of pamphlets in said schools, articles in leading periodicals like *The Survey*, personal visits to social science courses in black colleges and the establishment of summer and night school classes in social work at selected colleges and schools.

Through his contacts at the NUL and the Fisk Social Work School, Haynes enlisted groups such as the National Social Workers Exchange, the YMCA and various Black colleges to aid in the recruitment of qualified black social workers. Haynes couched his appeals to social work in the language of patriotism and race pride. After a long search, Haynes selected Karl Philips as his deputy. Phillips was a young lawyer and respected “race man” and was said to bring a keen scientific mind to the pressing problems of black labor. Along with external recruiting, Haynes drew some key members of his staff from existing government positions. Two of the department’s longest serving field agents, Charles Hall of Ohio and William B. Jennifer of Michigan, were U.S. Bureau of Census employees on loan from the Department of Commerce.\(^\text{190}\) The DNE was also instrumental in launching the careers of leading figures in black labor studies, such as J.R Crossland and Forest Washington. By the summer of 1918, the DNE employed an all black staff of 134 examiners, seven secretaries, and fifteen state representatives. Though working as representatives of the DNE these black professionals were attached to separate colored sections of the USES concentrating on problems relating to black wage earners in their respective locales. In day to day operations, blacks and whites often

\(^{190}\) Baldwin memo Jan 4 1919, General Correspondence, NUL papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Hall later returned to the census bureau where he was the chief specialist on black population matters for a number of years. Hall and had already written a number of census bureau reports on black migration. In 1917 Hall and Jennifer had been loaned to the DOL to do a report on blacks which was used to justify the creation of the DNE, *Segregated Scholars*: 131.
worked side by side, without incident, in USES offices under orders from the (white) state secretary.\textsuperscript{191}

The DNE afforded dozens of black professionals an unprecedented opportunity to continue their education and develop expertise at the upper levels of the federal government. Each of the department’s fifteen state supervisors reported to United States Employment Service (USES) supervisors in Washington D.C. Although many white USES officials found the dual reporting frustrating, it evinced a clear example of Haynes’s attempts to carve out a niche for black expertise within the wartime state. State supervisors sent Haynes monthly reports detailing the number of black migrants, types of available housing and employment opportunities. Haynes sent summaries of their reports to the Secretary of Labor and retained a second set of copies for use in DNE publications. As a minority agency within the Department of Labor, the DNE struggled constantly to ensure that any racial labor expertise it produced remained the property of African Americans.\textsuperscript{192}

\textit{Creating the Ideal Negro Worker: DNE Efficiency Campaigns}

The DNE worked to educate black migrants in the occupational and social mores of industrial life both on and off the shop-floor. Given wartime demands, it was essential that “the Negro learn on the job.” Drawing on previous NUL campaigns, the DNE instituted “efficiency campaigns” to instill a new industrial consciousness in migrants while assuaging white fears about the inefficiency and unpredictability of black labor. Due to budget constraints, the DNE was unable to launch widespread educational initiatives in black colleges or factories and instead relied on a limited publicity campaign targeting these institutions. Haynes used his contacts in the reform press to secure speaking engagements with various industry officials and to publish


\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
and distribute material on the virtues of efficiency. A popular pamphlet entitled “Why he Failed” detailed the traits of the dysfunctional worker: “he did not report on time, watched the clock, loafed when the boss was not looking, stayed out all night with the boys, failed to show up on Blue Monday, demanded a holiday on Saturday, and lied when asked for the truth.” DNE officials linked race pride to patriotism to caution blacks that “every time a Negro falls down on the job he pulls down his country and the entire race.”

Though agricultural and industrial labor fell under the purview of the DNE, the overwhelming focus of the efficiency campaigns was on the latter. The industries that lent themselves to Taylorist standardization, such as iron, munitions, meatpacking and shipbuilding, were ideal to better prove the mechanical skill and discipline of black workers. Shipbuilding, with its demand for “ships, ships and more ships,” represented the ideal medium of patriotic production through which Haynes worked to reframe the ideal black worker. Haynes noted that there “was no more interesting or important work than that being performed in the wartime shipyards.” Massive shipyards like Hog Island, located southwest of Philadelphia along the Delaware River, were seen as marvels of industrial organization. Bainbridge Colby, a trustee of the U.S. Shipping Board, declared Hog Island “the greatest piece of industrial enterprise that any country has ever known or has ever made.”

Sociologists were especially intrigued by the diverse workforces found at shipyards. At Hog Island, African Americans comprised approximately a fifth of the island’s workforce by war’s end. The records of the U.S. Shipping Board (Emergency Fleet Corporation) estimated that approximately 24,000 black men worked in the nation’s shipyards during the war, with the

193 Haynes, Negro at Work in War and Reconstruction: 130, 137-138.
194 Records of the U.S. Shipping Board Record Group 32, File 12, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia, NARA
number dipping to 14,000 at the close of the war through to September 1919.\textsuperscript{195} Just under half of the blacks employed during wartime (11,991) were stationed in the southern district, with the remaining 12,000 concentrated in the Great Lakes, Delaware River, Mid-Atlantic and Gulf Districts. During the war, 20.7\% of black shipyard workers were engaged in occupations classed as skilled. Following the armistice, the percentage of skilled black laborers in the yards rose to 27.47\%. The largest number of blacks in skilled occupations, both in steel and wooden ship construction, was in the southern district. Not only did blacks enter the skilled and semiskilled occupations during the war in large numbers, but those that did remained in those occupations in larger proportions than blacks in the unskilled occupations.\textsuperscript{196}

The vigorous and manly shipyard worker represented the ideal industrial worker, a perfectly calibrated model of human efficiency. At the 1918 Independence Day rally in Raleigh N.C., Haynes lavishly praised Charles Knight, a black riveter in Baltimore who drove a record 4,875 studs in nine hours into the hull of a battleship.\textsuperscript{197} Knight, “a highly respectable and industrious citizen” of Baltimore, was acclaimed throughout both the black and white press and was even awarded $125.00 by the British Government for his efforts. The New York Times noted that despite Knight's accomplishments, they did not lead to an increase in the number of blacks employed in shipyards. The Times observed that “the same condition of affairs, remained in the employment of Negroes at Hog Island. After they had manifested the same evidences of efficiency, they suffered from most invidious discriminations while endeavoring to contribute to the winning of the war.”\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{197} Guraza, Division of Negro Economics: 21.
\textsuperscript{198} Haynes, The Negro at Work: 137; NY Times, Feb, 17, 1918
Haynes’s found his black Stakovinate in one Edward Burwell. A native of Philadelphia, Burwell was the captain of a pile driving crew, who broke the world’s record in driving piles at Hog Island in the summer of 1918. Burwell and his crew drove 220, 65-ft piles in 9 hours and 5 minutes, amidst a terrific downpour, smashing the previous record of 165 piles in 9 hours.199 Burwell’s employer, The Arthur McMullen Company, had been contracted to drive 21,434 piles. Burwell and his crew alone drove about 20% of this number. When asked how he came to break the record, Burwell reportedly smiled and pointed to a placard which read: “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, again.” According to Burwell, “the sign filled the crew with enthusiasm. We decided one night that a new world’s record would be made on the morrow, and it was. Of course we had our little mechanical troubles, but instead of fretting and fuming the men just glanced at the sign and started in with renewed vigor and the record was smashed.” Employed as a pile driver for almost fifteen years, he explained that he had never been on a job as large as this before and that it was due to a rivalry with another Negro foreman that he had made up his mind to go after the record.200 Burwell’s sober work ethic, affability and mechanical acumen embodied the very model of racial fitness the DNE was working to create. His productivist narrative hit all the rhetorical notes required to portray black workers as efficient, enthusiastic, loyal and non-threatening patriots.

The DNE’s productivist narratives linked race pride with masculinity. Wartime labor demands created unprecedented opportunities for both white and black women, especially in occupations previously regarded as men’s work. To some extent, black women shared in these opportunities, especially in the meatpacking and tobacco industries. From December 1918 to June 1919, 3,282 black women labored in the stockyards and abattoirs while another 8,338 were

199 Ibid.
employed in the preparation of chewing tobacco and snuff. Nevertheless, black women were largely confined to low-skilled jobs such as cleaning, curing offal or stemming. DNE officials identified only 136 women in the stockyards employed in the highly skilled occupations of trimming and a mere two working as timekeepers. Likewise, in the tobacco industry only two women were cited as serving in the capacity of weights and inspections. Amongst black workers, this trend towards low skilled industrial work prevailed throughout the textile, laundry and munitions industries.²⁰¹

DNE officials believed that the imperatives of wartime efficiency would alleviate racial and gender inequalities in the workplace. However, assessments of black women’s performance were mixed. Employer satisfaction surveys revealed high levels of employer anxiety regarding black women workers. In a survey of thirty-four employers, across a variety of industries, fourteen rated the work of black women as satisfactory, while an additional three found their work superior to white women. Of the seventeen employers who rated black women’s work as unsatisfactory, seven cited irregular attendance as the main cause of dissatisfaction and seven felt that their output suffered from their “incorrigible slackness.”²⁰² Despite the ambiguous nature of these results, DNE officials were sensitive to the persistence of bio-racial models of African American workers’ inefficiency. To rationalize these critiques, Haynes and his staff argued that the social constraints of race and the innate handicaps of gender combined to limit the progress of black women workers.

The DNE, in its dealings with African American women, adopted a distinctly paternalistic approach. When pushing for a greater role for women in the workplace, officials

²⁰¹ Ibid.: 120-130.
²⁰² In a survey of five major stockyards -2990 black women (91% of those black women working in the industry) were employed in cleaning and curing offal. In a survey of 16 Tobacco plants 5,965 women were employed as steamers (72% of the total number of employed black women). Ibid.: 125, 130.
constantly stressed the need for workplace hygiene. While the assimilation of the male black worker depended on the standardizing effects of wartime industry, the efficient integration of black women workers depended on protecting them from the debilitating effects of the industrial workplace. DNE officials declared that whereas race was incidental to the identity of the black male worker, it was the definitive characteristic for black female laborers labeled as the “daughters and mothers of the race.” For Haynes, industrial employment for men was a precondition for racial progress, while for women it was a necessary evil engendered by wartime demands.203

Wartime working conditions for black women ran the gamut from intolerable to quite desirable. The disparity in all women’s working conditions narrowed in industries previously dominated by men. The meatpacking and munitions industries generally afforded a healthier workplace than the supposedly feminized industries of textiles, clothing and tobacco. DNE workers noted that women, both black and white, at a northern hosiery mill enjoyed no provision for first aid despite frequent accidents. Workers labored in cramped and ill-lighted conditions for ten hour shifts with only half an hour for lunch. The plant had no lockers or lunchrooms and only a single toilet and sink with no hot water. Despite a near total lack of amenities, workers were expected to keep the hosiery free from soiling and were taxed a few cents for each soiled spot found by the inspector. However, a survey of a neighboring shirt manufacturer employing black women revealed a well-lighted, heated and safe workplace fitted with the latest machinery and amenities.

In many workplaces, women had access to the most up to date vocational education, high wage rates and the chance to augment their pay through generous piece work bonuses. In their survey of one munitions plant, DNE officials were especially impressed with the well appointed

203 Ibid.
lockers and clean and ample restrooms that allowed “colored women to maintain their dignity.” In October 1918, black women at a small machine works operator in Ohio informed a DNE official of the “resolutely modern” conditions on the shop floor. Black women worked alongside foreign born women of several nationalities in clean, light workrooms for eight hours a day at decent wage rates. The plant had adequate washrooms, a lunchroom and adequate first aid facilities. A training school offered vocational instruction at night with no “special arrangements made to race.” However, despite this apparent race-neutral mandate, company officials acknowledged the difficulties which arose between black workers and white foremen. In the interest of maintaining wartime efficiency, they placed a black forewoman in charge of the black female workers.\textsuperscript{204}

For women across the color line, clerical work was touted as an ideal alternative to the debilitating and “unwomanly” environments of the industrial shop-floor. For black women, clerical work afforded a professional respectability to individuals laboring under the double jeopardy of race and gender. The wartime transfer of masses of male workers into industrial work created unprecedented opportunities in clerical work for women. DNE officials surveyed sixteen offices, in both the public and private sector, and found only a few thousand black women employed as typists, stenographers, bookkeepers and filing clerks. Reflecting the skilled division of labor along racial lines evident in the industrial sector, black female clerical workers were generally excluded from jobs as packing clerks, special investigators and switchboard operators. The majority of those employed in private commercial offices or government agencies held only temporary contract positions. After the war, these women were let go to make room for discharged soldiers. Like their male counterparts, black women found themselves “the last hired and the first fired.” Despite the DNE’s efforts to extol black women clerical workers for

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid: 130.
performing the vital “organizational work in the fight for democracy, erasing all doubts of their love for country,” their diligence failed to inoculate them against the gendered consequences of the postwar reassertion of a white supremacist political economy.\textsuperscript{205}

\textit{Racial Labor in the Wartime Corporatist State: The Negro Worker Advisory Committees}

The DNE’s most significant accomplishment was the Negro Workers Advisory Councils. Despite the department’s moderate success in developing a cadre of black professionals and creating new narratives of black labor efficiency, they were most effective in forging links between white capital and black labor. The chief mandate of the Negro Workers Advisory Committees was to facilitate black labor to the demands of wartime industry and mitigate shop floor tensions between the races. Advisory committees were institutionally integrated as an example of the need for interracial unity between workers.\textsuperscript{206} These committees mediated conferences between black and white labor and employers in nine states and a number of localities.

DNE officials assessed the needs of the labor market, the availability of black labor and the local racial dynamics to place the right worker in the right job. On August 1, 1918, the U.S. Employment Service (USES) assumed responsibility for recruiting and allocating labor for war industries employing one hundred or more workers. Following this announcement, Haynes worked to co-ordinate the efforts of the DNE with the USES for the recruitment and placement of black wage earners in both the north and south. Ideally, the DNE would draw on the legal resources of the USES to establish wage parity in various industries “whenever possible.” By

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.: 126-127.
\textsuperscript{206} Gurdza, \textit{Division of Negro Economics}: 21.
1920, Negro Workers Advisory Councils had been established in 225 counties and cities, along with eleven state committees, and boasted approximately one thousand active members.\footnote{DNE Summer Memo 1918, Records of the War Production Board, Record Group 174, NARA, Washington D.C.; Wilson, Segregated Scholars: 131.}

As conduits between white capital and black labor, Negro Workers Advisory Councils had a distinct corporatist character. Though the DNE leadership was not opposed to unionism in theory, a pragmatic assessment of the American Federation of Labor’s tepid and often hostile racial policies led them to believe that the race’s industrial future lay in forging productive alliances with white capital. Haynes saw the councils as key in allowing black workers to resist “the siren song of solidarity.” Statements such as these were met with derision by a new generation of black labor activists. In the pages of The Messenger, socialists A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen attacked Haynes as emblematic of the archaic leadership of “old crowd Negroes.”\footnote{Ibid.:130-134.} Black radicals characterized the DNE, and black liberals generally, as effete dupes of white capitalists. In this view, complacent elites were hopelessly enamored with meaningless studies and social programs which did little to aid the everyday struggles of the black working class. Perhaps the most damning critique leveled at these social scientific elites was the allegedly unscientific nature of their work. Randolph dismissed DuBois’ Philadelphia Negro as “a heavily padded work, filled with superfluous material, very much like a similar work by Dr. George E. Haynes, The Negro At Work in NYC.”\footnote{Ibid.: 132.} These attacks struck at the heart of Haynes and DuBois’ faith in social scientific methodology and their self-appointed status as race experts.

The DNE was silent on most social justice issues, incapable and unwilling to develop a systematic critique of the racial inequities of the contemporary political economy. In part this was due to Haynes’ accommodationist philosophy, which posited material advancement as a
prerequisite to social justice. Locally contentious issues such as lynching would have to be sacrificed to the greater good of an empowering black capitalism and racial progress. In contrast, the editors of The Messenger called for new leadership that had the “manly courage” to work for decent wages and housing, protest against segregated army units and condemn lynching and disenfranchisement. However, Haynes understood that due to blacks’ limited political capital, issues of social justice had to be viewed in pragmatic rather than absolutist terms. The Wilson administration had little sympathy for African Americans—President Wilson personally abhorred blacks—and viewed racial issues only through the narrow lens of wartime productivity. DNE officials who did challenge the local practices of white supremacy were handicapped by their role as agents of a federal government whose commitment to racial equality was ambivalent at best.

The institutional limits and ideological tensions of the Negro Workers Advisory Committees, and the DNE in general, were illustrated via their experience in the racial and labor politics of postwar Florida. In the winter of 1918, Governor Sidney Catts had warmly welcomed the DNE. Yet from the beginning powerful timber interests expressed opposition to Florida’s DNE supervisor, William Armwood, a local civil rights lawyer notorious for his previous unsuccessful efforts to unionize black timber workers in the north of the state. Their suspicions were confirmed when Armwood and the USES state director both refused to yield to the timber industry’s demand that they prevent the IWW from organizing black turpentine workers. Eventually, Armwood’s insistence that the DNE was legally obligated to remain neutral in labor disputes quickly led timber executives to slander the agency with the proverbial charges of “negro domination.” From Washington, Haynes assured Armwood of his “unwavering support”

\[210\] Ibid.: 134
\[211\] Ibid.
and refused to order him to make antiunion statements. However, Haynes’ resolute defense of Armwood was less about black’s right to unionize and more about his support for representatives of black professional expertise. For Haynes, the latter superseded any anxieties over offending local racial sensibilities.

Though DNE officials found the radicalism of the IWW distasteful to their moderate sensibilities, they staunchly defended the right of black workers to unionize. In the face of growing pressure from the timber industry, Governor Catts demanded that Armwood be fired by his “carpetbagger masters” and replaced with a “real Florida cracker.” When Haynes arrived to mediate the dispute, Florida’s state officials and lumber executives walked out rather than enter into dialogue with a black man. John Kirby, president of the National Lumber Manufacturers, stated that “while I shall be glad to confer with (Secretary of Labor) Wilson, or (Assistant Secretary of Labor) Post if they wish to see me....when it comes to sitting in council with Dr. Haynes, a negro, you will have to excuse me. In the South we tell negroes what to do; we do not take counsel with them.”212 The Florida press accused the DNE and the federal government of colluding with, “wobbly Bolsheviks” attempting to foist “racial equality” on the seemingly beleaguered local white populace. Unable to withstand public backlash and despite Assistant Secretary Post’s objections, the DOL fired Armwood and pulled all black DNE personal from the South.213 Increasingly powerless to effect real change for black workers, the DNE redoubled its efforts to develop sustainable black labor expertise and promote positive public relations.

The DNE’s loss of its southern staff, coming as it did just before the Department of Labor’s biannual interagency review, was a debilitating blow to the already faltering agency. An examination of the department’s correspondence from the summer of 1919 to its demise in the

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212 Guzda, Division of Negro Economics: 31
213 Wilson, Segregated Scholars :132.
fall of 1920 reveals its diminished ability to influence federal policy towards black workers. Haynes and his small staff were increasingly marginalized by officials at the DOL and the War Department. The combustible mix of increasing black migration, returning veterans, and economic depression led to increased racial tensions throughout the nation. Following clashes between white and black workers in Norfolk, Philadelphia, and Washington, an official at the War Department declared the “industrial experiment of Negro labor” a failure. Freed from wartime constraints the, “feckless negro” now stalked the streets of northern cities as the personification of contemporary anxieties that conflated unchecked disease, sexuality and political radicalism.  

Despite the DNE’s best efforts, hereditarian notions of black fitness persisted into the postwar era. War Department officials conceded that while racial labor tensions were in part linked to blacks’ social maladjustment, they were primarily the result of the “innate mechanical failings of the colored worker.” When the phosphates and navel stores industries in Florida began their reconversion into peacetime production in the spring of 1919, W.F. Coachmen of the Consolidated Navel Stores Co. contacted the DOL and the War Department for aid in replacing black workers temporarily recruited for the war effort. Federal officials noted that due to “the use of modern manufacturing methods, Mr. Coachmen thinks he would prefer white semi-skilled labor in place of the Negro labor used previously.” Reports indicated that while Coachmen and his peers “have not lost confidence in the Negro they do not feel certain that the improvement the army and the war have brought about in them is a permanent change.” Major W. Reynolds of the War Department echoed these sentiments, declaring, “clearly the negro has failed to adjust

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214 War Dept. Memo-April 22 1919, RG 179, NARA, Washington D.C.
himself to the industrial life and must be returned to his natural occupational environment in the South.”

Following the armistice, southern elites aggressively lobbied the DOL and the War Department to repatriate black labor to the South to aid the ailing agricultural sector. Tellingly, the DNE was excluded from this process. One southerner lamented that, “having secured high wages in the north the negro was reluctant to return south and knew of nothing that could induce him to return.” Major W. Reynolds hoped that deteriorating economic conditions in the North would force blacks southward: “the whole question of course is simply that the darkies seem to prefer to work in the North than in the South. As they find it increasingly difficult to get jobs in the North things won’t seem so attractive there and by contrast the attractiveness of the South may increase.” To entice migrant blacks to return to the South, the DOL contemplated instituting a standardized wage scale in local southern industries in which blacks had previously and currently dominated. This needed to be accompanied by an improvement in living conditions facilitated by local southern municipal authorities or boards of commerce and, most importantly, “certified by someone that the darkies will trust.”

The dissolution of wartime corporatist alliances frustrated efforts to order the postwar labor economy along racial lines. Less than three months after the Armistice, the DOL enlisted the aid of the War Department to secure reduced railroad fares to move Mexican labor from the Midwest to “points of need in the Pacific northwest.” However, free from the demands of wartime political economy, railroad officials refused the request and the initiative failed. In

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215 Ibid.
216 Post war black unemployment in the north while rooted in a general slowing of the economy (labor surplus) was also linked to blacks refusal to work at pre-war rates and the demand for agricultural labor in the south. See Memo to Woods, April 19, 1919, RG 173., NARA, Washington D.C.
217 Memo from Major Reynolds, April 22 1919, RG 179, NARA, Washington D.C.
218 War Dept. Memo to Col Woods from Sergeant E. Kobbe, April 1919, RG 179, NARA, Washington D.C.
April, 1919, the DOL achieved some success in transferring two hundred blacks from Philadelphia to the tobacco fields of North Carolina at a reduced rate but conceded that the majority of their requests to secure similar arrangements for blacks had been swiftly rebuffed. Throughout the war, southern elites had vociferously condemned railroad officials for facilitating the poaching of their captive black labor force. In the immediate postwar era, shifts in the labor economy led these same elites to advocate for a reversal of this policy: a return of African American migrants to their southern roots.219

These initiatives were eventually shelved due to fears that federal intervention in the southern labor economy, on behalf of white capital and black workers, would engender the wrath of white workers. Both the DOL and the DNE found themselves in the untenable position of trying to enforce policies which ostensibly afforded blacks full rights as citizens in locales where the very notion of black citizen workers was a contradiction in terms. Haynes acknowledged this as a “delicate and difficult task.” White southerners routinely derided the DNE as “that nigger agency” run by “northern carpetbaggers.” Perceptions of the DNE as an agent of “negro domination” were exacerbated by the department’s relative legislative impotence. Outside of appeals to the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments guaranteeing equal citizenship under the law, there were no federal laws prohibiting racial discrimination in wartime industries to even enforce in the first place. Lacking the power of enforcement, the DNE essentially became an advisory committee that relied on public initiatives, like efficiency campaigns, to garner positive publicity for black labor fitness. Faced with a dearth of legal options, the DNE was forced to pursue an

219 The Immigration Service of the USES had requested reduced fares from the Interstate Railroad Commerce Commission as early as 1908 and had been rejected. The USES made similar unsuccessful requests in; 1910, 1912, 1914, and 1916. On June 21 1918 the Assistant Secretary of Labor wrote to W.G McAdoo the Director General of Railroads requesting reduced rates for “specific emergency farm labor” and they were again refused. Memo to Col Woods Department of Labor, USES April 19 1919, RG 179, NARA, Washington D.C.
explicitly rhetorical strategy that made it vulnerable to accusations of “fostering racial discord” and “agitating for social equality” despite its moderate mandate.\textsuperscript{220}

To bolster the DNE following the dispiriting events in Florida, Labor Secretary Wilson invited the representatives of forty-five of the nation’s leading civil rights organizations to meet with him in Washington during the summer of 1919. After two days of deliberations, the parties agreed on a set of goals to ensure the economic advancement of black workers. The essential elements of the plan called for increased attention by the DNE to create job openings in skilled jobs in public infrastructure projects, provide federal aid to black businesses, develop a national network of Negro Workers Advisory Committees and lobby for public and private aid to black vocational education. Haynes was ecstatic, confiding to Assistant Labor Secretary Post that the implementation of these proposals “would be a boon to the race.” However, limited financial resources, anti-statism and continuing racial violence in the North tempered Haynes’ initial exuberance.\textsuperscript{221}

The fate of the DNE was sealed in the fall of 1919. That autumn a DOL civil sundry bill appeared before a Congressional appropriations committee devoid of any provisions for the DNE. An unnamed conferee raised a parliamentary point of order, citing funding for the DNE as unconstitutional. Allegedly, Secretary Wilson had usurped Congressional powers in creating the DNE, making the matter of appropriations moot. DOL officials protested that they had followed proper constitutional procedure in creating the DNE, citing Section 10 of the Organic Act which directed the secretary of Labor to “report to Congress any plans for the coordination of activities, duties and powers of his office with those of other offices relating to labor.”\textsuperscript{222} An internal memo revealed that on Jan 9 1918, Secretary of Labor Wilson informed Congress that he intended to

\textsuperscript{220} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{221} Gurdaza: 32.  
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid: 33.
appoint a Negro advisor to his department and had called on the Labor Department’s solicitor to
draft legislation for a “permanent division of negro economics.” This legislation was introduced
but Congress never acted on the bill. This legislative loophole precluded any debate or vote on
the issue of funding, forcing DNE officials to watch helplessly from the sidelines as the
department was dismantled.223

Civil Rights leaders were incensed over this duplicity. Mary White Ovington of the
NAACP, a close friend of Haynes, accused Congress of “bold racial bias.” Eugene K. Jones of
the NUL commented that “the appropriation for this important work was killed in Congress
through sheer political chicanery.”224 Haynes and Louis Post refused to give up the fight and
drafted legislation to submit to the next session of Congress for the creation of a permanent
Negro Labor division. Through the summer and fall of 1919, the USES and Bureau of Labor
Statistics absorbed some of the DNE’s division personal and programs. In a last ditch effort to
save the DNE, Labor Department officials arranged for Haynes to testify as the Department’s
official representative before a second Senate appropriations board hearing. Committee
Chairman Francis Warren gave the majority opinion voicing the rise in anti-black racism
masquerading as color blindness: “you are exactly equal under the law. You are exactly equal, of
course, under those appropriations. But as far as we are concerned, there should not be a division
between classes of workmen, one against the other....we have to look at it with the idea of
preserving equality. The same rule applies to both.” Haynes rejected this disingenuous color-

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223 U.S. Congress, House, House Document 1906 64th C, 2S U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the
Secretary, Regulations of the Department of Labor, (Washington: GPO, 1915) p 119-121; Gurdza: 33.
224 Ovington to Sec Wilson, NAACP papers Library of Congress; Kinckle Jones NUL papers Library of
Congress, Manuscript Room
blind rhetoric, responding, “the fact is, Senator, that heretofore the inequality has rested the other way when it has come to matters of industrial opportunity and employment”\textsuperscript{225}

Efforts to create a permanent Negro division within the DOL were unsuccessful thanks to a resurgent white nativism and a surge in anti-statism. Exhausted from the heady reforms of the Progressive era and the tumult of war, Americans elected the thoroughly unremarkable Warren G. Harding to the presidency on his pledge to restore “normalcy.” Harding’s normalcy was characterized in part by a resurgent nativism determined to purge the republic of undesirable elements such as Jews, Catholics, African Americans and political radicals of various stripes. The anti-immigration movement, which culminated in the 1924 Johnson Reed Restriction Act, and white fears over increased job competition from blacks led to a rapid whitening of the ethnic working class and a hardening of divisions between white and black labor. Though the new Secretary of Labor, James J. Davis, retained a “colored labor advisor,” the DNE was effectively dead by the time of Harding’s inauguration in March 1921. Emmett Scott, a Tuskegee official and special advisor to the War Department remarked, “I confess personally a deep sense of disappointment, of poignant pain, that a great country in time of need should promise so much and afterwards perform so little.” After the DNE was disbanded, George Haynes moved back to New York City, where he became the executive secretary of the Department of Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America\textsuperscript{226}.

The DNE’s contribution to racial sociology was distilled in \textit{The Negro at Work During the World War and Reconstruction} published by the Department of Labor in 1921. Like all progressives, Haynes placed a premium on publications and during his time at the DNE he

\textsuperscript{225} Gurdza pg. 35.; U.S. Congress, Civil Sundry Bill pp 98-100, Misc Press Clippings, Box C319, NAACP papers

endeavored to publish two full length studies on the role of wartime black labor. Budget constraints and limited staff forced him to narrow his expectations and publish a single monograph. *The Negro at Work* sought to answer many of the pressing questions regarding the wartime entry of blacks into northern industry: what particular industries did they enter? were they unskilled, semiskilled or skilled? what was their employers estimate and opinion of their work? and how did blacks compare with white workers in the same establishments and at the same jobs regarding absenteeism, turn over, quality of work produced, and speed in turning out quantity?227 To answer these questions, Haynes and his co-author Karl Phillips assembled a broad set of data gleaned from existing Labor Department records and subsequent DNE investigations. Unfortunately, the authors were unable to include data on black labor on the railroads, in the mines, in agriculture and in domestic service. Although the original plan of the bulletin called for the inclusion of these groups and although the department did adopt measures to promote their welfare and efficiency, agencies such as the U.S. Railroad Commission refused the DNE’s requests for data on black labor. A lack of institutional cooperation once again revealed the Jim Crow character of Progressivism and the general indifference accorded to black expertise. The authors were forced to concede that their sample size was limited and fragmentary and cautioned readers against drawing any broad generalizations regarding the state of industrial black labor.228

Nevertheless, findings from this work formed the basis for one of Haynes’ few policy recommendations to the Department of Labor. His September 1919 report advised that the DNE be afforded the interagency mechanism to develop greater cooperation with the Public Health Service, Bureau of War Risk Insurance and the War Department in reducing racial tensions

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228 Ibid.
between the working classes. Furthermore, he recommended that the Negro Workers Advisory Committees be allowed to continue their work in developing publicity and promotional campaigns committed to fostering the Negro's industrial consciousness and as well as stronger ties between black workers and white capital. Thirdly, the report advised that the Federal Government empower its agencies to provide information to employers regarding black workers. Finally, the report suggested that steps be taken with the appropriate departments of state governments towards the establishment of permanent DNE offices, similar to those already established in North Carolina, Ohio and Illinois.  

The Department of Labor failed to act on a single one of the recommendations.

*The Negro at Work During the World War and Reconstruction* stands as a key work of early twentieth century black labor studies and a model of sociological rigor. Shortly following its publication, co-author Karl Phillips bragged that his statistical charts were accurate to the third decimal and gave “the clearest picture of the current state of the colored labor in the nation.” After the demise of the DNE in 1920-1921, Philips remained at the Department of Labor preparing annual statistical reports on black migration and occupational status for a number of years. Although he responded to inquiries about black workers, Philips had no executive authority and quickly found himself marginalized within the Department of Labor.  

Throughout the twenties and thirties, black sociologists such as Charles Johnson and Abram Harris drew heavily on *The Negro at Work* and other DNE research for their own investigations into black proletarianization in the urban north. Ira Reid, a protégé of Haynes, remarked that *The

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229 ibid.: 135  
230 *Segregated Scholars*: 131
Negro at Work provided the first systematic analysis of the “Negro's entry onto the landscape of modern industry.”

**Conclusion**

World War One intensified the struggle for power within the factory, increased labor’s ability to impose standards and resist those of the employer and greatly increased the appeal of scientific management to industrialists. This forced the managerial class to wrestle with the problems of standardizing labor tasks to wage systems and a seemingly “un-American” workforce composed of immigrants and southern blacks. Reformers like George Haynes hoped that fostering black labor expertise, developing positive narratives of black labor fitness and forging stronger ties between black labor and white capital would encourage efficient labor behaviors in blacks while allaying white fears about the unpredictability and inferiority of the Negro worker. However, due to a lack of financial, social and political resources, this became a largely rhetorical exercise—a case of literally trying to speak the ideal black worker into existence through little more than enthusiastic press releases. In many ways this became an act of self preservation on the part of Haynes and his staff, allowing them to preserve their political capital—albeit limited—as official racial arbiters, while avoiding the stigma of failure and insulating themselves from the day to day experiences of black labor.

The DNE was significant in its attempts to reconcile the Negro problem with the Labor problem through the nexus of institutional sociology. The DNE—much like the NUL and the NAACP—represented the fusion of liberal environmentalism and accommodation that eventually came to define mainstream racial thought in early twentieth century America. Historian Mia Bay notes that this intellectual shift meant that no longer did black elites have to

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231 Reid NUL papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
fight racism “with revisionist (essentialist) racial ideologies of their own; now they had science on their side.” Yet the DNE’s greatest failure was its belief that white racism stemmed from ignorance or animus rather than pragmatic and often naked self-interest. Scholar George Lipsitz deems this “possessive investment in whiteness” as one characterized less as a “snarling contempt than a system for protecting the privileges of whites by denying communities of color opportunities for asset accumulation and upward mobility.” Time and time again, DNE officials underestimated the allure of the “wages of whiteness” to white workers.233

Scholars have argued that there is a danger in viewing race and racial identity simply as products of the social imagination. Historian Thomas Holt notes that such an approach tends to privilege racism as

a consequence of bad ideas, something which can be traced to some intellectual wrong turn. Too often the causal links between ideas and material circumstances are ambiguous, leaving historians to address the difficult question of whether racist ideas rationalize behavior or cause it? Do good ideas inevitably chase out the bad?234

Haynes, like many of his peers mistakenly imagined that by simply “laying the facts bare,” the irrationality of racial prejudice would be exposed and race relations could be remade along rational lines. Haynes and the staff at the DNE recognized that blacks’ socioeconomic marginalization, while rooted in material causes, was primarily defined by social fictions of black degeneracy that informed and reified these circumstances. They believed that only when blacks transcended these fictions, through the acquisition of a sober work ethic and white patriarchal norms, would whites accept the Negro worker as part of the national body politic.235

Blackness is a historically contingent discourse which shifts along lines of race, class and gender, constantly circumscribing the opportunities of those defined as black. The sociological

rhetoric of blackness informed the meanings given to the kinds of work individuals or groups could or could not do, where they could live, and how one defined a sick or healthy body. Philip Brown, the Labor Department’s Negro Commissioner of Conciliation, conceded that “the Negro has always been a problem in the scheme of civilization.”\textsuperscript{236} In the discourse of industrial evolution, the stigmata of blackness marked bodies as lazy, unreliable and unskilled, thereby making occupational advancement impossible. While acknowledging the racial politics of the day, DNE officials constantly tried to reconcile the contradictory proposition that blacks’ adjustment and assimilation into industrial modernity was ultimately dependent on them shedding their identities as \textit{black} workers and becoming \textit{workers} who happened to be black. However, black workers and reformers would soon discover that even the seemingly racially neutral imperatives of wartime scientific management, exemplified in anthropometry and vocational rehabilitation, were predicated on race-based notions of the fit and unfit body.

\textsuperscript{236} Philip Brown ‘The Negro Migrant’ An Address delivered before the International Association of Employment Services, King Edward Hotel, Toronto, Canada, September, 6, 1923, DNE Files Misc, RG179, NARA, Washington D.C.
Chapter Three

“Measuring Men for the Work of War”: Anthropometry, Race, and the Draft 1917-1919

“War is the health of the State.”
Randolph Bourne, The State (1918) 237

In the spring of 1918, Henry S. Berry, a promising young black medical student, arrived at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama for induction into the U.S. Army. Before his arrival, Berry had undergone a battery of mental and physical tests. To his immense satisfaction, he had been found “fit and worthy to bear arms in defense of the United States.” At Tuskegee, Berry and his fellow recruits underwent intense military training. He later recounted, “stripped to the waist in the broiling sun we would go through our exercises necessary to the development of arms, chest, abdomen and legs.” Despite the protests and groans of many of the men, Berry “enjoyed the exercises very much for I knew that such training as this would make a better man physically of me, if not more, and at the same time enable me to stand the strain of active service with greater fortitude.” Soon he and his compatriots “began to assume the shape and appearance of soldiers.” Berry was forever grateful to the army for the “hard muscles that now cover my limbs, the cultivated deep breathing that guards me from the white plague and my ability to walk many miles and enjoy the love of clean, pure, fresh air.”238 Through a regime of intensive physical evaluation and training, the army had remade Henry S. Berry into a new man, a new “type of Negro.”

Notwithstanding Henry Berry’s experience, progressive social scientists remained skeptical of blacks’ ability to transcend their “brutish physicality” and be remade into efficient professionals.

238 Berry Memoir, ‘A Day in the Army at Tuskegee Institute’- Berry family collection, Schomburg Centre, NYPL Library. Berry was eventually attached to the Army Medical Department in France.
soldier/workers. One exception was the feminist reformer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who had previously argued for the merits of state coercion in alleviating the industrial maladjustment of African Americans:

Let each sovereign state carefully organize in every county and township an enlisted body of all negroes below a certain grade of citizenship....... For the whole body of negroes who do not progress, who are not self-supporting, who are degenerating into an increasing percentage of social burdens or actual criminals should be taken hold of by the state. This proposed organization is not enslavement, but enlistment...... To be drafted to a field of labor that shall benefit his own race and the whole community, need not be considered a wrong to any negro. It should furnish good physical training and as much education as each individual can take.”

Drawing on a mixture of social and biological racial theories, Gilman’s advocacy for the industrial conscription for those blacks “below a certain grade of citizenship” sought to mediate progressive fears regarding the interconnections of racial and class degeneration. Like all good progressives, Gilman believed that only the state, via professional expertise, was capable of providing the inferior races with the necessary tools to work their way to civilization.

In contrast, progressives believed that military training would instill a much needed discipline in the near-white denizens of the melting pot and turn them into warlike, virile and efficient Americans. In the spring of 1918, the writer Irvin Cobb observed the men of the 77th “melting pot” division from New York City, following their arrival in France. Cobb wrote,

I saw them when they first landed at Camp Upton (NY), furtive, frightened, slow footed, slack-shouldered, underfed, a huddle of unhappy aliens ....now three months later....the stoop was beginning to come out of their spines, the shamble out of their gait. They had learned to hold their heads up; had learned to look every man in the eye and tell him to go elsewhere, with a capital H.

Gilman echoed prevailing notions of black’s juvenile and feminine vanity noting: “The whole system should involve fullest understanding of the special characteristics of the negro; should be full of light and color; of rhythm and music; of careful organization and honorable recognition. The new army should have its uniforms, its decorations, its titles, its careful system of grading, its music and banners and impressive ceremonies.” Gilman, ‘A Suggestion on the Negro Problem’, *American Journal of Sociology*, July, 1908
For militarists such as Theodore Roosevelt and General Leonard Wood, who had long agitated for the “invigorating benefits of universal military service,” conscription was an idea whose time was long overdue.240

Heretofore the soldiering body had been viewed as a source of social contagion and vice, elites now hoped to reconstitute it as a source of racial and national regeneration. Military service became a key mechanism of Americanization. Reformers and military officials linked the regenerative potential of conscription to notions of sexual purity and manly self-control, which was invariably posited as the sole purview of whiteness. Those who did not embrace this self-control demonstrated weakness, not strength, and were marked as failures as both soldiers and men.241 The Negro, alone amongst the nation’s races, remained a prisoner to his seemingly primitive and depraved biology.

How then do we make sense of Henry Berry’s experience? What can it tell us about how the shifting categories of race and labor were mediated, rationalized and ultimately naturalized through the body in progressive era America? Although the First World War did not create the impetus for state surveillance and discipline of the body, it intensified that surveillance and encouraged the proliferation of various regulatory institutions and practices. Scholars have argued that “the military requirements of modern warfare and industry provided governments with a powerful incentive to intervene in new areas of the economy including the construction of men’s bodies.” David Roediger reminds us that “the bodily and mental fitness of those being

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drafted into the army were objects of intense nationalist concern.” In a culture that equated industrial development with racial fitness, the ability to identify racial types was seen as key to national efficiency.

The following chapter examines how social scientists on the Committee on Anthropology (COA), of the National Research Council (NRC), used the science of anthropometry to evaluate the health, shape and fitness of “the Negro type” through the wartime draft. Ales Hrdlicka, head of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution and a founding member of the COA, defined anthropometry as “that part of anthropology in which are studied variations in the human body and all its parts, and particularly the differences of such variations in the races, tribes, families, and other well defined groups of humanity.” These self-appointed racial experts worked to equate the military evaluation of racial bodies with their industrial classification. Although the army IQ tests developed by Robert Yerkes are perhaps the best known wartime accounting of racial fitness, reformers were especially interested in “correlating the physical capabilities of various racial types with their cultural character.” Leading eugenicists such as Charles Davenport argued that while the “drafted men’s mental qualities and behavior are of importance, of no less obvious importance is his physique.”

Linking war to work, the COA defined racial types through the measurement and evaluation of the first million army recruits, the “multiracial” workforce of the American

242 This process was often referred to as the ‘inspection effect’ of wartime economies. Joanna Bourke, Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War (London; Reaktion Books 1996): 171-179; Roediger, How Race Survived U.S. History: 160-161.
243 Hoffman, Army Anthropology:16, 54; Davenport and Yerkes had corresponded at the beginning of the war regarding heredity’s role in linking the mental and the physiological. In a letter to Yerkes, Davenport remarked: “I am now rushing a book on the subject of naval officers with reference to their juvenile and family history. It is interesting to note that Admiral T Mahan (he of the great white fleet fame) was the one man who has expressed very clearly the idea that the effectiveness of a man in his occupation depends upon his hereditary traits, together with the opportunities that they have for development and exercise.” Davenport to Yerkes, May 16 1917, Davenport Papers, Correspondence, American Philosophical Society (APS), Philadelphia, PA.
International Shipbuilding Association at Hog Island in Philadelphia, and the measurement of some 100,000 demobilized men in the summer of 1919. These practices were extensively detailed in *Physical Examination of the First Million Draft Recruits: Methods and Results* (1919), *Defects Found in Drafted Men* (1919), and *Army Anthropology* (1921). The committee’s exclusively white membership included many of the leading race thinkers of the day: Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, of the Smithsonian, Dr. Charles Davenport, of the Carnegie Institute, Dr. Frederick Hoffman, Chief Statistician of the Prudential Life Insurance Company, Dr. E.F. Hooton, of Harvard and the ubiquitous Madison Grant, of the American Museum of Natural History.²⁴⁵ Operating at the nexus of the public and private spheres this cadre of self-described “race experts” exercised a near monopoly on the development, dissemination, and institutionalization of wartime measurements of racial labor fitness.

Wartime anthropometry determined the physical requirements of military service, along with “the physical adaptation of workman to highly organized industrial functions.” Industrial workers contributed disproportionately to the armed forces, primarily consisting of men from the lower ranks of the production line.²⁴⁶ Reformers argued, “we should relate our army establishment to society in training for our daily social and economic life, wherein young men may achieve not solely military training but equipment as well for the industrial life ahead of

²⁴⁵ Holmes to Hrdlicka, ‘Report of the Committee on Anthropology’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 1918. W.E.B DuBois was perhaps the foremost black practitioner of anthropometry or biometric science and for years had recognized the need to refute their prevailing theories of black degeneracy. For insight into how DuBois engaged with this scholarship, used it to bind his scientific and literary work, and reconfigured it as a means of uplift see Maria Farland, ‘W.E.B. DuBois, Anthropometric Science, and the Limits of Racial Uplift’, *American Quarterly*, 2006.

²⁴⁶ Ibid: 14; Using estimates made by Crowder, head of the selective service, industrial workers had a participation rate that was as much as five times higher than that of agricultural workers. Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: America Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003): 194.
them.247 Historian Roger Horowitz notes that military service is a special form of work experience, with its attendant issues of cohesion, division, authority, community, and recreation. Yet Horowitz warns against “overly ambitious levels of generalization concerning the effects of military service on workers” and stresses the need to develop analytical tools cognizant of the variegated character of military service and its respective historical context. As a federal system, the Selective System reflected the social order and cultural values prized by property owning married white men within their respective communities or states. Therefore, the draft is an ideal vehicle for comparing the regional connections of race, class, gender, and citizenship.248

Like statistics and sociology, anthropometry was a tool employed by progressives to maintain racial labor hierarchies at a time of war and rapid industrialization. In a global economy defined by a highly migratory labor force, shifting social identities, increasing division of work processes and new modes of union organization, elite efforts to link industrial behaviors to specific bodies were prized, but proving especially troublesome. Eugenic theory, which linked biology to destiny, dictated that a sober, scientific survey of racial physiologies was necessary to chart a races’ past, present, and future levels of fitness. Anthropometry became a means to link eugenic theory to the standardizing imperatives of Taylorism and evaluate black proletarianization.249

247 ‘Equipment’ which included everything- from mechanical skill to time-work discipline- In both the military and industrial spheres a body’s fitness and efficiency was ultimately measured by its resistance to disease and fatigue. In the context of wartime political economy the value of a laboring body resided in its ability ‘not to crack’ under the withering strain of militarized industry and mechanized warfare. Charles Johnson Post, The Army as a Social Service, The Survey, May, 20, 1916: 201.


249 Though historians have debated the actual extent to which Taylorist models were adopted by business many still contend that he was “the most influential management theorist of his time.” Joseph McCartin, Labor’s Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations 1912-1921 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 3, 50.
Wartime anthropometry emphasized the need not to confuse labor standardization with racial homogenization. Progressives claimed that for too long medical science and anthropology had erroneously focused on “what man had done and never what man was.” Military and industrial engineers were urged to fit various “laboring types” into occupations appropriate to their racial capabilities. Army anthropometry created a catalogue of racial taxonomies in which martial and labor fitness were linked not to character but to color and the body. Prevailing racialist logic understood ‘Negro fitness’ in stark terms: form dictated function. The Negro body was reconfigured as an index of his laboring abilities, or lack thereof. Ultimately, the war represented an opportunity to chart the nation’s “racial constitution and fitness” on a scale not seen since the Civil War.250

The Roots of American Military Anthropometry

Founded in February 1917, the National Research Council’s (NRC) Committee on Anthropology (COA) sought to reconcile these conflicting models of worker control. In its development and use of wartime racial anthropometry, the COA drew heavily on the past. American anthropometry originated in the Civil War; its leading text was Colonel Benjamin Gould’s seminal work, *Investigations of the Military and Anthropological Statistics of American Soldiers* (1869). An astronomer by training, Gould was hired by the U.S. Army Sanitary Commission to measure Union soldiers and create tables of “normal” body measurements. Gould dutifully measured arms, legs, feet, heads and trunks; he also gathered heights and weights and quantified lifting ability, lung capacity, pulse and vision. He then categorized his findings by country of origin, age, degree of education and, most importantly, race.251 Gould concluded that both “pure blacks” and “mulattos” possessed a smaller pulmonary capacity than whites and

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250 „Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee of Anthropologists at the NRC, Washington D.C. held November 15, 1918“, NRC Papers, Davenport Papers, APS
suffered disproportionately from flat feet. Perhaps most importantly from an evolutionary perspective, blacks’ longer arms—the distance from fingertip to kneecap being shorter than whites—ostensibly marked the Negro as much closer in development to the anthropoid than his white peer. Gould’s conclusions were echoed by Sanford Hunt, who that same year published “The Negro as Soldier” in the *Anthropological Review*. These racialist models of blacks’ physiological lack of fitness deepened doubts regarding the ability of the ex-slaves to fend for themselves following emancipation.

The literature of Civil War anthropometry exerted a profound influence on the contemporary discourse of race and human development. Charles Darwin cited Gould’s work in *The Descent of Man* (1871) to illustrate the ways in which physical differences both within and between races could be delineated. Frederick Hoffman’s infamous 1896 study on black extinction, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, also drew heavily on Gould’s work in outlining the innate differences between the races. Despite the best efforts of intellectuals such as W.E.B. DuBois and Franz Boas to develop antiracist forms of anthropometry, arguments for the black body as irrevocably degenerate ultimately carried the day. Black social scientists were strongly dissuaded from pursuing anthropological study, as it “had no practical benefit to the needs of the race.” According to historian John Haller, because of Civil War anthropometry, “no longer would attitudes of racial inferiority have to employ those prewar measurements and conclusions tainted by proslavery arguments.” From the war which

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252 Historian Margaret Humphreys disputes this assertion claiming that Gould himself did not draw this conclusion but merely documented the measurement. Humphreys, *Intensely Human*: 152.
liberated the American slave there developed a “body” of research which was used to support institutional racism well into the twentieth century.  

Army anthropometry experienced a renaissance with America’s imperial forays into the Caribbean and South East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century. Though many white, and some black, elites saw empire as a means to rejuvenate the race, there was still great anxiety regarding its dysgenic effects. Many ‘old-stock’ white elites worried about the external and internal dangers of empire on the republican body politic. Watching American regiments leave for Cuba in 1898, Madison Grant could not help but be impressed by “the size and blondness of the men in the ranks as contrasted with the complacent citizen, who from his safe stand on the gutter curb gave his applause to the fighting men and stayed behind to perpetuate his own brunet type.” During the Spanish American and Filipino American wars, and the subsequent American occupation of the Philippine archipelago, the U.S. military conducted enumerable studies on what effect, if any, these ‘exotic’ foreign environments had on the health of American troops. Troops bound for service abroad underwent basic physical examinations, along with “anatomical analysis of their respective constitutions,” to determine their racial fitness and endurance in tropical climates.

The emerging science of climatology, which linked racial evolution to climate, was a response by white elites to the socioeconomic, racial and gender anxieties which accompanied the rise of American empire. For many Americans the desire for empire coexisted with an

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255 In 1904 Boas contacted Booker T. Washington on behalf of one J.E. Aggrey, a “full blooded Negro” and a student at Livingstone College, Salisbury N.C. who wished to study anthropology at Columbia University. While Boas acknowledged that he was hesitant to “advise the young man to take up this work for fear that it would be difficult for him to find a place” following his studies, he was hopeful that Aggrey could find work in the Colonial services of a European African colony. Washington however confirmed Boas initial doubts, arguing that Aggrey’s proposed course of study would “be of little value to him.” Boas to Washington, Nov, 30, 1904, Washington to Boas, Dec, 9, 1904, Boas Papers, Correspondence, APS; John Haller, Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority 1859-1900 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971): 34.

abiding fear of these new colonial spaces. Imperial labor could be both invigorating and debilitating. Progressives often turned to corporal metaphors to express this ambivalence, whether counseling themselves to “take up the white man’s burden”, or reminding themselves to beware of the debilitating effects of the tropics, or “the white man’s graveyard.” In the case of the Philippines, army medical officials estimated that whites required approximately two years to become acclimated to the archipelago's climate. Officials found that a “moral life, with plenty of hard work” was found “to counteract in most cases the so-called demoralizing effects of the Philippine climate.” However, doubts still lingered concerning whether the tropics were the proper place for a white man.257

For a time white elites believed that empire might be a balm to the proverbial Negro problem. In 1900, Nathaniel Shaler, a geographer and the dean of Harvard’s Lawrence Scientific School, proposed that “troops required for Federal Service in tropical lands might well be recruited from the abler Negroes” whom “as a result of their tropical constitution would endure the tropical climates better than whites.” In 1901, Alabama senator John Tyler Morgan proposed the formation of black colonies in the islands, reasoning that African Americans were best equipped to compete with the indolent natives. Like most black repatriation schemes of the past, Taylor’s plans came to nothing. After extended duty in Southeast Asia, whatever immunity black troops possessed was seemingly compromised by their lack of “moral stamina,” as evidenced by their tendency to fraternize with “native women.” Anthropometric studies of black troops delineated the deleterious effects of these “social diseases,” or lesions and inflammations, on

257 Despite its small size the pre World War One American army was one of the few national institutions which had the resources, sample size and need to conduct systematic anthropometric and medical assessments of American bodies. Members of the U.S. army medical corps were explicit in linking their studies of soldiers health in the Caribbean and the Philippines to a broader discourse of race, work and place. Warwick Anderson, Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race and Hygiene in the Philippines (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006):130-132. William Washburn, ‘The Relation Between Climate and Health with special reference to American Occupation of the Philippine Islands, American Journal of the Medical Sciences, Lea Brothers,1905: 515.
black bodies. Within a few years, blacks had gone from being regarded as acclimated “children of the tropics” to representatives of the vast native reservoir of disease.\textsuperscript{258} Contrary to the expectations of many, both white and black, empire did not prove to be the Negro's salvation.

At the turn of the twentieth century, throughout the west, the military body was increasingly acclaimed in civilian life. Military definitions of fitness were widely adopted in public life as civilians regularly compared the “A1” or “1st class” body with the “C3” or “3rd class” body. On both sides of the Atlantic it was widely acknowledged that the state and employers had to accept some responsibility for the male physique. With the outbreak of war in Europe in the fall of 1914, conscription effectively linked the health of the worker-soldier to the body politic. The wartime extension of workplace safety legislation, along with public and military hygiene programs, revealed the corporatist urge to view national productivity as an organic whole in which the health of its constituent parts had to be maintained at all costs. Hoffman noted that while “every authority on anthropology on both sides of the Atlantic conceded the supreme importance of race as an underlying determining condition in the physical proportions or dimensions of workers and recruits,” there was a great deal of ambiguity regarding “race” in European anthropometry.\textsuperscript{259}

Evaluating the 1914-1915 rejection statistics of European armies, Hoffman concluded that, “the term race is not one which permits of precise definition, for entirely pure races are certainly no longer met with in European countries.” In contrast to the racial models he and his peers wished to develop in America—linking race to distinct physical markers such as color, hair and the shape of the skull—European military anthropometry tended to privilege “intra-racial,”

\textsuperscript{258} N.S. Shaler, ‘The Future of the Negro in the Southern States’, \textit{Popular Science Monthly} 57 (June 1900): 150; Bender, \textit{American Abyss}: 88; Anderson, \textit{Colonial Pathologies}: 102-103.
\textsuperscript{259} Bourke, \textit{Dismembering the Male}: 175; Frederick L. Hoffman, \textit{Army Anthropometry and Medical Rejection Statistics},1916
rather than “interracial” difference. The Europeans believed an individual’s “race” roughly corresponded with their residency and or birthplace. A Prussian was simply someone who was born in Prussia. Hoffman found this methodology to be maddeningly imprecise from an American ethnological perspective. Instead, he argued for the necessity “of correlating the physical data to the place of birth.” Racial physiologies had to be conceived of as a product of both space and time. Hoffman drew on his training as an actuary to note that “the same definite relationship between disease predisposition and inherited ancestral traits has shown to be the case in the inheritance of physical proportions of the body.” He proposed that the U.S. Army abandon its increasing reliance on European models of racial classification, which in lieu of race only required examiners to list recruits color and nationality, in favor of methods more attune to recent advances in physical anthropology. 260

World War One spurred what one observer labeled “an increased interest in physical measurements and the means of improving them when they are below par” throughout transatlantic reform circles. Racial anthropometry could also work to mitigate the war’s potentially dysgenic effects. War “impoverished the breed” as the strongest were killed at the front leaving behind the unfit to breed. 261 Dr. T.J. Downing, writing in the NY Medical Journal, warned that the danger of postwar racial degeneracy lay in “the possibility that through religion and commerce, the idealism of universal democracy, worldwide socialism and the practical annihilation of distance, the long headed races of Western Europe and America may invite or permit a migration of the mixed or broad head skull types which would be followed by centuries of retrogression.” In delineating the stigmata of degeneracy in various racial types,

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260 Hoffman, Army Anthropometry: 49; Bender, American Abyss: 66-67.
anthropometry segregated unfit bodies from the fit body politic. For Hoffman, an “accounting of national health” through a process like conscription was needed to answer vital questions regarding “national and racial vitality, physical progress or deterioration at a time of great unrest.”

“Taking the Measure of the Nation’s Racial Constitution”: Anthropometry and the Draft

Congress formally declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. In May of that year, conscription was instituted with the passage of the Selective Service Act. Conscription became a litmus test for progressive principles, and the utility and limits of state coercion as an agent of social change. Over the course of the war, America transformed its small peacetime volunteer army of 126,000 men into a fighting force of approximately 4 million, 350,000 of whom were black. For the philosopher John Dewey, the draconian irony of the state effectively “press-ganging” men into the armed services to “make the world safe for democracy” was a perversion of American ideals of social justice. The social critic Randolph Bourne argued that the war sounded the death knell for progressive politics and threatened to undo decades of reformers’ work for social justice.

The official impulse to couch conscription in the rhetoric of a voluntary “selective service” revealed the need to reconcile civil liberty and national efficiency in a modern and multiracial democracy. General Enoch Crowder, director of the Selective Service, stated that “conscription in America was not the drafting of the unwilling....the citizens themselves had willingly come forward and pledged their service.” President Woodrow Wilson described the

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263 David Kennedy, Over Here: 144-154.
264 Bourne’s impassioned indictment of the wartime state, The State was written in 1918 and remained unfinished at the time of his death in December 1918. See Casey Blake, Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank and Lewis Mumford (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1990)
process not as a draft per se, but as a “selection from a nation which has volunteered in mass.” Despite fears that June 5 1917, registration day, would be met with violence, or at the very least indifference, the day progressed largely without incident. At the end of the day 9,600,000 men—including 700,000 African American men—had been registered for military service.265

The African American intelligentsia reacted to the draft with ambivalence. Some black leaders, such as W.E.B. DuBois, hoped that military service would confer full citizenship on blacks. DuBois explained his reasoning in a July 1918 editorial in The Crisis, entitled “Close Ranks.” DuBois wrote, “let us while the war lasts...close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy.” In contrast, radicals such as A. Philip Randolph and Hubert Harrison argued that black support for the war, and conscription in particular, was a “surrender of life, liberty, and manhood.” By the end of the war, draft boards had registered 24,234,000 men “acceptable for military service,” with blacks comprising 2, 290, 527, or 9.63 percent, of the total registration. A significant minority of men, both black and white, remained immune to the era’s aggressive hyper-patriotism. Roughly one in ten of all those eligible for registration, both black and white, or approximately 30 percent of those selected by the draft boards, refused to present themselves for formal induction into the army. Local racial politics, high levels of illiteracy and the still overwhelmingly rural character of the masses of black recruits made it hard to determine exact numbers for the selective service.266 However, the pervading historical consensus, in addition to available statistics, maintains that the majority of African American men complied with wartime conscription.

265 Those responsible for raising a new national army, such as Secretary of War Newton Baker and Provost Marshal General Enoch Crowder, head of the Selective Service- were keen students of the Civil War and were well aware of the fact that the draft had only yielded 6% of the Union manpower and resulted in widespread civil unrest such as the bloody 1863 draft riots in NYC. Kennedy, Over Here: 68 ; Nell Irvin Painter, Standing at Armageddon: The United States 1877-1919 (NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008): 331.

266 Slotkin, Lost Battalions: 239; Shenk, Work or Fight: 4-10.
For members of the talented tenth—steeped in traditions of military service dating back to the revolution—the call to the colors was the ultimate affirmation of patriotic manhood.\textsuperscript{267} Of the 750,000 men in the Regular Army and the National Guard at the beginning of the war, approximately 20,000 were black. Nevertheless, theories of blacks’ lack of military prowess denied most African Americans the chance to prove their martial masculinity on the battlefield. The reasons were numerous: white southerners’ anxiety about armed blacks, a prevailing sense that the Negro was naturally “yellow” and notions of blacks as little more than “beasts of burden” unfit for the demands of modern mechanized warfare. Consequently, approximately 89\% of black troops were consigned to labor and supply battalions to provide logistical support to the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in France. One American war correspondent remarked, “one who sees the Negro stevedores work notes with what rapidity and cheerfulness they work and what a very important cog they are in the war machinery.” Black draftees who did see combat duty served in National Guard Units and regular army detachments units. The most famous black combat regiment was the 369th Harlem Hell Fighters, who served as an attachment of the French Fourth Army and became one of the most highly decorated allied units of the war.\textsuperscript{268}

Like most progressive era initiatives, the wartime draft was a curious mix of the pragmatic and the utopian. In pursuit of the latter, Ales Hrdlicka demanded that conscription “should yield nothing less than the initiation of a National Anthropometric Survey.” Indeed, “the existence of nations in the future will depend largely on the conservation of the physical


standards and soundness of their people.” In contrast President Wilson, who often framed the “war to end all wars” in idealistic terms, continually stressed the practical character of conscription. After signing the Selective Service Act into law on May 18, 1917, he announced, “this is not the time for any action not calculated to contribute to the immediate success of the war. The business now in hand is undramatic, practical and of scientific definiteness and precision.”

The wartime draft was a massive undertaking. Out of approximately 9.6 million males—ages 21-30 years old—who registered for the initial selective service draft in June 1917, some 2.5 million were examined at local draft boards. After examination at the local level, qualified men were dispersed to one of the nation’s sixteen mobilization camps, where they underwent a second or possibly third battery of physical tests. These tests were administered by officers of the Medical Department of the Army under the supervision of the division or camp surgeon. The chief medical officer was responsible for selecting the examining staff, which was drawn in part from regimental surgeons and base hospital personal. Though local draft boards and camp physicians exercised some latitude in interpreting the examination standards—detailed in the selective service act of June 1917—they generally conformed to a common pattern. Regulations proscribed a minimum height of 61 inches, weight of 118 pounds and a chest circumference of 31 inches for recruits. Physical defects given as causes for rejection included those found in the skin, head, spine, ears, eyes, mouth, neck, chest, abdomen, anus, genitor-urinary organs (VD), hands and the lower extremities.

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269 Hrdlicka to Hale, Feb, 4, 1918, NRC Collection, APS; Kennedy, Over Here: 149.
271 Although the selective service toyed with the idea of expanding the draft age from 31 to 40 years of age, and began to expand the number of defects which could disqualify one from military service -they were less willing to compromise on height, weight, and chest circumference standards. If anything these standards were raised. Hoffman recounts the experience of one 31 year old recruit from Brooklyn NY- a
Modern war required the development of a new form of military ergonomics. America’s polyglot army provided ample opportunity to develop an intricate schedule of racial typologies. Military officials agreed that men of “smaller races” (under 60 inches) were unable to carry the required equipment whereas men over 78 inches, “drawn primarily from the Nordic type,” were more apt to suffer from circulatory diseases. Body size also related to the standard army food ration. Troops in a camp containing many “small southern Italians and Jews” required less calories than one composed mainly of “hardy Scandinavians.” One AEF officer concluded that the fighting ability of American troops was in direct proportion to the percentage of “old-stock Americans” in various units, claiming, “get a draft outfit filled with men swept up from the east side (of New York) and it is just about as unsafe as anything in the army.”272 For many observers, martial fitness was a key indicator of racial fitness.

American military officials believed that efficient standardization in both the military and industrial sphere was dependent on racial differentiation. Informed by the work of French anthropologist L. Maneuvered, AEF officials tried to arrange men in each section according to the length of their leg, as opposed to their height, to facilitate more efficient marching techniques and to guard against the insidious scourge of fatigue. When gaps in the line needed to be filled they could be filled instantaneously by men of any height without requiring any redistribution or

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post graduate student at NYU and a former athletic director of playgrounds- who after being placed in Class 1A was informed by his local draft board, “that new army regulations forbade my induction into service because I was only 62 1/2 inches”-a half inch below the required 63 inches. The recruit bemoaned the fact that, “as there are plenty of sickly fellows ready to do clerical duty, why is it necessary to pick upon a healthy chap, fit for the real kind of war work?” Hoffman, Army Anthropometry; 114; ‘Standards of Physical Examination Governing the Entrance to All Branches of the Armies of the United States’ Issued through the Office of the Provost Marshal General Form 75, G.P.O Washington 1918: 4

272 The Medical Department of the U.S. Army in the World War Volume XV Statistics Part One-Army Anthropology under the direction of M.W. Ireland, C. Davenport and A. Love-Washington D.C.: GPO 1921: Commenting on the effectiveness of various ethnic types the unnamed officer remarked that “a fighting Italian is as rare as a dodo bird in spite of all the newspaper bull to the contrary.” “The Fighting Ability of Different Races”, Journal of Heredity, X 1919:
exchange of “men of various racial statures.” More gruesome modes of warfare privileged previously neglected aspects of a soldier’s physiology. Facial proportions were analyzed to fit men for new equipment, like gas masks, and respiratory fitness was measured to gauge specific groups’ susceptibility to gas. As a medic attached to the 92nd Division in western France, Henry Berry recalled one such order founded on these racialist models: “‘Negro soldiers will be used to handle the mustard gas cases because the Negro is less susceptible than the white.’ Why is the Negro less susceptible than the whites? No one can answer!” Officials argued otherwise, maintaining that a knowledge of “racial characteristics was necessary to decide on the classification when military organizations are being formed on racial lines, such as ‘Negro regiments’ or ‘Slavic legions’."

The war merged scientific management and its racial imperatives with military organization. The Committee on Anthropology (COA) built on Civil War and colonial anthropometry to develop usable racial schedules. Members remarked “that it seems as though we should, considering the progress of science, at least equal the achievements of Gould if not exceed them, and so the Committee has this purpose primarily in view.” Yet, there were limits to the utility of the Civil War-era data. Davenport remarked that if the racial constitution of the population remained constant—that is had there been no heavy immigration—then the question of comparison would have had more meaning, but in view of the tremendous immigration of the past years, the physical changes of the racial constitution of our stock have been so great as to mask entirely any slight alteration that may have occurred in the physique of the stock of fifty years ago, through either improvement or deterioration of environmental or economic conditions.

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273 Extract from letter of Professor L. Manouvrier, Laboratoire d’Anthropologie, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris, Dec. 25, 1917 to Dr. A. Hrdlicka enclosed in Hrdlicka to Holmes, March, 12, 1918, NRC Collection, APS
274 Berry Memoir, ‘A Day in the Army at Tuskegee Institute’- Berry Family Collection, Schomburg Centre, NYPL Library; Davenport, Army Anthropology: 34.
275 ‘Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee of Anthropologists at the NRC, Washington D.C. held November 15, 1918’, NRC Correspondence, Davenport Papers, APS
Determining whether the Negro could, or should, fight, was predicated on defining just what constituted a “Negro” in physiological terms. Indeed, one of the committee’s stated goals was “to assist division surgeons with basic racial problems such as: is this person to be classified as a white or a Negro?”

As early as fall 1917, the COA feared that army recruiting officials remained “indifferent to the racial aspects” of their work. In November 1917, Hoffman wrote to the Army Surgeon General and the Chief of Staff, urgently recommending the “authorization of the scientific re-measurement of selected groups of men of the new national army.....for the purpose of securing trustworthy racial data strictly comparable with statistics secured during the Civil War indispensable to all investigations into national physical progress or deterioration.” In January 1918, Dr. George Hale, Chairman of the NRC, wrote to the Army Surgeon General, William Gorgas, reiterating the need for army racial anthropometry: “I regard this matter as of the utmost importance, both from the standpoint of pure anthropology and its part in American history.......for various reasons much time has been lost and I cannot here impress upon you too strongly the great desirability of prompt action.” In response, Hale tapped Dr. Charles Davenport, head of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York to oversee this work.

A scion of a respectable New England family, Charles Davenport was a shy yet intensely ambitious individual. As a member of a new “anti-speculative generation of biologists,” he was a

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276 Davenport, *Army Anthropology* 35; In one instance the S.G.O subsection of anthropology (established in July 1918 under Davenport’s supervision ) was called upon to intervene in a case of disputed classification of a recruit who claimed not to have colored blood. Unfortunately the archival record does not reveal the outcome of this dispute. What is significant is the way in which some officials believed that anthropometric evaluation of said recruit could provide a reliable index of his racial typology. This was further evidence of anthropometry’s role in linking race and color not to traits and tendencies but to the body. Davenport to the Surgeon General of the Army, July 31 1922, Davenport to Grant, Jan, 12, 1918, Davenport Papers, APS

277 Hoffman to Dr. William Mayo, Dr. Herman Biggs, Nov, 22, 1917, U.S. Army Anthropometric Work 1919-1920, Hoffman Papers, APS.
pioneer in importing the European science of biometry—the statistical analysis and quantification of evolution—to America in the early twentieth century. In 1904, Davenport was able to persuade the wealthy Carnegie Institute of Washington, with its ten million dollar endowment, to fund the establishment of a station for the Experimental Study of Evolution at Cold Springs, New York. Six years later, thanks to the largesse of the Harriman railroad fortune, he established the ERO at Cold Springs, cementing his position as America’s premier eugenicist.278

Charles Davenport saw the war as an exercise in racial fratricide which endangered the ultimate survival of the white race(s). He believed that a conflagration of this scale could only be understood through an analysis of the participating racial types and those types which could potentially emerge from its bloody crucible. In the spring of 1918, Davenport was given the rank of Major in the Sanitary Corps to “take the measure of the nation’s racial constitution” as head of a new subsection of anthropology in the Office of the Army Surgeon General. Davenport, along with his collaborator Albert Love, would go on to produce three seminal works of wartime anthropometry: Physical Examination of the First Million Draft Recruits: Methods and Results (1919), Defects Found in Drafted Men (1919), and Army Anthropology (1921).279

Americans, much like Europeans three years prior, were horrified at the seemingly “enfeebled state of the nation’s manhood” revealed by wartime evaluations. Of this first draft, 1,422,637 or 58% were rejected outright by local boards as ineligible for military service. To add to the confusion, the Selective Service provided no gradations in assigning rejections; men were classified simply as fit or unfit for military service. Until the winter of 1917, men had no recourse to contest the evaluations of the local board. For some members of the COA, these high

279 Ibid.
rejection rates were due in part to a flawed understanding of the “racial antecedents of recruits.” Inattention to racial traits had seemingly led to thousands of men being mistakenly rejected or accepted for military service.\textsuperscript{280} Thousands of black recruits had been rejected for physical traits such as flat feet, which, though “inherent in the Negro had no bearing on his military efficiency.” In contrast, thousands more black men had been accepted despite suffering from the apparently “hidden wounds of colored diseases,” such as TB and VD. Military officials saw these pathologies “as endemic to the colored race prior to enlistment” and “readily detectable by the trained medical professional or racial anthropologist.”\textsuperscript{281}

COA officials blamed these errors on the alleged amateurism of the local draft boards. Characteristic of many progressive-era debates, this one involved conflicting claims over ‘expertise.’ According to the COA, the scientific objectivity of the local boards had been compromised by patronage, the scourge of every self-respecting progressive. Critics noted that draft boards were made up of three local residents of the county or city, of whom only one was a physician, often of dubious professional accreditations and beholden to the dictates of local politics. In the initial stages of the draft it fell to the physician, “in whom the governor feels that he can repose implicit confidence,” to carry out the physical examinations. With little to no understanding of the admittedly “imperfectly developed branch of knowledge that was physical anthropology,” examining officers of the line were ill-equipped to detect the apparent racial

\textsuperscript{280} For European ideas about the dysgenic conclusions gleaned from conscription see Bourke, \textit{Dismembering the Male Body}; Daniel Pick, \textit{Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder 1848-1918} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee of Anthropologists at the NRC, Washington D.C., November 15, 1918”, Davenport Papers, APS.

\textsuperscript{281} This fact was later confirmed by Davenport and Love in \textit{Physical Examination of the First Million Draft Recruits} (1919): “a broad, flat sole is common in laboring classes, particularly among Negroes, and is in no way disabling”. In the flat foot which \textit{does} render a man unfit for service, the arch is so far gone that the entire border rests upon the ground, with the inner ankle lowered and prominent and the foot apparently pushed forward.” Davenport, \textit{Army Anthropology}, 28; K. Walter Hickel, “Medicine, Bureaucracy, and Social Welfare” in Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds. \textit{The New Disability History}: 256.
significance of all but the most apparent conditions, such as “deformities, skin eruptions, pallor, inebriety, flat feet etc.” COA members argued that for recruits defined as “black,” these defective conditions had to be understood as endemic to, and not simply conditions of, an inferior racial constitution. By confusing physical deformities (flat feet) and infections with far more insidious forms of racial pathologies, draft board officials had erroneously failed to see the forest for the trees.

For the COA, short-term wartime imperatives of fitting the right man to the right job had to be measured against the long term necessities of race betterment and the danger of trying to fit square pegs into round holes. Frederick Hoffman argued that the physical requirements for military service depended

> upon the ascertainment and perfection of normal bodily averages which are at present wanting in scientific conclusiveness to a lamentable degree....therefore if the measurements being made are ignorant of these pathological facts it is self evident that one of the greatest opportunities for securing such information will be lost.

Acting on Hoffman’s advice, in the winter of 1917 the COA recommended two separate schedules: one for use in the local draft boards throughout the country and the other containing detailed anthropometric examinations for use at the cantonments. Schedule A—for use at Local Draft Boards—was a general schedule which included references to the registrants’ town, state, county and draft number. Examiners were instructed to note an individual’s color, “white, black, yellow and so on,” as opposed to his race. Given Davenport’s fascination with heredity, applicants were required to indicate the birthplace of both their parents and grandparents along with their weight, height and chest circumference.  

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282 Davenport and Love, *Physical Examination*: 22; For Hoffman confusing venereal diseases with physical deficiencies of the body was; “as serious an error as to confuse organic defects of the lungs with defects of lung capacity.” Hoffman, *Army Anthropology*: 13.

283 Hoffman, *Army Anthropology*: 15; Davenport to Grant, December, 31, 1917, Davenport Papers, APS
The second schedule for special examination at the cantonments called for a much more detailed physiological investigation. The first set of measurements referenced “the form of the head, its length and breadth,” all of which were deemed to be of “great anthropological importance.” The COA was especially keen to chart other racial traits like “the absence of body hair in certain Negro races, the Chinese etc...” and the variation between the races’ wing span. Both schedules provided space for any additional remarks relating to “special bodily peculiarities that the individual may show.” Though many of these secondary measurements echoed those of an earlier racial science—specifically the notorious practice of phrenology—they differed by explicitly linking variations to bodily dimensions and skin color, anticipating the trend towards color as the primary maker of racial divisions in the interwar years.\(^{284}\)

The impetus to measure the exact dimensions of Negro racial types was ultimately informed by the hard reality of Jim Crow. After the East St. Louis Race Riot of May 1917 and the Houston Riot the following August—in which the all black 24th infantry battalion responded to months of race baiting and violence by local whites by killing over a dozen white civilians—the War Department delayed the general mobilization of blacks until mid October 1917. Once blacks began to be called, southern draft boards habitually refused to grant exemptions for even the most debilitating physical ailments. One of the more egregious examples occurred in Fulton County, Georgia where the board discharged 44 percent of white registrants on physical grounds while exempting only 3 percent of black registrants. Nationwide, black draftees received proportionality fewer deferrals than whites. Despite constituting only 10% of the population,

\(^{284}\) Ibid. This trend which had been most forcefully argued by Franz Boas since the early pre-war years—see Franz Boas, The Mind of Primitive Mind (NY: Macmillan 1911), Vernon Williams Jr., ‘What is Race?: Franz Boas Reconsidered in Race, Nation, and Empire in American History, Editor James Campbell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007)
blacks made up approximately 13% of those serving, as southern draft board officials were keen to maintain their captive labor forces.\textsuperscript{285}

Historically barred from the skilled trades, blacks were hard pressed to claim deferments for “industrial necessity.” Moreover, many black men were quite simply too poor to claim the usual exemptions for husbands and fathers. Historian David Kennedy notes that in a cruel twist of irony, black men’s merge army pay and compulsory family allotment—up to fifty dollars a month to an enlisted man’s family—“would actually increase many a black family’s income, wiping out any claimed deferment on grounds of economic dependency.” To preserve the labor economy of Jim Crow, local officials also made a practice of inducting those blacks who owned their own farms and had their own families to support, while exempting young, single men who worked for large planters. Socio-medical models of black’s racial fitness, or lack thereof, utilized by local draft boards, reinforced blacks’ subordinate position in regional and national labor economies.\textsuperscript{286}

‘Weeding out the Unfit for War’: Eugenics and Military Anthropometry

In December 1917—in an effort to enhance the scientific and medical rigor of the selection process—the Selective Service allowed local boards to appoint additional examining physicians to assist in all future physical evaluations. Drawn from the Army Medical Department, these physicians would also help to combat the apparent rise in “malingering” amongst recruits. Military officials divided malingers into two groups: those who, “do so with full knowledge, intent and responsibility; and those whose members are hypochondriacs or constitutionally inferior individuals.” While the first group was relatively small it was the second


group, “the constitutionally inferior,” who posed the greatest threat. Akin to “soldiering” in industrial labor, malingering was seen as a major impediment to efficiency and a direct threat to managerial control. Reformers feared that the hyper regimented and social nature of military life, along with a basic fear of combat, greatly increased the chance for “systematic malingering which like its industrial cousin, stemmed not from a man’s natural inclination to loaf but from one’s self interest in relation to that of other men.” Military officials were forced to walk a fine line between facilitating cooperation between disparate types of men while militating against any tendency on their collective part to restrict or withhold their labor at the front or behind the lines.287

The logic of Taylorism equated malingering or soldiering with dependency and a congenital lack of manliness. In a white supremacist labor economy in which the independent and dependent worker was delineated in starkly racial terms, charges of malingering were disproportionately leveled at colored recruits. As members of a so called “tropical race,” blacks were seen as genetically predisposed to indolence. This theory was often expressed in explicitly corporeal terms. Arthur Little, a white officer in the 15th New York colored regiment, recorded his reactions to the sight of his men bathing naked in a pond, claiming that it “caused a number of us to exclaim: ‘with Henry M. Stanley in Darkest Africa!’” Like most white officers assigned to black units, Little saw blacks as a people governed by unreasoning emotion and brute strength that, if left to their own devices would surely shirk their military duties and fall into an inevitable state of dissipation.288 Little saw his “colored charges” as only one step removed from the jungle.

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287 One surgeon remarked, “that in all of the cases in which defects were simulated or exaggerated, the patients were actually defective either in a lesser degree or in a different affection or both.” Office of the Surgeon General U.S. Army, ‘Malingering in U.S. Troops, Home Forces 1917’ The Military Surgeon Vol. XLII No. 3 March 1918; Taylor-The Principles of Scientific Management: 6-7.
288 ‘Standards of Physical Examination Governing the Entrance to All Branches of the Armies of the United States’ Issued through the Office of the Provost Marshal General, Form 75, G.P.O Washington 1918; Slotkin, Lost Battalions: 63.
The black body was foreign, exotic and, through its association with the primitive climes of Africa, indolence embodied.

Malingering was a socio-medical condition that was also seen as highly performative in nature. Yet, despite the highly subjective performance by the malinger to disguise his “condition,” be it “excessively self-assertive” or “overconfident” behavior, military officials felt that advances in physical anthropology meant that the practice could be detected through physiological symptoms such as “diluted pupils” or “rapid breathing” that were often “indicative of various racial traits.” Military officials believed that “there was something indefinable yet pathological in the bearing of the malinger which medical experience alone can detect.” Though examining personal were still advised to use some degree of “personal discretion” in evaluating suspected malingers, they increasingly relied on medical models of physical anthropology, which marked bodies as unambiguously fit or unfit. The “Negro type” and the “malingering type” were increasingly seen as the same: deviant bodies that had to be identified and weeded from the ranks to preserve military vigor and national vitality.289

Following the institution of the new medical advisory boards in the winter of 1917, all previously granted exemptions were repealed and subjected to further review. The state established 1,319 medical advisory boards to allow individuals to appeal the decision of their local draft boards. Selective Service regulations regarding physical examinations by local boards “prescribed standards of unconditional acceptance and rejection.” All cases found upon examination by a Local Board to fall “between these two standards shall be referred to the Medical Advisory Board.” The functions of the Medical Advisory Boards, outlined in Section 44 of the Selective Service Act, were to “examine registrants sent to them by Local Boards or State Adjutants General for examination and advise such Local Boards concerning the physical

condition of such registrants.” The power to determine whether an individual was either accepted or rejected for service remained with the local draft boards. Under these new guidelines all past, present and future draftees were required to fill out questionnaires concerning their industrial status and exemption eligibility.290

These new guidelines sought to establish clearly defined hierarchies of military efficiency. All registrants were reclassified into five classes, “in inverse order of their importance to the economic interests of the Nation.” These categories were implemented at both the local and regional level. Most men fell under Class I, defined as “unmarried and married men whose wife and children are not dependent on their earnings.” The Classes II through IV included men that were the sole support for their dependents, clerics and criminals. Class V consisted of those “totally and permanently physically and mentally unfit for military service.” Those defined as Class I—liable for immediate military service—were subsequently dispatched to one of sixteen national mobilization camps, where they could possibly undergo a second battery of tests to determine whether they were fit for general, limited or no form of military service. The impotence of the Medical Advisory Boards deepened with the growing expectation that no individuals “found by the local boards to be qualified for military service will be rejected upon their subsequent examination by any examining surgeons at the camps or cantonments.”291

Davenport received a civilian appointment in the War Department as an army anthropologist in May 1918 in response to repeated overtures from the COA that the revised procedures still remained indifferent to the “race question.” Two months later, he was appointed

Major in the Sanitary Corps. Finally, on July 23, 1918, a subsection of anthropology, under Davenport’s supervision, was authorized within the office of the Army surgeon general. Initially proposed as the section of “Anthropology and Eugenics,” this subcommittee received federal funding and drew most of its staff from the COA. Ales Hardwick, of the Smithsonian Institute, predicted that anthropometric “surveys of this kind will become as fixed and important as the census, and the data they gather will serve as an index of progress, stagnation or deterioration of and within the nation, and thus be of vital importance to agencies for eugenics and legislation.”

Many reformers were ambivalent about linking this proposed work with “eugenics”. As late as 1916, eugenicists had dismissed African Americans as a factor in industrial civilization. However, as Dan Bender argues, “the war accelerated the process of colored industrial advance” as southern black migrants began to replace whites throughout the industrial north. Madison Grant—the patrician racialist and author of the best selling lament for Nordic supremacy The Passing of the Great Race—vigorously campaigned for a stronger eugenic element in the committee’s work to better understand and combat the creeping “Negro factor” in national life. For Grant, an indifference to heredity was an indifference to history. Davenport informed Grant that the inclusion of the term eugenics “was to merely highlight the effect the section would have upon the next generation in charting the: marriage and birth rate, selective nature of the death rate in war and future matters of race and anthropology.” However, Davenport maintained that he “was perfectly ready to withdraw the word if the Surgeon General is not educated up to it.”

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292 Hrdlicka to Hale, Feb, 4, 1918, July 1918, NRC Collection, Davenport Papers, APS
293 Bender, American Abyss: 240.
294 Jonathan Sprio, Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant (Burlington: University of Vermont Press, 2009): 311; Davenport to Grant, Jan 12, 1918, Davenport Papers, Correspondence File, APS. The SGO could be forgiven their ignorance given Davenport’s more extreme and baffling statements such as his stubborn belief that a dominant gene for thalassophilia (love of the sea) predisposed its carriers to careers as naval captains. Jan Witkowski, John Inglis, ed.
The fear that eugenics would be misunderstood by the non-initiated—and tar any future attempts to link social policy to biology—also belied deeper anxieties of the committee regarding the mutability of racial physiologies during this highly volatile period of war and socioeconomic change.

Amongst white elites, growing fears of an international “rising tide of color” increased the need for accurate systems of racial profiling. Though keenly aware of the indispensability of “the Negro type” to the contemporary political economy, many observers were unsure if such a “type in its purest form” even existed. Just before the outbreak of war in Europe, Grant had warned Davenport about the dangers of airing these anxieties in public given the current political and cultural climate. Responding to Davenport’s musings on the “whiteness” of mulattos and “Negroes as the first men,” Grant remarked, “the inferior races are struggling so hard to assert their equality with the dominant races, that I think it a pity to give them any statements, which by misquotation could be twisted to their advantage. This is especially true of the Negroes, about whom so much sentimentalism has been wasted.”

For Grant, race betterment was a zero sum proposition. Anthropometry, with its ability to chart racial physiologies and quantify the respective utility of racial types, was a powerful tool for the maintenance of white supremacy, which could not be compromised by the controversial rhetoric of “eugenics.”

The establishment of a Subsection of Anthropology within the Army Surgeon General’s Office (the term “eugenics” having since been dropped) was an attempt to craft a distinctly American form of anthropometry sensitive to the nation’s racial and socioeconomic needs. This

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295 Grant to Davenport, July 6, 1914, Davenport Papers, Correspondence, APS
296 While eugenics had already started to sustain criticism within the scientific community as early as the 1910’s, thanks to the work of Boas and his students at Columbia, the public or popular incarnation of eugenics flourished during the 1920’s and 30’s. For an insightful analysis of the lag between scientific and popular understandings of Eugenics see Susan Curell and Catherine Codgell eds., *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and Mass Culture in the 1930’s* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006)
new section was authorized “to secure the highest quality of the measurements of recruits to assist the War Department in all questions about racial dimensions and differences.” The army hoped to answer these questions, cut down on rejection rates and better prepare for the racial reconfiguration of the postwar workforce. During the summer of 1918, Davenport and his staff traveled to army camps across the nation, inspecting methods and equipments of physical examinations. After a visit to Camp Grant in Illinois, they drew up revised plans—based on Hoffman’s actuarial models, which linked disease to heredity through the physical proportions of the body—for the physical inspection service and finger printing at mobilization camps. However, owing to the cessation of mobilization in September 1918 and the end of the war a mere two months later, these projects were never completed. In concrete policy terms, the short-lived Subsection on Anthropology was a failure.

The few anthropological studies of drafted men undertaken by the anthropological subsection exist as little more than fragments in the historical record. Much to his disappointment, Davenport was relegated to studying the statistical analysis of the army’s preexisting physical examination records from the fall of 1918 until his discharge in January 1919. Davenport and his collaborator, Albert Love, would publish their findings in Physical Examination of the First Million Draft Recruits (1919). Reviewing the data prior to publication, they found the “elucidation of defects to be highly subjective” and “shockingly indifferent to racial factors.” Since the data covered two successive drafts of Class I men from September 1917 to May 1918, who were initially subjected to two different standards of physical examination, the results were predictably uneven. Nevertheless, the authors were able to make a few provisional conclusions regarding overall rejection rates: recruiting standards declined over time, rejection rates fluctuated both intra and inter-regionally, urban men were rejected at a slightly higher rate.

297 Davenport, Army Anthropology: 50.
than those from rural regions and sensory (eyesight) and physical (underweight) defects accounted for two-fifths (21% and 20% respectively) of all rejections followed by circulatory diseases (15.7%) while tuberculosis and venereal diseases accounted for a combined 15 per cent. However, Davenport and Love conceded that, much to their chagrin, their conclusions were bereft of any “real meaningful racial value.”

The failure of the NRC’s Committee on Anthropology and the Surgeon General’s Subsection on Anthropology forced their members to explore new avenues, even well before the committee’s demise. Three in particular require attention. In March 1918, following a conference on eugenics at the Shoreham Hotel, Davenport suggested to Madison Grant the creation of a society which would analyze the race problem from the specific vantage point of physical anthropology. This would be an organization that could rival “the culture ridden” American Anthropological Association, which had increasingly come under the influence of the Boasians. Grant suggested the name “Galton Society” which met with the approval of Davenport. Soon, Henry F. Osborn of the American Museum of National History—with whom Grant had co-founded the Bronx Zoo—was brought on board, and on April 16, 1918, a charter of the Galton Society was signed by its founding members. In conjunction with the Eugenics Record Office and the Museum of Natural History, the Galton Society would form part of a leading triumvirate of eugenic institutions based in and around New York City. Their influence would grow in the 1920’s and was reflected in the era’s “Nordic” vogue and the development of the “Caucasian” as

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298 Davenport and Love, Physical examination of the first million draft recruits: 17.
299 Grant to William Gregory, American Museum of Natural History, April, 18, 1918, American Eugenics Society Scrapbook, APS.
a form of unitary whiteness, both of which grew from theories that largely emanated from the nation’s leading metropolis.300

This new emerging discourse of whiteness was addressed at length in the pages of the new American Journal of Physical Anthropology, founded in early 1918. Ales Hrdlicka was instrumental in developing the journal and approached the task with an almost maniacal zeal. However, Hrdlicka’s COA peers, particularly Madison Grant, felt he was becoming indifferent to the wartime work of the committee. Grant believed that while the journal could be launched at any time, the window of opportunity provided by the draft was limited. Hrdlicka disagreed, and by the middle of 1918 he and Grant were no longer on speaking terms. Under the direction of Hrdlicka, the American Journal of Physical Anthropology blended Lamarckian and Mendelian theories of heredity. Hrdlicka proposed that environment “excited germ plasma” in various peoples, drawing out latent traits which individuals would invariably pass on to their offspring. Anthropologist Lee Baker argues that Hrdlicka and the journal were largely responsible “for making physical anthropology a well defined field within the discipline.” The rise of physical anthropology culminated in the establishment of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists in 1929.301

The third and final alternative, and the one most crucial to our investigation, was the creation of yet another NRC subcommittee, “Race in Relation to Disease Civilian Records,” (RRDCR) which was founded in May 1918. The RRDCR was designed as a medium for linking military investigations of racial anthropometry to the public and private spheres. Frederick Hoffman was appointed head of the section and pledged to put the company’s vast collection of vital racial statistics at the full disposal of the committee. Yet, much like the COA and the

300 Spiro, Defending the Master Race: 304; Grant to William Gregory, April, 18, 1918, APS; Kelves, In the Name of Eugenics: 75.
301 Spiro, Defending the Master Race: 314; Baker, From Savage to Negro: 93.
Surgeon General’s anthropological subsection, the RRDCR met with a mixture of bureaucratic indifference and intransigence from both the NRC and the federal government. The RRDCR had originally been conceived as a single entity (incorporating both military and civilian records) but objections from the Surgeon General’s Office regarding civilian access to military records required the creation of two distinct military and civilian subsections with only loosely defined information sharing rules.

‘Measuring Race at the Eighth Wonder of the World’: Racial Anthropometry at Hog Island

By July the RRDCR was still little more than a figment of Hoffman’s imagination. Nevertheless, his confidence remained unbroken. In correspondence with the Chairmen of the NRC’s Division of Medicine, Hoffman outlined three possible investigations: a study of Hawaiian race pathology with special reference “to Orientals”; “Racial Aspects of Autopsy Investigation” at John Hopkins Hospital; and “Race in Relation to Physical Condition and Fitness for Employment at Hog Island, Pa.” The latter was intended to determine the physical variation of different racial groups which officials had so far failed to glean from military examinations. Hoffman went over the records of Dr. J.J. Reilly, chief surgeon of the American International Shipbuilding Corporation at Hog Island and found “the outlook for new and practically useful data as distinctly encouraging.” He was especially impressed with Reilly’s use of “photographic identification” in measuring a worker’s stature, weight and vital capacity. Despite Reilly’s lack of anthropological training, Hoffman found him to be a man of “high scientific attainments with extended experience in the anthropometric measurements of men.” Moreover, Reilly was amenable to aligning his methods of measurement at Hog Island to any of the committee’s potential suggestions.\footnote{Hoffman to Pearce, July, 1, 1918, Hoffman Papers, Correspondence, APS.}
NRC officials tentatively agreed to fund the RRDCR’s proposed anthropometric research at Hog Island. The overriding question informing this work was the practical correlation between the physical variations of different racial types and their “physical efficiency, disease resistance, disease occurrence, physical, and pathological impairment.” From a military perspective, this investigation was intended to provide the War Department and the Office of the Surgeon General with “unquestionable evidence of physiological racial variations” which could help “materially diminish in given groups the ratio of rejections for erroneous physical causes.” NRC and military officials hoped that anthropometric analysis of this arsenal of democracy would also provide insight into ways to preserve the racial equilibrium they deemed so vital to American democracy.\(^{303}\)

Hoffman, in designing his methodology, was deeply influenced by the anthropometric models outlined by Charles Goring in his seminal study *The English Convict* (1913). Goring maintained that the criminal was a defective and not an atavistic physical type in the Lombrosian vein. For Goring, defective mental or physical traits were often concurrent, but not necessarily agents of degeneration. In short, though not all defectives were criminals, most criminals exhibited defective traits. Similarly, Hoffman believed that defective traits were generally inherited and could therefore be reliably traced through an analysis of the individual’s “racial antecedents.” Though Hoffman and his peers were often unclear as to the existence of an a priori ‘Negro type,’ they believed that certain physiological traits, taken together, could mark one as a Negro. This tension evinced a gradual shift from naturalist to pathological models of racial difference in American racial thought.\(^{304}\)

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\(^{303}\) Ibid.

\(^{304}\) Hoffman to Pearce, July, 15, 1918, Hoffman Papers, Correspondence, APS; Beinre, *Criminology*, *Fourth Edition*: 82.
NRC officials argued that investigations into the pathological basis of race were vital for avoiding errors in the military sphere and “the selection of recruits for work involving a wide range of physical aptitude, stress, strain and specific liabilities to disease.” Wartime national efficiency depended upon it. The massive Hog Island shipyard in Pennsylvania proved an ideal location for Hoffman, Davenport and their allies to put their models of racial evaluation into practice. Located southwest of Philadelphia along the Delaware River, the Hog Island shipyard was the largest in the world. Built in approximately nine months on reclaimed swampland, it was hailed by many as the “eighth wonder of the world.” Foreign visitors to Hog Island described it as “awe-inspiring,” and “thrilling” and were thoroughly impressed with the “wonderful organizing efficiency of what they have seen.” President Wilson stated, “Hog Island is simply wonderful.” The duality of war as work was succinctly expressed by a Lieut. C. Wiezbicki of France, who following a tour of the island remarked, “Hog Island is one of the two most important places in the world today. The other is the River Marne.”

The sheer numbers and diversity of men passing through the plant, comprising “dozens of different nationalities,” made it an ideal source for gathering anthropometric data on various racial labor types. Out of an estimated 300,000 men, black laborers would make up an estimated fifth of the island’s workforce by war’s end. COA officials noted that under the direction of the Industrial Relations Manager and the Consulting Sanitary Engineer, workplace hygiene and a general attention to working bodies “consisted one of the most important facets of life at Hog Island.” Dr Reilly commented that “we have not had an epidemic of any sort. Our record is better

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305 Hoffman to Davenport, August, 5, 1918, Davenport Papers, Correspondence, APS.
306 Records of the U.S. Shipping Board, Record Group 32, File 25, Folder 2, NARA, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia, PA. Despite these accolades the yard proved relatively ineffectual as an arsenal of democracy. The first ship produced at the site, the USS Quistconck was christened on August, 5, 1918 but subsequent delays in its final fitting pushed its launch date weeks beyond the armistice. In just over three years of operation (August 1917- Jan 1921) Hog Island turned out 122 ships equaling almost a million deadweight tons, yet failed to furnish a single ship for the war effort.; James Martin, The Saga of Hog’s Island (1977): 34-35.
than any of the army cantonments and the spirit of the workmen is fine.” The vitality of the workforce began with “the examination of all applicants for employment.” Reilly’s partner, Dr. Darlington remarked, “Efficiency means health. This country needs men too badly to waste them. Therefore we are doing things here that are not usually done—we have a medical as well as a surgical hospital and vocational school on site.” A reporter for the New York Times noted that two large hospitals for employees were already up and running as well as a vast program of social welfare activity on behalf of the labor force.307

At Hog Island, maintaining workers’ health began with the selection process. In early August, Hoffman forwarded to Davenport the first draft of the subcommittee's record card for use at Hog Island. Hoffman hoped that “in the course of time, these cards be found feasible for adoption on the part of many other industrial corporations or allied interests in connection with which employees or applicants for employment are physically examined.” Therefore, “only such measurements and questions have been included that serves the immediate and practical purpose of determining the physical status, strength, aptitude and health of the person examined.” The cards were divided into four data groups: Personal Record, Birth Place and Race, Physical Examination and Medical Examination. Aside from measuring an applicant’s weight, height and chest circumference, examiners were instructed to note any other “racial peculiarities” in lung capacity, feet and hair color. Unless otherwise noted, recruits were to be measured in the nude. Finally, to increase the degree of accuracy and render any statistical findings compatible with those of European investigators, measurements were to be made in metric terms.308

Two key attributes of the progressive character were fidelity to pragmatism and systematic methodologies. Accordingly, Hoffman advised that different individuals be charged

307 NY Times Feb, 17, 1918.
308 Hoffman to Davenport, Aug, 5, 1918, Davenport Papers, Correspondence, APS.
with securing different sets of anthropometric data in the interests of “systematic consistency.” Examiners were urged to exercise great care in noting examinees’ respective occupation and race. When filling in the occupational entry in Section A-Personal Record, examiners were instructed that “no general statements or assertions should be accepted. The mere term ‘laborer’ was deemed wholly inadequate.” Applicants were to state the specific nature of their work—i.e. whether they were “a laborer in connection with sewer work, street-cleaning or at a steel plant,” along with their respective standing in these vocations. In Section B, “extra care was necessary for the ascertainment of an applicant’s race.” Industrial aptitude was linked directly to racial fitness. Sketching out these racial schedules Hoffman asserted that “the large majority of applicants would be white, in the ordinary sense of the term.” (emphasis mine) 309 Recent shifts in political economy—including black migration and increasing labor standardization—occasioned a shift away from heterogeneous ideologies of whiteness to a more homogenous Caucasian archetype.

Establishing a unitary whiteness was an exercise in negation. Whiteness was defined not by what it was but by what it was not: i.e. blackness. The physiological and social boundaries of whiteness required constant policing of suspected “deviant” and “abnormal” bodies. Color and bodily shape were now the primary markers of this deviance. When examining “Negro applicants, examiners would have to be guided entirely by personal appearance.” The three “distinctions of ‘black,’ ‘mulatto’ and ‘near or almost white,’ should not lead to confusion.” For RRDCR officials, this was a tacit acknowledgment that the basis of blackness ultimately rested in its definitive non-whiteness. Simply put, black bodies were “colored” by a progressively declining absence of whiteness. Wartime demands meant that across the color line, intra-racial

309 Ibid.
differences were superseded by *interracial* models of difference.\textsuperscript{310} Empirical pretensions to the contrary, Hoffman’s record cards were designed as little more than a rubber stamp for a priori models of racial difference gleaned through subjective observation.

On the surface officials of the American International Shipbuilding Corporation were ostensibly committed to a productivist ethos with little regard for caste or color. Initially, African American workers were given access to company health care and received training in the highly skilled trades, such as welding and riveting. However, thanks to the work of the RRDCR, opportunities for blacks were soon limited. During their time at Hog Island, Hoffman and Riley were able to evaluate approximately 450 workers through their new record cards. While the exact number of blacks in this sample is unknown, subsequent events reveal that they must have comprised at least a portion of the total. A mere six weeks after the drafting of the initial set of record cards, W.R. Wright, president of the Colored Men’s Protective Association, brandishing fifteen signed affidavits, claimed that black workers who had graduated from the Hog Island School as riveters were instead assigned to jobs as general laborers because of their supposed “lack of aptitude.” International Shipbuilding officials countered that the promotion of skilled black laborers would only antagonize white workers and disrupt the supposed racial harmony. Management cited Hoffman’s evaluations to buttress long standing theories of black’s industrial incompatibility, specifically a lack of mechanical aptitude, in the sterile and more palatable rhetoric of scientific management. RRDCR members argued that biological, physiological and productive imperatives, not racism, necessitated relegating blacks to the bottom of Hog Island’s occupational hierarchy.\textsuperscript{311}

\textsuperscript{310} The card also provided space for notation for Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos. Hoffman suggested that it would be advisable to secure a list from the Bureau of Immigration of the, “fifty principal races likely to be met with in this country.” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{311} *NY Tribune*, September, 22, 1918: 9.
Notwithstanding the RRDCR’s “success” in relegating blacks to their appropriate occupational niches, no large scale evaluation of racial types at Hog Island was ever completed. Nor were Hoffman and his allies able to publish any of their preliminary findings. Following the war, appeals to the wartime “utility” of the work became moot. Inadequately funded from the beginning, and continually stonewalled by officials of both the American Shipbuilding Corporation and the NRC, the RRDCR was abruptly eliminated by the winter of 1918. Like other initiatives of the wartime state, the significance of the RRDCR was its ability to reconfigure socioeconomic ideologies in the long term. America’s brief wartime experience precluded any significant short term results. The RRDCR strengthened discursive and institutional links between the public and private sector “to establish a standard of physical efficiency for our soldiers and our adult male working population.” Anthropometry at Hog Island contributed to a broadening consensus that a working knowledge of racial anthropology was vital to postwar national efficiency.312

From its inception, the Committee on Anthropology and its successor agencies, the anthropological subsection and the RRDCR, prevailed upon leading labor organizations to note the racial consequences “of physical examinations in fitting applicants for employment.” Accordingly, Hoffman established a correspondence with representatives of the Western Pennsylvania Division of the National Safety Council and the National Industrial Conference Board regarding the broader implementation of these racial schedules. Mere weeks before the war’s end, the committee achieved something of a coup by enlisting the support of AFL president Samuel Gompers, who was currently serving as the chairman of the Committee on Labor at the Council of National Defense. Gompers was attuned to the discourse of industrial

312 Radogvich to Baker, “NYU School of Pedagogy” November, 26, 1918, Committee on Anthropology Collection, APS Papers; Minutes of the meeting of the COA November, 15 1918., Committee on Anthropology Collection, APS; Gerstle, American Crucible: 210.
anthropology—developed by the likes of Ely, Commons, and Ross—and had long advocated ethnographic inspection of workers. However such an examination was beyond the financial and institutional means of most corporations. A thorough medical examination of every prospective laborer, however desirable for medical, public health or race betterment purposes would place an enormous strain on management, examining physician(s) and the workforce.  

Even with the necessary resources, the methodology of industrial anthropometry remained a concern. Following the Civil War, any large scale investigations into racial physiologies were invariably stymied for fear that without a current and accurate standard of normative models, various racial types would be able to pass undetected into positions for which they were not “racially equipped.” For Gompers and his allies in labor and industry, the record card was seen as a way to efficiently rationalize working bodies in explicitly black and white terms. The cards would eliminate the need for time consuming medical examinations and prove more valuable for charting bodily development, nutritional conditions and occupational aptitudes than the medical literature currently used by industrial agencies, which was devoid of data relating specifically to black labor fitness. By the spring of 1919, the COA was inundated by inquires for racial record cards from corporations such as Standard Oil, Sears Roebuck and their former partners at Hog Island, the American Shipbuilding Corporation; all were seeking to reconcile racial form with function and avoid placing round pegs into square holes.

313 Hoffman to Mr. Matthew Well, Committee on Labor, Council of National Defense, September, 11, 1918, Davenport Papers, APS; Hoffman to Davenport, Sept. 4, 1918, Davenport Papers, Correspondence, APS.
314 Ibid.
315 Hoffman to Woll (Asst. to Gompers) Sept, 11, 1918.; Hoffman to Davenport, April 15, 1919, Davenport to Boas, May, 2, 1919, Davenport Papers, Correspondence, APS.
Race and Postwar Sartorial Ergonomics

Postwar efforts to merge racial form and function coalesced along sartorial lines. During demobilization, the standardizing imperatives of military/industrial labor and its racial dimensions were mediated through the ready-made clothing industry. In the winter of 1918, Harvard anthropologist Dr. E.F Hooton wrote to Secretary of war Newton Baker citing the “tremendous problem afforded by large numbers of the Negro race in this country” warning that “to neglect the investigative opportunity presented by demobilization would hamper the scientific study of race betterment for many years to come.” Hooton’s plans received a boost the following summer when the Secretary of War directed the Army’s Surgeon General Office to have “measurements of 100,000 men made for the purposes of uniform patterns.” With the final authorization of Col. A.J. Dougherty of the equipment branch of the general staff, a cadre of “expert anthropologists under the direction of Dr. Charles Davenport” was enlisted to perform this work throughout the various national camps. Given public demands for a quick return to “normalcy,” the anthropologists were cautioned to finish their work quickly “so as not interfere in any way with the process of demobilization.”

Fitting men for military uniforms or industrial clothing, “accruements vital to their respective productivity,” allowed Davenport and his peers to frame anthropometry as an applied science vital to the war effort and the future of race betterment. Anthropologists with the COA were tasked with collecting data to be used “in the construction of manikins of various sizes with the aim of affording better fitting uniforms for the army.” However, the COA’s primary intent

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316 Hooton to Baker, Harvard University Division of Anthropology, November, 22, 1918, Hooton Papers, APS; Surgeon General of the Army to Camp Surgeons, July 24, 1919, Collection, APS Material; Davenport, Army Anthropology: 56.
317 In his recent biography of Madison Grant, Jonathan P. Spiro claims that this request by the SGO to secure measurements for better fitting uniforms was in fact a ruse. Spiro argues that it was never the intention to use the data to design mannequins for better fitting uniforms. Instead this was merely a pretext so as not, “to unduly alarm any uncooperative radicals who might object to being measured for
was to ascertain the diversity of racial types, since “the tariffs of sizes to be supplied to any
distribution zone for a draft army depended on the racial constitution of the population living in
that zone.” Prevailing wisdom dictated that effective military standardization required racial
 specification. Regarding the formation of the two all-black combat divisions (the 92nd and the
93rd), officials claimed, “surely the question of whether a given person had Negro blood must
often have arisen and mistakes have been made.” These suspected incidents of “passing” were
believed to exert potentially disastrous effects on the biological composition and integrity of a
unit, leading to its general inefficiency. Anthropology was needed to expedite the practice of
racial classification and military efficiency. Through its sartorial manufacture of bodily types, the
ready-made clothing industry was the ideal medium to facilitate this process. 318

For the COA, the window for success was small. A mere month after the Army Surgeon
General placed its order; Davenport tapped Ales Hrdlicka, now the curator of the division of
anthropology at the National Museum in Washington D.C., to train anthropologists for work in
the demobilization camps. Under the direction of the camp surgeon, anthropologists were
expected to measure approximately up to 90 men an hour per eight hour day. Army authorities
noted that given the “limited allotments for the anthropologists assigned personal” and the basic
cost of maintaining men in the service, “haste was essential.” Examinees were to be measured in
the nude using apparatuses such as calipers, measuring tapes, and metal scales. There were
twenty primary metric measurements ranging from standards such as “standing and sitting
height,” “weight” and “circumference of chest” to the more obscure notations of “height of
pubis” and “height of sternal notch.” Final measurements were shipped to the Medical Record

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318 Ibid: 47.
Section of the Surgeon General’s Office for transfer to Hollerith punch cards using a prearranged code for bodily measurements.  

Identification cards based on those previously developed at Hog Island linked race to color and physique to defects. Officials were advised to use their “own discretion to judge the fraction of Negro blood by estimate of skin color.” Sensory subjectivity trumped objective empirical analysis. Accordingly, a “mulatto” was identified by their “clear brown” or “cafe au lait” complexion. If the skin color was darker than clear brown, one was to mark three quarter black; if light brownish yellow or lighter (“yet clearly of African Descent,” but presumably marked by other physiological markers such as hair or eye color) the examinee was defined as one quarter black. Conversely, other veterans of color were given unprecedented opportunities to racially self-identify. In the case of a “probable” or “suspected” individual of Indian, Chinese or Japanese descent, officials were simply advised to ask: “of what race?” If this line of questioning proved insufficient, examiners were provided space to note any “other noteworthy racial traits” that could provide clues to the individual’s “precise” racial identity.

COA anthropologists found that their sample size of 100,000 men—of whom only 6,445 or a mere 0.6% of the total were “colored”—was too limited to glean any meaningful conclusions about recruits’ labor racial fitness. Consequently, the demobilization material was combined with prior wartime evaluations of the first one million recruits and published as Army Anthropology (1921) by the Army Medical Department. This study, authored by Charles Davenport and Albert Love, detailed the sizes and proportions of the American male population from 21-30 years with “reference to health and development, to geographical distribution and
environment, and to race and color.” With a larger sample size, the authors were able to make some definitive conclusions regarding racial physiology. The general comparative picture of white troops versus black troops revealed the latter as having longer appendages, shorter trunks, broader shoulders, narrower pelvis’, and greater girth of neck and length of thigh and calf than their white peers. While blacks seemed more powerfully developed from the pelvis down, whites were more powerfully developed in the chest.\footnote{\textit{ibid}: 34, 40.}

Measuring racial types also involved a consideration of their changeability. Davenport and Love mused as to what role, if any, environment or acquired characteristics play in the development of racial types. They asked themselves, could function alter form? The primary aim of \textit{Army Anthropology} was to determine the effect of the military experience on racial physiologies. The authors concluded that it was “important to know the physical characteristics and proportions of accepted and demobilized men, as physical proportions are intimately related to mental development, diseases and nutritional requirements.” Therefore, all measured men were required to have a minimum four months of military service. When it came to blacks, these evaluations could aid in charting “the changes which have occurred in the Negro due to various conditions and the persistent qualities which occurred in the distribution of the race during its recent northward migration.” Officials were advised that “in three primary southern demobilization zones, respectively 35\%, 30\% and 25\% of the men measured were to be of African descent.” Measurements were then to be matched to the available census data.\footnote{Davenport to the Surgeon General of the Army, July 31 1922; From the Adjutant General of the Army to the Surgeon General, June, 25,1919 Davenport Papers, Correspondence, APS.} This process effectively provided reformers with the outlines of a physiological map of black proletarianization.
Postwar data confirmed the social effects of military service on racial types. In contrast to the available wartime data, measurements taken during demobilization appeared to reveal that all recruits had undergone slight physical transformations. From enlistment to demobilization, the mean stature of all enlisted men, both white and black, had increased from 67.49 to 67.72 inches. Blacks stood at 67.70 inches, compared to 67.71 inches for whites, while the average weight of all military personal increased by approximately three pounds, to 144.50 pounds. The reasons for these changes were numerous: young men of all races had lied about their age at enlistment, had undergone slight growth spurts while in the service and height and weight requirements had been lowered in later drafts.

Yet, despite sharing a near identical height, blacks were five pounds heavier on average than their white counterparts. Davenport and Love also noted that “in the southern sections those containing many of colored men show relatively less obesity than those containing a small proposition of them.” Finally, while the chest girth of black troops was somewhat less than that of whites, the chest circumference of recruits had increased about one inch over the last twenty four months of military service, from 33.22 to 34.94 inches. The authors concluded that, thanks “to the fine physical conditions of army life,” the average recruit emerged from the war a changed man; he was a slightly taller, heavier and fitter version of his former self. For many recruits, especially those from urban areas, these fine physical conditions were due to little more than increased access to outdoor activity, exercise and better nutrition. 323

Postwar anthropometry yielded key insights into the shifting nature of racial types and revealed some remarkable evidence regarding racial fitness. The editors of the Journal of the American Medical Association cited Army Anthropology –along with an additional 549,099 men who were rejected by local boards as totally and permanently unfit for military service—to argue

that “the uninfected Negro was a constitutionally better physiological machine” than his white counterpart. This assessment ran counter to the theories of blacks’ mental inferiority recently gleaned from the infamous Army IQ tests, which had concluded that black recruits had an average mental age of ten years old. Yet, white enlisted men did not fare much better, ostensibly registering an average mental age of only thirteen years old. To the horror of white elites, America was revealed to be a nation of adolescent simpletons. Clearly, a variety of causes, including the cultural bias of the Army tests (for example, it quizzed rural and immigrant populaces on urban amenities and popular culture) and the poor education of many of those examined accounted for these shocking results. Historian Daniel Kelves notes that these ostensibly objective tests “further convinced eugenically minded Americans not only that mental deficiency was genetically determined but that so was intelligence.”

Wartime anthropometry told a different story. Physiologically, blacks and white shared a similar mortality rate for the majority of illnesses, though the black soldier “possessed more stable nerves, has better balance and metabolizes better” than his white counterpart. The skin of black soldiers—on the bodily surface, enfolds of the mouth and nasal passages—was found to be much more resistant to microorganisms than that of whites. Officials found that white skin actually seemed to “be a relatively degenerate skin in this respect.” Perhaps owing to their allegedly innate primitivism, blacks suffered from few of the diseases of “over-civilization,” such as neurasthenia and psychopathic disorders, which afflicted whites. However, blacks were found to be more susceptible to maladies such as venereal diseases, tuberculosis and smallpox. Despite high levels of poverty, African Americans were also less likely to suffer from nutritional disorders or alcoholism than were whites. In fact, alcoholism affected whites at nearly double the

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rate of blacks. The supposed physiological superiority of the black soldier was all the more impressive considering a Jim Crow selective service that often enlisted thoroughly sickly black recruits but caused no apparent diminution in the health of this superior Negro type.\textsuperscript{325}

\textbf{Conclusion}

The persistent attempts of the COA to measure racial types were constantly hindered by a sustained lack of institutional support, bureaucratic incompetence, committee infighting and the general indifference of civilian and military officials skeptical of the utility of investigations into the nation’s racial constitution. Perhaps even more troubling for social scientists, the seemingly primitive and ossified figure of the Negro had displayed a surprising capacity to work his way to a state of civilized fitness, as revealed in the experience of Henry Berry. White elites found the wartime emergence of the Negro as a “superior physiological machine” troubling on many levels, not only because it refuted notions of black inferiority, but also because it challenged the stability and utility of black and white racial identities.\textsuperscript{326}

In the face of blacks’ apparent physiological superiority, social scientists were forced to rethink their fundamental understandings of racial typologies. Davenport maintained that “we started this draft in ignorance, all our errors were due to the fact that we had a heterogeneous mass of data instead of a homogenous distribution of types.”\textsuperscript{327} However, Davenport remained optimistic about how the tools of wartime anthropometry could be used to maintain, or reestablish, racial labor hierarchies in the postwar era. In a lecture to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, entitled “The Measurement of Man,” he noted:

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\textsuperscript{325} \textit{Literary Digest} for June, 14, 1919: 23
\textsuperscript{326} Ibid; See Guterl, \textit{The Color of Race}; Jacobson, \textit{Whiteness of Another Color}; Roediger, \textit{Working to Whiteness}.
\textsuperscript{327} “Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee of Anthropologists at the NRC, Washington D.C. held November 15, 1918”, NRC Papers, APS.
\end{flushright}
man is more than a physical body. A live person has a dynamic output, and it is one of the signs of progress in the scientific study of men that within the last fifteen years so great an extension of the measurement of human functioning has been undertaken... a new impulse given to such measurements by the work of Binet and Simon of the intellectual measuring scale and wartime anthropometry. It led to the remarkable intelligence testing and physical measurements in the late war and the attempt to express quantitatively the social and physical qualities amongst army recruits.

Davenport concluded with a warning: “although type is a natural refuge of the mind, the danger is that in our enthusiasm for selected types the great mass of people who do not fall into any type are overlooked.”

Reconstituting racial typologies as “a dynamic output” of physical and mental forces allowed social scientists to rationalize the apparent physiological superiority of the Negro. The carnage of war and the postwar ascendance of Fordism—increased standardization and segmentation of labor processes—effectively violated the productive integrity of the working body. Laboring bodies were reduced to little more than the sum of their parts. Though some of these parts were seen as interchangeable (see: the postwar prosthetics industry) others were thought to be firmly rooted in heredity. The Army IQ tests developed by Robert Yerkes and Henry Goddard, which labeled blacks as “moronic,” justified white presumptions that African Americans’ ostensible physiological superiority was invariably compromised by their feeble intellect. According to the cultural politics of the day, physical vigor was inevitably compromised by a lack of manly restraint and self-reflection. Men who were able to navigate this tension were marked as white, often in spite of a lack of a white physiognomy. However, the

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328. “The Measurement of Men” Lecture, Charles Davenport, read before the Philadelphia meeting of the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science), Jan, 14, 1927, Davenport Papers, APS
mind-body tension within African Americans undermined their “dynamic productivity” and posited the savage body as a hostage to its savage mind.\textsuperscript{329}

Racial typologies persisted as key organizing principles of the postwar political economy. Anthropometry continued to be described as “the best quantitative expression of the form of the body.” For Charles Davenport, “wartime anthropometry was a handmaiden to genetical studies directed toward problems of inheritance of the human form in both the military and industrial sphere.” Concurrent with postwar assessments of wartime anthropometry was the practice of rehabilitation and the struggle to determine which individuals or groups required or warranted reconstruction. Ultimately, both anthropometry and rehabilitation sought to determine the value of laboring bodies, albeit in differing stages of bodily integrity. Theories of black physiological superiority gleaned from anthropometric inquiry did not go uncontested during the various stages of rehabilitation. Henri-Jacques Striker argues that the development of “type,” or the wish to “make one like everything else,” greatly influenced the policy and practice of postwar rehabilitation, throughout the western world. The tension that informed social scientific efforts to simultaneously define and rehabilitate a supposed “Negro type” within the confines of legalized and de-facto segregation marked a turning point in progressive imaginings of the African American worker. \textsuperscript{330}

\textsuperscript{329} Gould, \textit{The Mismeasure of Man}: 227; ‘Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee of Anthropologists at the NRC, Washington D.C. held November 15, 1918’, NRC Papers, APS.

Chapter Four

“To Make the Negro Anew?”: Race, Rehabilitation, and African American Veterans 1917-1924

“Conservation of our natural resources has been one of the most important developments of the twentieth century. We have reclaimed our arid lands; we have plowed our burned forests into fertile fields; we have taken our discarded metals from the scrap heap and remolded them to other uses. By a natural evolution, crystallized by the casualties of war we have come to the problem of salvaging our men.”

Callie Hull
The Vocational Summary (1920) 331

In August 1922, an African American veteran named Buster Sunter wrote to the Veterans Bureau to protest alleged mistreatment at his local veterans training centre. Sunter, who had been previously diagnosed with acute tuberculosis, wrote, “I want to let you know that I have not been treated right here, when I take this training I was suppost to have four years here but they have cut my time down to two years...they bully me and have me work like I aint sick so I want you to look into the matter for me for I am not able to work like that.”(sic) The experience of Private Sunter, with officials refusing to treat, or even acknowledge, his handicap, reveals the segregationist roots of U.S. veterans policy following World War One. Postwar models of disability were more than just medical discourses established by physicians. The models were also social constructs developed by legislators, administrators and veterans, all within the social relations of labor, family and the wider community. Rehabilitation officials noted that “as a result of our plans for the reclaiming of the war disabled, the country is reawakening to its responsibility toward the civilian disabled.” The cultural politics of remaking men touched various aspects of American life, including race, labor, gender, disability and citizenship.332

331 Callie Hull, ‘Salvage the Man’, The Vocational Summary, Spring, 1920.
332 Sunter to Crossland U.S. Veterans Bureau, Frankfort, Kentucky, Aug 7, 1922 Crossland Correspondence, Record Group 15, Entry 50, Box 2, General Correspondence File Folder, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington D.C.; Harry Mock, ‘Reclamation of the
Modern war brutalized bodies in both life and death, reducing its victims to what one observer termed “mere waste matter.” The Great War’s human cost was staggering: eight and a half million dead, twenty-million wounded and more than eight million permanently disabled. The U.S. lost 116,708 men, with an additional 210,000 classified as wounded or disabled. The disabled came in many guises: mentally ill (victims of “shell shock”), tubercular, syphilitic, blind, deaf and, of course, amputees. The mechanized murder of the trenches destroyed the ideals of Victorian heroic sacrifice and war as a rejuvenating manly force. For Lothrop Stoddard—author of the best selling work, The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy (1920)—the war was “a catastrophe” because its “racial losses were certainly as grave as the material loses.” Historians have noted that all soldiering bodies “were endowed with signs and declarations of age, generation, class, ethnicity and race.” Within these socially constructed frameworks, bodies lived, died, and were broken. Yet, as historian David Gerber reminds us, “if war is the extension of politics by other means, then only by making victims can war achieve its political aims.”

Efforts to salvage the “the human wastage of war” were invariably linked to political debates over the ideologies, identities and aesthetics of race and work in postwar America. The issue of rehabilitation ultimately rested on an assessment of the state’s obligation to its veterans. Either the state would secure the compulsory employment of tens of thousands of injured men, or

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it would consign them to the unpredictable marketplace and the pitying attitudes of their fellow citizens. Throughout the West the question of rehabilitation was “a theoretical, an economic, and finally a moral one, but its consequences for veterans were eminently practical.” Veterans groups argued that “if the state had the power to draft men, it also had the responsibility to prevent the war from ruining the lives of those it conscripted.” Loath to encourage an emasculating “culture of dependency,” federal officials pledged that “the government is resolved to do its best to restore him (veterans) to health, strength, and self-supporting activity.” However, many Americans cited the link between vocational rehabilitation and industrial conscription as proof of the creeping militarization of American life. John Dewey lamented this development, arguing that “despite the struggle for the elimination of Prussainization we are at the same time secretly admiring and envying it.”

This chapter examines how federal efforts to rehabilitate disabled African American veterans produced new forms of racial knowledge and racial labor control in postwar America. Though the war did not create the impetus for state surveillance and discipline of working bodies, it intensified that impetus and encouraged the proliferation of new regulatory institutions and practices. Chief amongst these was the Federal Board of Vocational Education (FBVE), which was charged with rehabilitating the citizen-soldier into the citizen-worker. FBVE policy linked scientific management and a rising eugenic mindset to develop a catalogue of racial taxonomies in which labor fitness was linked to color and the body. Through the stages of diagnosis, training, job placement, and hospitalization, officials struggled to determine whether

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they could, or even should, mend the broken black bodies so often understood as defective by definition. African American veterans saw their disabilities dismissed by federal officials as a “stroke of luck” and an attempt “to unjustly profit from their natural inferiority.” Black veterans rejected these medical models of inferiority in profoundly gendered terms, positing their right to rehabilitation as soldiers, citizens, workers and men.\textsuperscript{336}

This analysis claims the disabled black veteran’s body as a useful category of analysis for examining the era’s cultural politics of race and labor, the institutionalization of social scientific expertise at the federal level and the trend towards a biological interpretation of social policy. This trend would culminate in 1924, with the passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Restriction Act and the state of Virginia’s anti-miscegenation law, both of which were conceived with the support of the nation’s eugenicists. Historian Matt Price argues that the very term “rehabilitation,” often used interchangeably with “reeducation” and “reconstruction,” betrayed a “distinctly moral and social cast to a scientific discourse ostensibly concerned only with bodily reconstruction.” Price describes this as an exercise in which “many broken threads, representing physical, mental, and social factors, must be unraveled and rewoven to make a consistent pattern” of national health. FBVE officials believed that the remaking of men constituted nothing less than the remaking of the nation itself along stable white supremacist lines.\textsuperscript{337}

Rehabilitation was intimately tied not only to the nation’s debt to its veterans, but also to the nation’s long term social efficiency. The reformer Elizabeth Upham argued that “the wide prevalence of defects found through the physical examinations of the draft justifies a careful


consideration of physical and mental racial health with work when developing programs of reconstruction and the salvaging of human waste.” These medical models of racial disability were informed by what scholar Paul Longmore describes as “a theory which assumes that pathological physiological conditions are the primary obstacle to disabled people’s social integration.” So, too, was the Negro’s pathological inferiority seen as a barrier to his entry into mainstream American political economy. Moreover, white elites concluded that inferior races such as African Americans and American Indians not only desired, but required, social and occupational segregation.

Rehabilitation functioned as a key tool in regulating a postwar labor economy rocked by drastic demographic shifts; it was used as a mechanism to assign individuals according to exact social and occupational specifications. Rehabilitation added new members to the body politic, as thousands of foreign born servicemen were naturalized during their convalescence and vocational training at the nation’s various general hospitals. For some reformers, “no greater reconstruction has been accomplished in the hospitals than the making of American citizens.” Military service and rehabilitation were vital mediums for working class immigrants to reap the social and monetary rewards of white privilege. Working bodies previously seen as definitively foreign, defective and of little value were transformed, through rehabilitation, into efficient, valuable and definitively white Americans. For poor “old stock” whites, rehabilitation represented a possessive investment in whiteness as reparation for their tenuous socioeconomic status and as consolation for the destructive consequences of their wartime service.

Wartime migration introduced hundreds of thousands of southern blacks to the labor force of the industrial North. Between America’s entry into the war and the stock market crash of 1929, African Americans left the South at an average rate of 500 per day, or more than 15,000 per month. What had once been the nation’s most rural population was rapidly becoming its most urban.\(^\text{340}\) White elites were increasingly disturbed by the fact that the “Negro was fast becoming a factor in the nation’s industrial landscape.” For many whites, the solution to this problem was brutal extralegal violence; returning African American ex-servicemen were especially popular targets for these forms of racial vigilantism. In contrast, the more acceptable practices of vocational rehabilitation helped to acclimatize recent migrants, many of whom had gone directly from rural Georgia to western France, to the rigors and rhythms of modern industrial labor.\(^\text{341}\)

Despite facing de facto and de jure segregation at home, approximately 350,000 African-American men had fought to make the world safe for democracy, in addition to fighting “in the hopes of making Georgia safe for the Negro.” Monroe Work, editor of the *Negro Year Book* and a staunch conservative, summarized the South’s problems in relation to the process of reconstruction this way: “first the handling of demobilization in such a way to prevent racial friction or conflict; second the maintenance of those harmonious relations that have already established.” However, this optimism was laced with a profound anxiety. Perhaps most worrisome for white elites and their black allies was the new political and social self-awareness of returning black soldiers. The previously fixed and knowable Negro type of the progressive imagination was becoming increasingly unknowable to the purveyors of mainstream opinion, as

\(^\text{340}\) By 1930, half a million blacks had left the region of their birth. At mid-century, 96% of black northerners and 90% of black westerners lived in urban areas. Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (NY: Viking, 2010): 154

is made evident in the following, from The Survey: “all the men seem glad to be home again, and on the surface at least to accept their social inferiority as a matter of course. What goes on in their minds beneath that surface cheerfulness and docility no one seems to know exactly.”

Contemporary racial logic severely constrained combat opportunities for African Americans. Southern white fears over arming blacks, along with theories of the Negro’s innate cowardice, kept most African Americans from the front lines. Army officials believed that “the poorer class of backward Negro has not the mental or physical stamina or moral sturdiness to put him in the line against opposing German troops of high average education and training.” Consequently, the majority of African American recruits, over 90 percent, were relegated to segregated support battalions, laboring at the inglorious work of war. Many white officers saw the men under their command as little more than beasts of burden and were frequently instructed by their superiors to “work the hell out of the niggers.” Following the end of hostilities, tens of thousands of black soldiers were assigned the gruesome job of exhuming and reburying the American dead for re-internment in France or removal to the United States. African Americans’ physical absence from the battlefield led to their figurative absence from debates regarding the rights and benefits of rehabilitation. Refused treatment in many veterans’ hospitals and barred from joining powerful veterans organizations such as the American Legion, black veterans grudgingly turned to an increasingly intransigent federal government for help.

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“Salvaging Human Wastage for Industry:” The Roots of Vocational Rehabilitation

Beginning in 1915, throughout the various belligerent nations, a coalition of social, medical and scientific reformers founded a new science, “Rehabilitation.” This science was institutionalized through laboratories, training centers and camps designated to retrain maimed soldiers for postwar industry. Recent advances in medical and surgical care meant that more men could be “reclaimed” than in previous conflicts. Throughout the West, “aggressive normalization” by physical restoration and vocational education was seen as a balm to the “irrational, dysgenic consequences of modern warfare.”

Linking rehabilitation to prewar theories of conservation, officials such as Lieutenant Henry Mock of the Army Sanitary Corps cited “human conservation” as one of the “greatest byproducts of the war.” As early as 1909, Herbert Croly, in his seminal work The Promise of American Life, had argued for a national system of vocational education, “so that the laborer be placed, just as timber, stone and iron, in the places for which their natures fit them.” By the postwar era, the drive to save and conserve the best in nature coincided with a desire to conserve the best of humanity.

America’s entry into the war in the spring of 1917 forced officials to look abroad for workable models of reconstruction. Officials lamented that “no pioneer road was left for us to follow with respect to the physical reconstruction and vocational rehabilitation of our wounded.....it was left for us to merely select a plan and to modify it to our own needs.”

344 One of the first progressives to cite the racially dysgenic effects of war was David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University. See Starr’s seminal work on the subject, War and Waste published in 1913 and republished in 1914. Bender, American Abyss: 233-234; Gerber, Disability in History: 8.; W.M.Hussie, “How Forestry and Tree Culture Concern the Disabled Soldier” American Forestry 24 (December 1918): 725-26.

American rehabilitationists drew heavily on British, Canadian and even German models of reconstruction. They drew particular inspiration from methods developed north of the border by Canadian authorities. Due to its proximity, and the Dominion's prior experience with close to three years of war, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax became key stops on the “grand tour” of foreign institutions of physical reconstruction taken by American rehabilitationists. These foreign models of holistic rehabilitation blended physical with vocational reconstruction to facilitate the “training of the disabled man to again be a productive agent in spite of his handicap.” Major John Todd of the Canadian Pension Board envisioned rehabilitation as a communal practice “a matter of such wide extent that it can leave no phase of social organization untouched.”

This emphasis upon national “productivity” was part of a broader attempt to substitute independence for dependence and move veterans care from the realm of the sentimental to that of the scientific. One of the key mediators in this transatlantic discourse was Douglas McMurtrie, who, along with W.M. Russie, co-founded the Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men in New York City in 1917. McMurtrie was instrumental in presenting rehabilitation, the nation’s “duty to the war cripple,” as an act of wholesale social regeneration. He urged surgeons in the various frontline base hospitals “to free themselves from their tendency to treat the wounds and forget the function; to make a well man but not a working one; to take the anatomical rather than the physiological point of view.” McMurtrie believed that the “only compensation of real value for physical disability is rehabilitation for self support. Make a man capable again of earning his

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living and the chief burden of his handicap drops away.” FBVE member Dr. W.S. Bainbridge argued that “the rehabilitation of the soldier is a redemptive act for the nation—it demonstrates a nation’s moral fiber and authorizes that nation’s economic success.”

Vocational rehabilitation as federal policy began with the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in February 1917. The act called for federal support to “train people who have entered upon, or are preparing to enter upon, the work of the farm.” Administration of the act at the state level was facilitated through a Federal Board of Vocational Education (FBVE). The FBVE expanded on the agricultural focus of the Smith Hughes Act with a planned cooperation between the federal government and the states to promote vocational education in agriculture, home economics and industry. To secure appropriations for teaching and institutional support, states were required to accept the provisions of the act through their legislatures or their governors. States also had to designate or create a board of at least three members with the necessary power to cooperate with the FBVE at the local level.

Establishing provisions for the rehabilitation of disabled soldiers and sailors was originally only one of the FBVE’s duties but it soon grew to be the board’s primary function. In January 1918, a bill was presented to Congress recommending rehabilitation work be administrated by a commission of five persons representing the Office of the Surgeon General, War Department, Department of Labor, Bureau of War Risk Insurance (BWRI) and the FBVE. On June 27, 1918, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act was passed with a federal approbation of approximately $2,000,000. The act provided for “the vocational training, after their discharge

from the service, of persons disabled in the military or naval forces of the United States, and for their assistance in obtaining gainful employment.” Although the FBVE initially focused on restoring veterans’ disabled bodies, it soon extended to the conservation of “national energies” by providing services to civilian victims of industrial accidents. Elizabeth Upham linked the military and civilian sphere through the rhetoric of industrial ethnography: “if all men who have physical defects may be considered handicapped, the vast part of the working population is in some degree handicapped. The selection in the Army was based upon this principle. It was relatively simple, as the occupation of war demanded definite physical qualifications.”

Previously, veterans care had been characterized by inefficiency, waste and corruption. By the turn of the twentieth century over a million Americans were receiving pensions totaling $150,000,000 a year, constituting approximately 38% of the entire federal budget. By 1917, the federal government had spent $5,000,000,000 on military pensions since 1776, with the majority of that spent on Civil War pensions. Eager to avoid these excesses, President Woodrow Wilson moved quickly to facilitate the redirection of wartime agencies towards peace time practices of regulation and reform. To prevent the creation of a “dependent army of cripples,” the Vocational Rehabilitation Act stated that only “severely disabled” soldiers who qualified for compensation under the War Risk Insurance Act were entitled to retraining. Other veterans, regardless of their wounds or socioeconomic status, and though eligible for disability benefits, received no invitation to retrain for new careers. The policy of vocational rehabilitation was bluntly defined

349 The FBVE took up the administration of this work until it was subsumed by the Veterans Bureau in 1921. Evangeline Thurber, -Office of the Director of Research and Records Division-Preliminary Checklist of the General Administrative Files of the Rehabilitation Division, July 1944: 6; Elizabeth Upham “Selective Placement of the Disabled”, The Vocational Summary, June 1919 Vol. 2 No. 2: 35
by one official as “one of conservation, in the treatment and placing of disabled men back into industry, there is no room for the spectacular.”

FBVE models of rehabilitation vacillated between the pragmatic and the utopian. For many elites, vocational rehabilitation was a transformative process which would return the “lucky handicap” to the workforce as a more efficient and productive version of his former self. FBVE officials continually cast disability as regenerative, noting, “practically every man, no matter how handicapped he may be, can come back. In fact a handicap puts more fight into a man, makes him strive harder than ever before, and results quite often in his making good to a greater extent than if he had never been disabled.” Rehabilitation literature was filled with tales of disabled men who, through sheer willpower and pluck, overcame the most debilitating of injuries and escaped the stigma of deformed dependence. Officials cited the case of a double amputee who allegedly remarked, “‘watch me! I am going to make good with both feet.’ And he has. This is the spirit! Determination and grit—stick-to-itiveness—are the qualities which every disabled man must have or must acquire to crawl out or jump out of that hated class—The Disabled.” Initially the FBVE placed men in educational institutions rather than in training on the job, in part because of the depressed wage situation of the immediate postwar years, and in part to protect disabled veterans from the potentially enfeebling effects of a rapidly industrializing workplace.

By fall 1918, there was a consensus amongst officials that advances in medical technology and the social sciences made charity towards the disabled obsolete. Postwar veterans

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policy dispensed with notions of the disabled veteran as an object of pity. Only by rejecting these pitying characterizations and embracing “a sober program of reconstruction” could veterans achieve a manly self-sufficiency. FBVE Vice-Chairman James Munroe worried that veterans would become “feminized by too much coddling.” Munroe argued that “hero worship is popular; nurses and sweethearts are but human; thousands of well meaning women have little to do and a large capacity for sentimentalism.” Through the various stages, including diagnosis, compensation, training and hospitalization, FBVE officials sought to create “a gradual, unbroken reclamation (of the disabled) to a useful life whatever his handicap may be.” All that stood between the disabled veteran and manly self-sufficiency was the pitying and emasculating attitude of his loved ones and well meaning citizens. Wounded veterans must be made aware of the “naked grim reality” facing them after all the “well meaning sentiment and verbiage about heroism and gratitude and never forgetting faded away.”

The new breed of rehabilitationists was committed to expunging the culture of victimization from veterans’ policy. However, the relatively low educational and physical status of the average Doughboy, evinced in wartime intelligence and anthropometric testing, lowered the expectations of many FBVE officials. Debates raged over whether disabled veterans, or recruits generally, were victims of their heredity. Rehabilitationists’ use of IQ data had a particularly debilitating effect on African Americans who fared especially poorly on the infamous tests. Test results indicated that an appalling 89% of African American recruits, compared to 47% of whites, were classified as “morons,” with a mental age of seven to ten years.

Officials ignored social disparities between Southern and Northern blacks test scores—with the latter scoring consistently higher—as well as the disparity of educational rates between whites and blacks. While 25% of all draftees were classified as illiterate, the median number of years spent in education ranged from 6.9 for “native” whites and 4.7 for immigrants, to only 2.6 for Southern blacks. As one veteran quipped, many officials “take these soldiers who whipped the Germans to be mental and physical cripples.”

The praxis of rehabilitation linked race and gender through the discourse of national efficiency. As American causalities began to mount in the spring of 1918, reformers discerned, in the returning waves of crippled men and the rehabilitation they required, a chance to push women and blacks out of their “temporary” industrial jobs and back into the “ennobling protection of the home and the field.” Efforts to restore white male dominance in the labor market were based on the belief that because “the life of a nation springs from its motherhood,” women required protection from the debilitating environment of the shop-floor. Despite women’s increasing role in wartime industries—an increase of approximately 20% increase from 1910-1918—many employers were hesitant to retain them in the postwar era. Dr. Francis Patterson, chief of the Division of Industrial Hygiene for the Pennsylvania Department of Labor, claimed that “while it is undoubtedly true that women can and are replacing men in some positions, by reasons of their sex there are limitations upon the work they can do. It needs no words of mine to emphasize the importance of the conservation of the health of those who are to be the mothers of our future (read white) race.” George Lipsitz notes that “patriotism has often

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been constructed in the United States as a matter of gendered and racialized obligation to paternal protection of the white family.”

The mass migration of African Americans to the industrial north, in addition to women’s wartime entry into industry, necessitated a re-imagining of their respective fitness for modern industrial work. White elites in both the public and private sphere were generally forced to concede that African Americans’ wartime industrial labor had proven to be “quite as good as the foreign labor” which it replaced. To restore traditional gender and racial hierarchies in the industrial sector, FBVE officials could no longer simply cite the negative effects these environments had upon the “female and negro character;” instead, they had to rely on locating female and black workers’ deficiencies in their physiology. The weak postwar economy, increasing labor standardization and the socioeconomic demands of white patriarchy required merging form with function to delineate the limits of gender and racial labor fitness. Heredity, not environment, was seen as the source of women’s and racial minorities’ lack of labor fitness.

Rehabilitationists focused as much attention on conserving the physical output of bodies—the natural kinetic power crucial to economic success—as they did on efforts to restore battered male psyches through the promotion of patriarchal families and white racial privilege. “Manpower,” a gendered and racial vision of natural energies that linked masculinity to physical exertion, needed to be replenished at all costs. Historian Joanna Bourke illustrates the process by which, across Europe and North America, social scientists and the culture at large conflated the male body with maleness, explaining that “an incomplete version of the former could, without

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356 Hull, ‘Salvage the Man’: 88.
careful training and rehabilitation, destroy one’s sense of the latter.” Rather than casting disabled white veterans “upon the scrap heap,” reformers urged the state to “restore them to suitable skilled positions now temporarily occupied by women and colored workers” in order to preserve a racial and gendered equilibrium in the labor economy. Lieutenant Henry Mock argued that, given the apparent unsuitability of “Chinese, East Indians and Negroes” as sources of additional labor—a result of their inability “to readily assimilate to the melting pot”—the nation’s greatest source of labor lay “in making that which we have (i.e. white workers) doubly efficient.”

The Worth of Wounds: Defining Disability at the Bureau of War Risk Insurance (BWRI)

For FBVE officials, the diagnosis of disability coincided with its commodification. According to the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1918, “persons who had been disabled through their service in the military or naval forces of the United States—whether caused by injury, disease or aggregation of a previous medical condition—were afforded vocational training and assistance in obtaining gainful employment.” Individuals could not enter training until they had been awarded compensation by the Bureau of War Risk Insurance. The services and facilities of the Public Health Service (PHS) were used to provide examination, medical care, treatment and hospitalization for beneficiaries of the War Risk Insurance Act. Initially, the Rehabilitation Act was intended “to divorce compensation from patriotic sacrifice or physical or mental suffering and instead link it to the reimbursement of potential lost future income due to disability and the general disadvantages it caused the veteran in the labor market.” The logic of vocational rehabilitation produced a disabled identity that was simply an aggregate of social relations relative to specific industrial occupations and hierarchies.

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357 Bourke, Dismembering the Male: 171-179.
358 Henry E. Mock, ‘Reclamation of the Disabled from the Industrial Army,’ 8, 28; Lansing: 12.
359 Thurber: 6-7.
Given that few African American veterans suffered combat wounds, their road to vocational rehabilitation followed a different route than that of their white peers. For blacks, the initial diagnosis of disability did not occur during convalescence in domestic or overseas field hospitals but upon submission of their disability claims through the BWRI. In the five years following the end of the war, 930,000 veterans applied for disability benefits. Though applicants were required to indicate their race on their appraisal forms, the FBVE and its successors at the Veterans Bureau did not compile statistics on the filing and rejection of claims based on race. However, racial segregation was integral to the social networks within which disability was diagnosed. As one bureau official noted, “southern representatives who are of course always white, will not, as a matter of principle, forward us all the necessary evidence to complete the Negroes’ claim. As a rule, the fact that the claimant is a Negro in their eyes is sufficient evidence that he is not in need of disability assistance.” FBVE officials were disinclined to provide compensation to a people whose apparent worthlessness formed the basis of the American political economy.

In contrast to traditional military pensions or workmen’s compensation, the model developed by the BWRI was not calculated in relation to a veteran’s prewar or current occupation. Instead it measured the average reduction in earning capacity a veteran with a specific disability was likely to incur in any skilled, unskilled, manual or intellectual “civil occupation.” Since the reduction in earning capacity varied with the type and severity of the impairment, disability was expressed as a percentage, representing the deviation between the estimated production of an “average” (read white) working body and the residual capacity of a disabled veteran. To help in the calculation of this percentage for “specific injuries of a

permanent nature,” the BWRI developed a disability rating schedule with a comprehensive index of amputations, injuries, diseases and mental disorders. This schedule assigned percentages for each impairment based on its purported affect on the veteran’s ability to work. Through this process, the bodies of disabled veterans were reduced to little more than the sum of their parts.361

Veteran’s benefits were dispensed as inducements for the disabled to compensate for various physiological deficiencies and to help redirect their productive energies in unprecedented and newly profitable ways. For ex-servicemen afflicted with serious physical handicaps, reformers stressed the mental acuity needed to perform skilled industrial labor: “while from his neck down a man is worth about $1.50 a day; from his neck up, he may well be worth $100,000 a year.” In contrast, appeals to veterans suffering from mental disorders emphasized the need for the physical vigor and resistance to fatigue required in the modern factory system. Whereas Europeans tended to see the struggle between fatigue and energy in strictly physiological terms, Americans saw it as a tension between time and money, specifically the body’s latent labor power. One army official noted, “a man is crippled only to that extent to which he allows his physical handicap to put him down and out. If he ceases to be an economic factor in society—an earning, serving unit—he is a cripple.”362 In the context of postwar American capitalism, disability was both an identity and a commodity; a corporal index of labor capital, or the lack thereof.

361 While rates of compensation varied according to marital status and dependents, veterans accorded a 10 percent rating or more for a temporary disability were entitled to approximately $80-$120 a month. Those deemed to be suffering from total disability including blindness, multiple amputations, or who were “helpless and permanently bedridden” were assessed at a flat rate of $100 a month. Ibid: 240.
FBVE officials believed that their disability rating schedule democratized veteran entitlements by defining disability in relative terms—as a declension from a productive or “normal” body. These assessments were based upon what historian Douglas Bayton terms “the corporal idea of the normal,” which in the context of progressive era political culture was invariably colored white.\(^\text{363}\) Yet, both FBVE officials and African American veterans conceived of handicaps in relation to their respective social relationships and needs. In defining disability, both groups emphasized the structure of local labor markets, racial segregation and social norms ascribing to men their roles as workers, providers and citizens. For all veterans, disability touched on all of these institutions and relationships; disability did not simply denote the medical condition of an individual isolated from society or a purely legal entitlement to benefits. While African American veterans saw their injuries as a source of masculine entitlement, rehabilitationists saw them as proof of blacks’ irredeemable pathological inferiority.\(^\text{364}\)

The persistence of Victorian racial etiologies that linked racial degeneracy to deviant traits and tendencies, in addition to a rise in eugenic thinking, severely limited African American veterans’ ability to acquire compensation through the BWRI. Examining doctors claimed that the majority of black veterans were disproportionately afflicted with the “hidden wounds” of venereal disease and tuberculosis. Despite a lack of clinical evidence, these diseases were routinely referred to as “colored diseases.” Local officials—like the FBVE manager of District Five (comprising the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida and Tennessee)—were suspicious of black veterans’ claims, suggesting that “the majority of the disabilities of the southern Negro are traceable to TB and VD which in the majority of cases were judged to have existed in the race as

\(^{363}\) Douglas Boynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History”: 39.

\(^{364}\) Hickel: 239-245.
a whole before enlistment.” These medical fictions had profound consequences for African American veterans, undermining their disability claims and denying them the financial compensation needed to qualify for federal vocational rehabilitation programs.

African American veterans and their allies in the black press vociferously defended their right to rehabilitation. The Chicago Defender speculated that “out of this great world struggle may come industrial and civil freedom.....certainly the colored soldier who fights side by side with the white American will hardly be begrudged a fair chance when the victorious armies return.” Robert R. Moton, Booker T. Washington’s successor at Tuskegee, told returning black soldiers, “America is a great laboratory which God is using to show the world how men and women of different races can succeed together.” The Crisis urged that “industry be extended to the colored American and the same unlimited opportunities to serve in reconstruction as it did in war times when men of both races ‘went over the top’ often suffering the most grievous of wounds.” Some black veterans conflated their physical wounds with those inflicted by the “prejudices, insults and duplicity of his white American ally.” These dual factors had made the black soldier into a “super-soldier and superman” deserving of compensation and the nation’s respect.

Historians have argued that this new boldness in the black community stemmed from a surge of resentment against white America for the unfilled promises of racial equality proffered by the “war to end all wars.” One white observer noted that “the Negro soldiers from the South have gone into the army from the most remote sections. They have seen something of the world. They, like their white companions in arms, are returning with a wider vision of life.”

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365 Ibid: 257.
black veterans interpreted the rhetorical and physical assaults directed at them by the authorities and local whites as attacks on their martial manhood and its entitlements, such as rehabilitation. One veteran remarked, “it is extremely difficult for the opposite race to see the colored soldier in a fair and impartial light. The fact is that we are invariably received and treated as a *colored man* and not as a *disabled soldier* (emphasis mine).” W.E.B. DuBois articulated this rising resentment in typically eloquent and forceful terms, perhaps in part to absolve himself of his earlier pro-war leanings: “We return, We return from fighting, We return fighting; Make way for democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.”

Most white southerners regarded the spectacle of uniformed African American soldiers as profane. After the armistice, returning black servicemen—the very embodiment of the assertive New Negro—became targets for the wrath of white mob violence. Some whites would have likely been especially enraged by disabled black soldiers and their unassailable badge of heroic sacrifice, which few soldiers of any color could boast. In the “Red Summer” of 1919, more than seventy African Americans, ten of whom were still in uniform, were lynched by white mobs. Mississippi and Georgia whites murdered three ex-soldiers; in Arkansas two were lynched; meanwhile, Florida and Alabama killed one black soldier each. How many of these victims were disabled is unclear, but attacks on black ex-servicemen were clearly driven by white rage at black pretensions to martial manhood acquired through military service. This violence was set

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against a rise in labor disputes between landowners and employers, job competition and federal repression of labor and political radicalism.\(^{368}\)

Racialist models of African American disability were key in maintaining white supremacy in the South and the nation as a whole. Notwithstanding their seemingly race-neutral posture, many FBVE officials recognized that benefits paid to black veterans could potentially undermine white dominance, which was rooted in regional labor markets, income distribution and citizenship rights. Compensation could amount to several times the thirty dollars a month black agricultural laborers earned on average in the South and it could more than equal the $500 to $600 annual income of most rural black families. Though modest, these benefits would enable black veterans to temporarily forego poorly paid menial “colored” jobs, give them a measure of financial independence and confer on them a status of equal citizenship.\(^{369}\) White racial animus and economic self-interest conspired to exclude African American veterans from the hierarchies of patriotic entitlement.

*Fitting the Right Races to the Right Places: African American Veterans and Vocational Training at the FBVE*

Ultimately, African American veterans’ claims to citizenship rested not in their ability to draw compensation—with its pernicious subtext of black dependency—but in the opportunity to work their way to independence through vocational rehabilitation. In the initial stage of physical reconstruction—conducted under the Office of the Army Surgeon General (AGO) and compensated through the BWRI—disability was perceived as a source of entitlement. However, when the process shifted to vocational rehabilitation, disability was reconfigured as a chance to remake oneself. African American veterans who did qualify for compensation under the BWRI,

\(^{368}\) Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*: 236; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*: 480-481.

a small minority given the fact that over half of all veterans were denied coverage, found themselves segregated in exclusively menial occupations. This process was laced with paternalistic overtones designed to “not only make the Negro a better workman, but also teach him to build a better home and live a more ideal life.” FBVE officials constantly linked racial uplift to patriarchy noting, “the idea is to elevate the economic status of these men sufficiently to enable their children to attend school and their women to give more time to the moral and hygienic development of the home.”

Progressives saw vocational rehabilitation as an unprecedented opportunity for the “crippled Negro race” to work itself to civilized respectability. This optimism was echoed in the pages of the FBVE’s official organ, *The Vocational Summary*: “the Negro has seen the highways of progress and labor opened to him in the land he helped to defend.” With a degree of willful ignorance, *The Crisis* was confident that the FBVE would “surely undertake—regardless of race—the training of a disabled soldier for a new occupation or retraining to better fit him for his former occupation.” Observers linked war to work through the rhetoric of a pluralistic patriotism to argue for African Americans’ right to rehabilitation, claiming, “the Negro soldier left a civil occupation to take up his gun. These recruits were not loiters, but laborers in the large sense. They were contributing to the nation and the world’s work in various ways both skilled and otherwise.”

African American veterans’ wartime wounds were allegedly a form of social currency which entitled them to service in the great postwar industrial army. Initially it appeared the state was willing to let blacks perform this transaction in the name of national efficiency. One FBVE official remarked, “the worth of our Negro veteran rests not in his racial nature but in his ability

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370 Hickel: 237.
to work himself into an efficient and productive worker.” Another noted that “if the Negro is coming into our lives to stay—and we need him—we should recognize the fact that he is perfectly capable of profiting under vocational instruction and becoming a worker worthy of the name.” Not all officials would prove so accommodating. FBVE official Frederic Keough countered, “the fact that a man is a disabled soldier or sailor is not enough to place him in any systematic manufacturing plant. He must be productive.” For Keough, vocational rehabilitation “must terminate in an economic advantage to the community.”372 In the context of nationwide legal and de-facto Jim Crow, appeals to vocational rehabilitation's communal “advantages” limited the kinds of work African Americans could do, as well as where they could do it.

The FBVE ordered the postwar labor economy along racial and spatial lines by fitting the right races to the right places. Officials stressed that it was necessary for “practical men who will not put square pegs in round holes” to be put in charge of returned soldiers employment bureaus.373 To undertake the vocational education and placement of veterans, the FBVE established the Rehabilitation Division in the summer of 1918. This division maintained three types of offices: the Central Office at Washington D.C., fourteen district offices and 100 or more local offices. These fourteen district offices, each composed of two or more states, and each with a district office located in one of the principal cities, were distributed from coast to coast. Each district office was headed by a district vocational officer, under whom were two or more assistant district vocational officers. One of these officers was responsible for training supervision in the local offices and another for industrial relations and employment aid. Dr. J.R. Crossland, a man “of splendid education, widely known in professional circles” and a “fearless

372 Keough, “War Disabled Negroes in Training”: 93.
373 American Red Cross Department of Civilian Relief 'Draft of Manual-After Care of Disabled Soldiers and Sailors', May, 15, 1918, RG. 112, Entry 29A, Box 233. Surgeon General Office Files 1917-1921, NARA, Washington D.C.
defender of the claims of the Negro,” was appointed by the FBVE as a “special expert on Negro affairs.” Though some in the black community saw Crossland’s post as little more than ceremonial, he was a key mediator between black ex-servicemen and an often ineffectual and Byzantine veteran’s bureaucracy.374

FBVE officials employed the model of disability laid out in the BWRI Disability schedule to train and place injured veterans in their appropriate occupations. According to this model, a man was not handicapped by his physical condition but only by the specific limitation that condition placed on his employment. In short, although “one may find himself handicapped in one occupation he may not be in another.” The fear that crippled veterans, and the disabled in general, would become a burden on society led to repeated calls that integration, not segregation, was essential for any truly effective program of rehabilitation. FBVE officials believed “there is a danger inherent in the reservation of specific employment for disabled men. It makes a special class of cripples; employments reserved for them cannot fail to become characterized as subnormal occupations.”375 Long segregated into “subnormal occupations” African American veterans now found themselves trapped in a double jeopardy of race and disability.

The seemingly equitable “one size fits all” policy of re-integrating handicapped veterans into the general work force collapsed in the FBVE’s rush to decentralization in the early 1920s. By the winter of 1919-1920, most district offices were already operating with near total

374 From 1918-1921 the fourteen districts were: No. 1-Maine, N.H., Vermont, Mass and R.I.; No. 2-Conn., N.Y., N.J.; No. 3-Pennsylvania and Delaware; No. 4-D.C.,Md., Virginia and W.V.; No. 5-N.C., S.C., Georgia, Florida and Tenn; No. 6-Alabama, Miss and Louisiana, ; No.7- Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky,; No.8-Michigan, Illinois and Wisc; No. 9-Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri; No. 10- Minn., Montana, N.D., S.D.; No. 11-Wyoming, Colorado, N.M. and Utah; No.12-California, Nevada and Arizona; No. 13-Idaho, Oregon and Washington; No. 14-Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas. In 1921 the district offices were combined with Public Health Service Offices and subsumed under the Veterans Bureau. Ibid. pg. 10; For Release’-Biography of Crossland- RG 15, Entry 50-Misc. Correspondence File 1920-1925, Box 1 NARA- In 1921 the district offices were combined with Public Health Service Offices and subsumed under the Veterans Bureau. Ibid: 10; For Release’-Biography of Crossland, RG 15, Entry 50, Box 1, Misc. Correspondence File 1920-1925,NARA, Washington D.C.
autonomy. Often derided as self-regulating bureaucratic “fiefdoms,” these offices were free to adjust their work to the socioeconomic circumstances of their respective regions. However, amidst mounting public criticism of delays and inefficiency in awarding compensation and job placement, the FBVE was finally absorbed into the Veterans Bureau in August of 1921. At the time of the transfer, complete authority for determining the eligibility of ex-service men for training was delegated to the district offices and all federal vocational officers were eliminated.

As early as the spring of 1923, Crossland was complaining to the Veterans Bureau over cuts to his already limited staff and the petty but ominous disconnection of his office telephone. Crossland argued that as the lone federal representative of Negro veterans, it was essential that he “keep in close contact with local businesses, community centers, the Red Cross and various other rehabilitation institutions.”

By the spring of 1924, the decentralization of the FBVE was complete, allowing local mores of race, labor and disability to emerge as the dominant model in the bureau’s day to day operations. Southern racial ideologies dominated the debate over veterans care due to shifts in the nation’s racial demographics and social scientific methodologies. Given that four out of five black veterans lived south of the Mason-Dixon line, Southern elites exercised a tremendous influence over the bureau’s racial policy. In the face of widespread black migration to the North, east coast elites increasingly deferred to southern “racial expertise” to deal with the widening national Negro problem. For many Northern observers, “the Negro” remained a largely abstract yet menacing figure. Despite his increased presence in the North, “the Negro” was still seen as a

376 Crossland to Acting Asst. Director Rehabilitation Division-U.S. Veterans Bureau, April, 3, 1923, RG 15 entry 50, Misc Correspondence File 1920-1925, Box 1 NARA, Washington D.C.
distinctly southern entity. Historian Matt Guterl has referred to this interwar shift in racial knowledge as a “Southernization of American race relations.”

Medical models of rehabilitation allowed Southern FBVE officials to couch their traditional animus towards blacks in the more palatable and “rational” rhetoric of scientific racism. Evaluating tubercular blacks’ ability to undertake “strenuous vocational rehabilitation,” officials in the FBVE central office in Washington D.C. concurred with their Southern counterparts, citing the racial disparities in infection and mortality rates of TB as proof of blacks’ congenital weakness. Ignoring racial disparities in living conditions and any rigorous etiological study, Southern physicians blithely contended that “tuberculosis is in the colored race as a whole.” Considering these “biological facts,” any attempts to retrain tubercular blacks were seen as misguided and foolish.

While African American proletarianization may have been grudgingly tolerated by Northern capital as something to be contained (in menial or low-skilled labor), or leveraged to further the “whitening” of the ethnic working classes (through strike breaking), in the South the process was simply untenable. Nearly a generation prior, Southern blacks’ shift from a rural to urban economy, and the subsequent fraying of traditional social networks, had led to widespread racial segregation. The road to African American proletarianization—with the notable exception of industrial penal labor—did not lead through the cotton fields of the black belt. In the face of increased black migration to the North—spurred by a creeping boll weevil infestation and wartime disruption of the international cotton economy—the FBVE was key in maintaining the

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restrictive system of sharecropping so vital to the maintenance of the region’s white supremacist political economy.

Theories of blacks as racial cripples were not limited to the South. However, as home to the bulk of the nation’s African American population, the socioeconomic demands of white supremacy and the need to rationalize the black body as pathologically inferior were acute. Though these rationalizations were undeniably racist, they were not irrational. African Americans were indispensable to the postwar southern rural economy. Blacks comprised forty-eight percent of all Southerners engaged in agriculture, cultivated two-thirds of the region’s land, owned or rented 41,000,000 acres of farm land, worth approximately one billion dollars, and tilled some 60,000,000 more as laborers. Southern elites successfully prevailed upon the FBVE to provide the “Negro with the kind of education that he needs and demands, namely, vocational agricultural education.” Through the FBVE, the federal government colluded with southern capital to help retain its rapidly shrinking workforce of unskilled black labor.381

FBVE officials drew on established forms of black industrial education in the design of vocational rehabilitation programs. Yet, though Hampton-style education in the semiskilled “mechanical arts” had long been a staple of the prewar south, federal officials argued that there were too few teachers or institutions to facilitate the process. To fill this gap, the FBVE and its successors at the Veterans Bureau committed to the establishment of new vocational schools. These schools were divided into three types: urban schools for nonresident students, training centers for resident students and reconstruction centers in Public Health Service hospitals. From November 1917 to November 1918, federal funds subsidized the creation of thirty-nine vocational education schools for African Americans (disabled veterans and otherwise), the bulk of whom—approximately 1,055 pupils—were enrolled in vocational agricultural training. H.O.

381 Hull, ‘Salvage the Man’: 88
Sargent, a federal FBVE agent, proudly noted that “in these schools little attention is given to preparing students for college” and that “classes were directed solely to the productive field of farming.”

The courses of study in these schools were designed to meet the needs of the local white community. For black pupils—who generally functioned at a fifth to eighth grade level—at least three hours a day were devoted to vocational agriculture, half of which was spent on supervised study and laboratory work, while the other half was devoted to its practical application. Each student carried on a project that generally involved the raising of some farm crop or farm animals, usually at the home of the student. White officials never hesitated to note examples of African Americans’ supposed affinity for farming. When two out of three disabled African Americans in training at Tuskegee “looked out over all the vocations open to them and chose the land” bureau, officials cited this as proof that “the call of the wild isn’t any stronger than the call of the land” and commended the two for their “courage” in answering to the latter. For Southern FBVE officials, the Negro agricultural worker was a necessary and natural entity.

For African American veterans, the imperatives of a Jim Crow political economy often held life and death consequences every bit as harrowing as their experiences in France. Throughout the South, theories of racial labor hierarchies were buttressed with the threat and practice of brutal violence. Such was the case with Oscar Woods, whom FBVE officials assigned to undertake tailoring training in Georgia despite his extensive background in auto mechanics. Miffed by the fact that the bureau had refused his request for training in more highly skilled work, Woods wrote to the bureau’s “Negro advisor,” J.R. Crossland, stating, “I would prefer to pass through Alabama in an aeroplane, driving fast at that, of course..... on account I hers they

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383 Ibid.
have the KKK in Georgia and Alabama and Ises know how they hates working niggers.” (sic) Woods fearfully insisted that if he was sent to Alabama, “when yous bring me back ise won’t need no meal ticket. My flag draped casket will be enough.” (sic) Woods’ fear of racial violence engendered by his job training exemplifies a common fear amongst many African American veterans, who often lobbied Crossland for help.

Northern FBVE officials also maintained a proscribed list of trades for the minority of African American veterans lucky enough to qualify for vocational rehabilitation. In Northern FBVE training centers, almost all the occupations on offer for blacks were non-industrial and semiskilled. Throughout the nation, disabled African American veterans were disproportionately placed in training for shoemaking and tailoring, with auto mechanics—the sole “mechanical” occupation—a distant third. If African Americans selected trades that did not appear on the approved list, bureau officials were instructed to keep them out of training indefinitely. When Mack Hudson of Philadelphia reported to his Local FBVE Office upon being certified for training with an undisclosed injury, he was offered shoe repair after asking for auto mechanics and was told that the Board “could do nothing for him.” J.R. Crossland noted, “it appears from the complaints which constantly pour into my office that several districts believe there are certain occupations in which they cannot afford colored men. And it is not always true that the necessary facilities are not present and readily available. The whole thing is working a great injustice upon the men of my racial group.”

384 Chas .M. Griffith to Director, U.S. Veterans Bureau, April, 29, 1922, RG 15, Entry 55, NARA
385 Ernest Luce to I. Fisher, ‘Disabled Negro Soldiers in Training’, Veterans Administration, Ernest Luce, Office Files on Supervisor of Advisement and Training, October, 1920, RG 15, Entry 20, Box No. 1 NARA, Washington D.C.; Crossland to Smith, U.S. Veterans Bureau: Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Jan, 3, 1922, RG 15, Entry 50, Box 2, General Correspondence File Folder, NARA., Washington D.C.
Nevertheless, FBVE records indicate that the vast majority of disabled black veterans—emboldened by their wartime service and accustomed to the occupational segregation of Jim Crow—complied with their vocational placements. One official observed that most men went “into training at the trades they are given not with the view to being rehabilitated, or even ever working at the particular trade, but simply to draw the training pay for the allotted time.” Like all veterans, blacks placed more importance on their financial benefits than they did on the actual practices of physical rehabilitation. Bureau officials constantly complained that disabled black veterans were “lazy” in not taking up vocational training and should therefore be denied compensation. Though similar charges of negligence were leveled against white veterans, their rights under the War Risk Insurance Act were rarely, if ever, challenged. Whereas crippled white veterans were generally seen as having earned their disability in the service of their country, African Americans’ allegedly “inferior disposition” marked them as undeserving of benefits.386

**The Institutionalization of Racial Disabilities: The Founding of Tuskegee Veterans Hospital**

Debates surrounding the racial dynamics of veterans policy reached their climax in the development and operation of the era’s lone hospital devoted exclusively to African American veterans: Federal Veterans Hospital 91 at Tuskegee, Alabama. Located at the Mecca of black vocational education, Veterans Hospital 91 was less concerned with “making the Negro anew” then with the quarantine of African American veterans. By the time of the hospital’s founding in February 1923, FBVE officials, now fully under the jurisdiction of the Veterans Bureau, had generally abandoned the goal of rehabilitating black veterans for integration into the industrial workforce. Officials believed that the institutionalization of veterans care would ensure that its practices aligned with postwar occupational hierarchies on both the local and national level.

386 Wiley Hill to J.R. Crossland, Jan. 23, 1922, U.S. Veterans Bureau Division of Vocational rehabilitation for Disabled Soldiers, Sailors and Marines, RG 15, Entry 50, Box 4, General Correspondence File Folder, NARA, Washington D.C.
Conversely, for African American veterans, residence at Veterans Hospital No. 91 endowed their injuries with the stamp of federal authority and entitled them to compensation and vocational rehabilitation as citizens.\footnote{War-Disabled Negroes in Training, The Vocational Summary: 33 1923; Vanessa Gamble, Making a Place for Ourselves: The Black Hospital Movement 1920-1945 (NY:Oxford University Press, 1995): 73-74}

Postwar hospital provisions for African American veterans were deplorable. Communities throughout the nation often refused to hospitalize black veterans in integrated institutions for fear that their mere presence would undermine patient morale. Especially troubling for whites was the specter of “race-mixing,” in which white staff, particularly female nurses, could find themselves in proximity to the crippled and diseased bodies of African American veterans. For those blacks “fortunate” enough to be admitted to Public Health Service (PHS) hospitals, treatment was typically administered in inferior segregated facilities. Veteran Issac Webb described his experience in a letter to The Crisis:

I am also one of the boys who volunteered in 1917 for services ‘over there’ and I have spent six months in hospitals for the disabled....At Mobile, I was handed my food out of a window, forbidden to use the front of the hospital to enter my ward, given no medical attention and forced to use the same toilet facilities fellows in advanced stages of syphilis and gonorrhea used.

Understandably, many African American veterans refused to seek treatment at PHS facilities, which meant that black hospitalization rates were almost fifty to eighty percent below that of whites. For observers across the color line, disparate racial hospitalization rates were an affront to the rhetoric of wartime pluralism and a threat to national stability.\footnote{The Crisis-Spring 1920; Ibid: 73-74}

Tuskegee Veterans Hospital grew from the efforts of the Consultations on Hospitalization—or, the aptly named White Committee—convened in the spring of 1921 by the Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon. Secretary Mellon enlisted a committee of medical experts who labored for two years to create a veterans hospital system which was “not only
national, but rational” in scope. These new facilities would be organized and financed by the federal government and initially restricted to veterans with combat service-related diseases and injuries. The committee was assisted by an advisory group that included representatives from the PHS, the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers and the National Tuberculosis Association. The committee’s final report recommended that a separate national hospital for black veterans be established at Tuskegee, Alabama. Though the original legislation that established the hospital system did not mention separate facilities for black veterans, the committee noted early in its deliberations that “one of the great American problems—that of race—obtruded itself more and more.”

The first problem facing the hospital regarded the issue of staffing. Debates over whether to employ a white, black or integrated staff spoke to broader issues of professional expertise, race and the right to define disability. The National Medical Association and the NAACP aggressively lobbied the federal government to employ African American staff at Tuskegee to maintain the school’s “commitment to race betterment.” Along with providing much needed jobs for African American physicians and nurses, it was also felt that they would provide better care to patients due to their mutual “racial affinity.” The drive for professional accreditation as a form of racial uplift was poignantly expressed by Dr. J.F. Lane of Lane College, who asked, “if we cannot serve our own people, where shall we work and whom are we to serve?” Lane’s plea full on deaf ears as the White committee, hesitant to give African American expertise the imprimatur of federal authority, elected to staff the hospital with all white personal following its opening in February 1923. Like their enslaved forebears, disabled African American veterans at

389 Ibid: 73.
Tuskegee were often viewed as objects of pity, solely dependent on the paternalist largesse of whites.\textsuperscript{391}

Demands for an all black staff increased in the wake of the hospital’s official dedication. In May 1923, General Frank T. Hines, Veterans Administrator in Washington D.C. asked Tuskegee’s Dr. Robert R. Moton whether he thought it advisable to staff the hospital with black doctors. Moton replied, “inasmuch as all the patients will be Negroes and since Negro physicians are not allowed at present to practice in any large hospitals it would be fair to give them this opportunity.” Tuskegee whites were infuriated at the prospect of “colored doctors” taking up residence at the Hospital. The local Ku Klux Klan staged a number of dramatic and violent protests on the hospital grounds in June and July of 1923. The Klan denounced the presence of “carpet-bagging negro professionals” and demanded that the hospital maintain an all white staff, even though this contravened a state law prohibiting white medical personal from treating blacks. Disregarding their previous objections to whites, particularly white nurses, working closely with disfigured and often half naked black men, the Klan remarkably chose to privilege the power of white professional expertise over socio-sexual racial mores. Quite simply, in the words of one white Alabamian, “we do not want any niggers in this state who we cannot control.”\textsuperscript{392}

While there were many in the federal government who were more than sympathetic to the Klan, most federal officials could not ultimately countenance attacks on federal property. The Republican administrations of Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge reluctantly agreed to turn the hospital administration over to blacks in an attempt to curry favor with the increasingly influential bloc of urban black voters in the North. When the hospital’s first white administrator, Dr. Robert Stanley, proved resistant to this idea—in part because he felt that granting military

\textsuperscript{391} “War-Disabled Negroes in Training”, \textit{The Vocational Summary}, Spring 1923: 33.
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid; Mark Schneider, \textit{We Return Fighting: Civil Rights in the Jazz Age}, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002): 236.
rank to potential black doctors was a gross violation of southern racial codes—he was replaced with Dr. John Ward, a leading figure in black medical circles. Ward had served overseas and been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Medical Corps. He arrived at Tuskegee in July of 1924 to take up his post as chief medical officer and head an all black staff of over forty physicians, dentists and vocational assistants. Ward directed his staff to provide ex-servicemen with “sympathetic aid and comfort,” as opposed to occupational therapy, of which “our veterans would have little use given the social strictures placed on their advancement.”

Following its opening, Hospital No. 91 had accommodations for approximately 300 veterans suffering from tuberculosis and just over 300 spaces for those afflicted with neuropsychiatric disorders. For roughly the first two years of the hospital’s operation, approximately 60 to 70 percent of its patients were listed as tubercular. However, staff were quick to point out that social factors, not race, were the source of these circumstances, noting that “the medical problems in connection with the tuberculosis patients are about the same as those connected with any institution of the kind.” Patients at Tuskegee often objected to the extended “rest cure” which characterized the contemporary care for the tubercular. Evelyn Z. Phelps, Director of the Red Cross Service at Tuskegee, remarked, “the patients rebel at the long rest hours, and many complaints are heard. They are kept in bed about twenty hours out of the twenty four, and feel keenly the lack of reading material, occupational therapy, vocational training and teachers.”

394 Ibid: 135.; Thomas Ruth-Director War Service to Directors of War Service, re: ‘Service Connection on Tuberculosis and Neuropsychrtic Diseases in Relation to Vocational Training’, November, 2, 1922, American Red Cross Records 1917-34, Record Group 200 Box No. 600. NARA, Washington D.C
Tuskegee Hospital’s focus on paternalistic or palliative care was largely informed by the types of disabilities and diseases, primarily tuberculosis, found in its patients. Though tuberculosis had exacted a debilitating toll on the wartime army as a whole, black troops suffered from the “white plague” at a rate nearly double that of whites. A 1921 study by the Army Surgeon General revealed that the highest admission rates for TB comprised black troops in Europe and stateside and white troops in Europe. Citing earlier environmental or climatic theories of racial difference, officials concluded that while the seasoned white soldier experienced “a marked advantage both as to the admission and death rates, the effect of seasoning on the colored soldier was much less marked, and indeed under the conditions he was called upon to face in Europe his admission rate was much higher than that of the relatively untrained colored men in this country.”

Uprooted from their “natural” southern habitat and transported to the foreign climes of northern France, African Americans were seemingly unable to ward off these new and more aggressive strains of the tubercular bacillus.

The series of monthly reports from Tuskegee’s resident American Red Cross Director provides the most substantive insight into the daily workings of Veterans Hospital No. 91 available, in addition to the insight it provides into the racial politics of disease etiology. Initially the Red Cross was intended to secure patients’ social histories, particularly in the neuropsychiatric service. However, as the hospital’s emphases on social welfare and non-surgical/curative methods of care increased, so too did the power of the Red Cross. These records—spanning the period from the hospital’s opening in April of 1923 through to December of 1926—chart the hospital’s shift from an all white to an all black staff and demonstrate the surprisingly consistent focus on palliative rather than rehabilitative care.

physicians, nurses and various hospital officials did tend to provide patients with more
“sympathetic forms of care,” they rarely if ever questioned the Veterans Bureau’s directives to
manage rather than treat their patients. Occupational therapy and vocational rehabilitation were
in short supply at Tuskegee throughout the 1920s. Ex-servicemen received only the most
rudimentary vocational training in agriculture and the mechanical arts. FBVE officials concurred
that tubercular blacks must be treated in the “healthful and restful climate to which they were
accustomed, much like that at Tuskegee.”397 In late 1923 the FBVE, in conjunction with the
National Tuberculosis Association, published a manual for vocational advisors detailing suitable
occupations and vocations for tubercular veterans. The manual was the culmination of a two year
study on the negative physiological effects of tuberculosis on an individual’s labor capacity. The
study’s authors were eager to incorporate the work of Jules Amar, Director of the Research
Laboratory of Industrial Labor in Paris, who had developed a new method for measuring the lung
capacity of individuals suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis. FBVE officials recommended
that the U.S. government petition Amar to accept an advisory position at the Veterans Bureau to
pursue studies on tubercular laborers. Given Amar’s work on colonial African troops, the
Veterans Bureau expressed interest in commissioning a study at Tuskegee on African American
veterans. Though Amar’s studies failed to develop, the fact that they were commissioned
represents an intriguing attempt by FBVE and Veterans Bureaus officials to understand the racial
etiology within a broader transnational economy of racial labor fitness.

Red Cross records also revealed the modest ways in which black veterans attempted to
counter characterizations of themselves as fundamentally disabled. In May 1924, just two
months before turning over the hospital to an all black staff, an occupational therapy department

Red Cross, Tuskegee, Alabama’, June 1923, RG 200, August 31 1923 NARA, Washington D.C.
was finally opened on the hospital’s grounds. Red Cross director E.M. Murray reported that “many of the men were loud in their expressions of delight in its beginning” and that the “work will do much toward abating any spirit of restlessness that might have existed among the men. Indeed it has already reduced the innumerable requests made upon this office for occupational supplies.” Through their persistent demands for occupational/vocational supplies, black veterans actively resisted the paternalistic regime of “enforced idleness” that had characterized their treatment.\textsuperscript{398} African American veterans saw such treatment as an affront to their identities as soldiers, workers and men. However, despite the introduction of an occupational therapy department and an all black staff, Tuskegee continued to maintain a palliative, rather than a rehabilitation focus.

Red Cross officials worked to reify models of African American degeneracy by linking ideas about broken black bodies to broken black families. Undermining black patriarchy was a means to frame Negro inferiority in both social and biological terms. This formulation was adopted by both white and black officials, with the latter tending to frame their critiques in the neo Washingtonian uplift rhetoric of the day.\textsuperscript{399} Although Veteran Bureau and Red Cross officials did accuse white veterans of philandering and neglecting their duties as men and citizens, black intemperance was understood as a function of their form. In making this connection, reformers cited blacks’ biological predisposition to the morally and physically enfeebling diseases of TB and VD as causal factors for their seemingly degraded familial life. Black men’s abrogation of their manly duties—to provide financial and moral support for their dependents and to faithfully discharge their duties as head of the household—stemmed from

\textsuperscript{398} E.M. Murray to Miss Helen Ryan, The American Red Cross, U.S. Veterans Hospital NO. 91 Tuskegee, Alabama, May, 1, 1924, RG 200, NARA, Washington D.C.

their ostensibly de haired heredity. This framing of black pathology in gendered terms—located in an enfeebled masculinity and implicit in the BWRI’s disability rating schedule and the FBVE’s job placement practices—only served to further compromise black veterans’ already tenuous claims to martial republican manhood.

In the circular logic of anti-black racism, African Americans’ lack of bourgeoisie familial standards was seen as both a cause and effect of their degradation. This debased form of masculinity was evident in the black male body itself. Reviewing the patient files of Mr. Tuttle Duke—a divorcee and “a rather foppish fellow”—a Red Cross official remarked that his “enfeebled physical state” (as a tubercular) was matched “only by his predilection for vice so characteristic for a negro of his type.” In their monthly reports, hospital officials routinely derided patients as “unfit guardians” and “absentee fathers and husbands.” Given these models of black male indolence, officials were quick to dismiss efforts by veterans to retain family ties as needlessly sentimental and misguided. One staff member noted that patients should be denied the opportunity to return to their families, even if “many feel that they can take the treatment as well at home and worry needlessly about their families, for if the truth were known, many of the families are far better off when the patient is away.” In early 1925, the new black Red Cross director E.M. Murray cited the increasing “tendency of patients bringing their families to Tuskegee as something which we are endeavoring to prevent as much as possible” in part because of the poor housing situation, but perhaps more importantly because of a need to effectively “isolate” the patients. Hospital officials felt that releasing disabled patients into the custody of their dysfunctional families—or letting these families visit the hospital grounds—would be detrimental to their long term health and that of the community. 400

400 E.M. Murray to Helen Ryan, The American Red Cross, U.S. Veterans Hospital No. 91, Tuskegee, Alabama, May, 1, 1924; Evelyn Phelps to Miss Helen Ryan, RED CROSS FILES RG 200 August, 3,
Much like officials at the Bureau of War Risk Insurance, the hospital staff at Tuskegee viewed black disabilities with suspicion and antagonism. In contrast, black veterans saw their residence at Tuskegee as proof that their injuries had—however tenuously—been certified by the Bureau and that, therefore, they were entitled to federal benefits. Red Cross officials at Tuskegee positioned themselves as intermediaries between the state and veterans, specifically when issues were related to financial benefits. In December 1923 Director Phelps remarked,

at last the contact officer has arrived at the hospital and will take the responsibility for handling compensation claims....A definite plan for cooperation is to be instituted between home and the Red Cross workers, with the Red Cross assuming the responsibility for obtaining the affidavits and supporting proof, and the Contact Officer having the responsibility of working up the claim.

Along with assessing the validity of black compensation claims, the Red Cross also took the lead in facilitating the Hospital’s attempts to gain custody over its most “troublesome patients,” i.e. those individuals suffering from mental illness.401

While institutional confinement of the mentally ill or physically disabled was still a staple of medical practice in progressive America, the involuntary confinement of disabled ex-servicemen proved far more contentious. Yet at Tuskegee, staff were encouraged to find reasons to confine black ex-servicemen to the Hospital. For local white officials this impulse was one of blatant self-preservation, to protect themselves and their communities from “sickly negroes.” Shortly before the hospital’s shift to an all-black staff, Evelyn Phillips remarked, “it is our experience that the Trust Companies make the best guardians and that relatives of the patients make the poorest.” This was because “some of the families of the Negro patients are wholly ignorant and illiterate and pay no attention to the letters which we write them requesting aid for their kin.” Phillips contested the limits of African American citizenship, arguing that black

1923, NARA ; E.M. Murray to Pauline Radford, The American Red Cross, U.S. Veterans Hospital No. 91, January, 1925. NARA, Washington D.C.  
401 Evelyn Phelps to Miss Helen Ryan, Red Cross Files RG 200, December, 1, 1923, NARA, Washington D.C.
families mistakenly “have the idea that the government is caring for the man and that every necessity is provided.”

With the switch to an all black staff, white modes of self-preservation were reconfigured around appeals to black racial uplift and “respectability.” African American elites worried that the social and physical deficiencies of the “lower classes of Negroes”—which comprised the majority of veterans—would impede the race’s progress towards civilized respectability. When E.M. Murray took over from Evelyn Philips in early 1924 to become the first black Red Cross director at Tuskegee, he and his staff continued the policy of placing “invalid Negroes” in the custody of local trust companies and banks. In the hospital's first four years, the Red Cross placed close to two hundred ex-servicemen in trusts, the majority of whom were placed with the local Bank of Tuskegee. Red Cross officials sought to disabuse blacks of their sense of civic entitlement by placing them in a private trust and reducing them to little more than wards of the post-war corporatist state.

Finally, white elites often moved to criminalize African American disability by confining the tubercular and mentally ill in jails and insane asylums. A particularly egregious example occurred when the Veterans Bureau sent thirty tubercular African American veterans to the Central State Hospital for the Insane in Nashville on the spurious pretext that “their condition could be attributed to a uniquely racial mental affliction.” One tubercular black veteran confined to the barracks at Camp Lee in Virginia lamented, “we all have worn out at such as to not have the chance to go no place but to work and when we are in from work then we are in prison until time to go work again.....the way we are being handled here it looks to me and others that it will

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402 Evelyn Phelps to Miss Helen Ryan, Red Cross Files, RG 200, January, 2, 1924, NARA, Washington D.C.
403 E.M. Murray to Miss Pauline Radford, The American Red Cross, U.S. Veterans Hospital no. 91, Tuskegee, Alabama, December, 3, 1924 Red Cross Files, RG 200 NARA, Washington D.C.
be slavery instead of freedom.” (sic) Rather than enlisting the expertise of medical and vocational specialists to eliminate or alleviate black degeneracy, hospital officials merely sought to contain it by strengthening ties with social welfare agencies like the Red Cross and the Knights of Columbus. At its peak in 1923, the FBVE and the Veterans Bureau were active in rehabilitating approximately 2,500 African American ex-service men, with an additional 1,500 in hospitals—the majority of whom lived at Tuskegee. \(^{404}\)

**Conclusion**

Struggles over the policy and practice of the vocational rehabilitation of disabled African American veterans revealed the connection between race and disability as signifiers of social difference in postwar America. FBVE officials linked these two identities to marginalize and exclude African American veterans and civilian laborers from the postwar labor economy. Yet, given rehabilitationists’ oft-cited opinion of black inferiority, even limited or menial forms of rehabilitation, training and placement ran contrary to the core tenet of modern veterans care: autonomy before charity. Some progressives wondered why the state should actively enable “the worst dependent traits of the colored race” in a misguided attempt to salvage the unsalvageable? Many officials proposed that the state should simply “cut the colored man loose” and let the dysgenic nature of war and modern industry run its course and do away with “the burdensome Negro problem.” \(^{405}\)

FBVE policies towards black ex-servicemen—while profoundly racialist and driven by the belief that race was the driving force in human affairs—were not necessarily motivated by an explicit racial prejudice. In fact, race hatred was quite besides the point. Historian Michael Adas

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\(^{404}\) Thomas Ruth-Director War Service to Directors of War Service, re: ‘Service Connection on Tuberculosis and Neuropsychtic Diseases in Relation to Vocational Training’, November, 2, 1922, American Red Cross Records 1917-34, Record Group 200 Box No. 600. NARA, Washington D.C; “War-Disabled Negroes in Training”, *The Vocational Summary*, Spring 1923: 33.  
\(^{405}\) Ibid.
argues that “the successful management of the war effort emboldened social scientists to rationalize human systems and improve social morality (i.e. the work ethic) through the application of theories informed by analogies to the natural sciences and technology.” FBVE officials saw themselves as self-appointed “guardians of evolution, weeding the fit from the unfit” and pruning mainstream society of its most undesirable elements. Officials believed that by limiting black veterans’ compensation and isolating them in menial occupations, they were performing a necessary intervention in the process of social evolution. Progressives realized that social and legal sanction (Jim Crow in the South and dual unionism in the North) alone were insufficient for keeping black laborers in their “proper place” in an increasingly complex and segmented labor economy. Social norms of “colored work” and “white men’s work” needed to be buttressed by the fiat of institutionalized racial expertise. The maintenance of occupational racial hierarchies was therefore presented not only as socially desirable, but as biologically vital to national efficiency and the “future betterment of the white race.”

Progressive era racial thought was characterized by an abiding tension between ideas of progression and regression. Like all good progressives, FBVE officials were guided by an almost messianic faith in rational progress, while being simultaneously consumed by a fear of the “atavistic perils of degeneration” embodied by groups such as African Americans. The wounds of disabled black veterans were not seen as badges of patriotic honor but as the stigmata of atavistic agents who threatened to poison the American body politic from within. Therefore, for even the most liberal-minded progressives, the goal was never “to make the Negro anew” but to

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contain, or at best alleviate, the dangerous effects of his inevitable slide into degeneracy.\textsuperscript{407} Corporatist elites read the wounded and broken bodies of black veterans as harbingers of America’s racial decline. Ultimately, African American veterans found themselves marginalized within the various processes of vocational rehabilitation due to the explicit racism of Southern whites and a pragmatic desire for socioeconomic self-preservation on the part of white elites nationwide.

Vocational rehabilitation was a rational and pragmatic response to a rapidly shifting industrial landscape transformed by wartime imperatives and large scale African American migration. Rehabilitation linked the health of the veteran to that of the republican body politic in distinctly racial terms and helped negotiate a shift from prewar notions of race as a multifaceted phenomena—or, a cacophony of immigrant white races—to a stark postwar biracialism of black versus white. Implicit in the very policy and practice of rehabilitation—or, the drive for “aggressive normalization”—was a regulatory impulse to rationalize and contain bodily and social difference so readily embodied in “the Negro.” FBVE officials believed that the visible and hidden wounds of African American veterans only served to highlight their innate degeneracy in the zero-sum struggle of evolutionary racial fitness.\textsuperscript{408} Vocational rehabilitation linked social/labor hierarchies with physiological difference to reconcile racial function with racial form in the maintenance of a white dominated labor economy.

Chapter Five

“A New Negro Type:” The National Research Council (NRC) and the Production of Racial Knowledge in Postwar America 1919-1929

“In the last decade something beyond the watch and guard of statistics has happened in the life of the American Negro and the three norms who have traditionally presided over the Negro problem have a changeling in their laps. The Sociologist, the Philanthropist, the Race Leader are not unaware of the New Negro, but they are at a loss to account for him. He simply cannot be swathed in their formulae.”

Alain Locke
The New Negro (1925)

“The race problem is rather a difficult one because we do not know exactly what negroes are or what the Negro race is.”

Dr. Joseph Peterson
National Research Council (1928)\(^{409}\)

Amongst the many causalities of World War One was a faith in the future. Notwithstanding the conflict’s gruesome human toll, the carnage of the western front deeply shook progressives’ faith in their ability to affect historical progress through rational reform. One economist declared, “it would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that the European war has rendered every text in social sciences out of date...but not much of an exaggeration.” As a latecomer to the conflict, America managed to avoid the war’s most destructive excess. However, as active participants in the discourse of transatlantic reform, Americans were unable to escape the pervading crisis of faith that consumed western progressives. Like their European peers, American social scientists lived in constant fear of an insidious atavism lurking in primitive emotions or primitive peoples that threatened to engulf postwar respectable society. The existence of such brutality amidst the remains of civilization heightened public interest in

theories such as eugenics, which linked biology to destiny, and the idea that “biological diseases required biological cures.”

For old stock American elites, the racially dysgenic effects of war were paramount. Lothrop Stoddard, author of the bestseller *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, described the conflict as a white civil war that portended the fall of western society. For many, this decline had begun over a decade before, with Japan’s shocking victory in the Russo-Japanese war. In the intervening years, new technologies had increased migration and the international flow of capital, annihilating both space and time and allowing “the colored hordes” to penetrate the “outer and inner dikes” of the white world. Now the effects of the “war to end all wars” were clear; the best of white manhood had been slaughtered in the trenches, leaving the unfit behind to breed. Even more troubling were the masses of colored laborers and soldiers who had traveled to the various metropolises of empire—New York, Chicago, Paris, Berlin and London—to do the work of war. For Stoddard, “colored triumphs of arms are less to be dreaded than more enduring conquests like migration which would swamp whole populations and turn countries now white into colored man’s lands irretrievably lost to the white world.” He conceded that while “these ominous possibilities existed even before 1914, the war has rendered them much more probable.”

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412 Stoddard’s notion of the ‘unfit’ was not strictly confined to “the fecund colored races”- or the lower classes of whites, it also drew heavily on prewar notions of the white upper classes as ‘unfit’ for abrogating their duty to propagate. Stoddard, *Rising Tide of Color*: 220-221, 13-16. This view was echoed by Professor Warren S. Thompson of Cornell University; “One may look upon the dying out of those who
Despite these harrowing developments, the conflict had provided “extraordinary opportunities for the study of different races and their various physical and mental aptitudes.” Wartime imperatives had created various regulatory systems of racial labor classification. Sociology, anthropometry, and vocational rehabilitation all worked to define and evaluate the labor fitness of specific racial types, specifically African Americans. Yet, wartime assessments of African Americans proved ambiguous. While tests had found the “uninfected Negro to be a constitutionally better physiological machine than his white counterpart,” skeptics pointed to blacks’ woeful performance on the Army IQ tests as proof of their inferiority. Even military officials sympathetic to, “the Negro’s plight” cautioned, “races develop slowly! A few years ago these men were slaves in the fields and a few years before that they were children in the jungles of Africa. They are children still.” The “Negro as problem” was an acknowledged fact amongst postwar social scientists, across the color line. Less clear were the precise mental and physiological contours of this racial problem, which according to the sociologist Charles Johnson, “was only now in evolution.”

This chapter examines the efforts of social scientists at the National Research Council (NRC) to build on wartime evaluations of African Americans in order to develop, sustain and institutionalize a body of knowledge on the African American worker. The successful management of the war effort provided social scientists with the impetus to rationalize humans and human networks through theoretical models analogous to those in the natural sciences; it allowed them to effectively create an organic model of political economy. According to DuBois,

worship the God of Mammon as nature's kindly provision for ridding the world of the overambitious, egotistic elements who have missed the true goal of living.” Warren S. Thompson, ‘Race Suicide in the United States’, *American Journal of Anthropology*, January-March Vol. II No. 1, 1919: 144-145; Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroses*: 10-11

413 A common refrain amongst wartime evaluations of black soldiers was their supposed “childlike nature”, and “affinity for the theatrics of drill and parade”. Black soldiers were continually praised for their “imitative skill”, John Richards “Some Experiences with Colored Soldiers”, *Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1919: 190; Charles Johnson, ‘Black Workers and the City’, *The Survey Graphic*, Harlem Number, March 1925
the war “had given the Negro his chance to widen his narrow foothold on life, a slightly better opportunity to make his way in the industrial world of America.” The war changed perceptions of African American labor fitness in three significant ways: wartime migration and military service definitively established the Negro as a factor in industrial civilization; rapid migration and urbanization were effecting mental and physical changes on African American workers; and national efficiency was becoming increasingly synonymous with racial integrity. The latter led to the social and legal establishment of a stark biracialism—of white versus non-white—that endeavored to link race and labor fitness to color and the body.414

The NRC characterized social and national efficiency as a function of racial biology best determined through social scientific inquiry. Committee members charted these processes through *The Committee on Scientific Problems of Human Migration* (1922), and *The Committee on the American Negro* (1928). African Americans, especially those affiliated with the NUL, conducted their own investigations into the “New Negro,” albeit on a much more limited scale. Historians have noted that “more than a literary metaphor, the New Negro was a product and producer of the global transformations that generated ‘Modern Times.’” NRC social scientists agreed that, for better or worse, “given that the Negro and his descendants represent a large part of the total population and were now an increasing factor in industrial life, investigation of this group is particularly important, both from a theoretical and practical point of view.”415 Blacks’ sudden appearance as an industrial factor led many observers to question what exactly constituted a “Negro type” in the cultures of the modern American political economy.

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415 Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*: 9; “Committee on the American Negro” -Proposals for the Organization of Investigations of the American Negro, 1921, NRC Material, APS
NRC social scientists fused biology with culture to create taxonomies of racial types for ordering the postwar labor/political economy. Primary amongst these types was the New Negro, although debates over the specific contours of this new racial type persisted. The various NRC committees on race were largely motivated by social scientists’ desire to regain their fleeting wartime influence over the racial aspects of public policy. Michael Adas argues that scientism—a melding of the “pure” and “social” sciences—played a major role in the postwar efforts of social scientists to establish their authority in drafting public policy and to win funding for their endeavors.” Before the war, Robert Park noted that “the simplest problems......are world problems, the problems of the contacts and the frictions and the interactions of nations and races.” To curry favor and funding from federal officials, NRC members linked their proposals for studies of domestic black migration to a lager global project of racial knowledge production. Social scientists believed that a better understanding of the homegrown American Negro would help to stem the rising tide of color abroad.416

Social scientists emerged from the war convinced that social policy needed to be meditated in biological terms. This urge culminated in 1924 with the passage of the restrictive Johnson-Reed Immigration Act and Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act, which prohibited interracial marriage and legalized involuntary sterilization of the “unfit.” Though both laws were authored in part by the arch Nordicist Madison Grant, in spirit they presaged an increasingly unfamiliar racial landscape, one in which the Caucasian had displaced the Nordic and the Negro—rather than “dusky” European races—was now seen as the greatest threat to the nation’s racial health. Paradoxically, African Americans who wished to challenge this characterization within the confines of a segregated society by arguing for the Negro’s “Americanness” had to

simultaneously deny and emphasize the significance of race. African American appeals for racial
equality had to be balanced against any inferences for the social equality (i.e. interracial sex) that
was so despised by white elites and large swaths of the black community. African Americans had
to lobby for equality of opportunity not as Americans, but as black Americans well aware of
their proper socioeconomic place.417

Following the armistice, a language of efficiency and social control gradually eclipsed
the humanitarian and moralistic rhetoric of earlier reformers. Historians have argued that the war
reinforced social scientists’ move away from a “moral fervor for reform” to a “reverence for
scientific knowledge and technological innovation.”418 For NRC members, the language of
“expertise” required that the social sciences be made “as relevant to modern industry as the
chemist, electoral engineer or geologist.” To mine the full potential of African American labor, it
was necessary to study “the Negro’s respective strength, endurance, nervous reactions and
instinctive responses to stimuli in comparison with those of the white (or Indian) race to discern
his capacity for profiting by vocational training.” R.J. Terry, the future chairman of the
“Committee on the American Negro,” claimed, “the Negro Problem is certainly no less complex
than the Indian problem and we should have to anticipate the same kind of valuable......but
fragmentary work being done by the Bureau of American Ethnology.” Anthropologist A.E. Jenks
remarked that “just as breeds of animals differ, likewise, do breeds (or so-called races) of people
differ.” For Jenks, the survival of American civilization depended on “the races of men who are
to work and breed the nation’s future generations.”419

419 Proposal for the Organization of Investigations on the American Negro, April, 8, 1927, NRC File, APS; Boas to Terry, Committee on the American Negro, Feb. 15, 1927,Boas Correspondence, APS; A.E. Jenks to Mr. Hal Smith, Attn. Ford Motor Company, December 13, 1923, NRC File, APS.
Anthropology, as the “science of race and culture,” was a key tool for interpreting and regulating the postwar labor economy. Lee Baker notes that in the late nineteenth century, anthropology became a powerful discipline because it helped to explain, describe and preserve the culture of “out of the way peoples,” thereby influencing law and policy from the American west to the Philippines. More often than not, these indigenous peoples were seen as culturally distinct, primitive and vanishing. Anthropologists had less success describing the culture of many “in the way immigrant and black peoples.” That job went to sociologists, such as George Haynes, committed to the study of assimilation and race relations. Baker contends that before the Great Depression, anthropologists were perhaps excessively concerned with American Indian culture, to the exclusion of African Americans. While the Indian was seen as a hostage to his culture, the Negro was believed to be constrained by his biology. Wartime and postwar evaluations of African Americans—completed over a decade before the Great Depression—were an attempt to rectify African Americans’ previous absence from anthropological discourse.  

Prewar anthropological analyses of African Americans were generally the work of one scholar: Franz Boas of Columbia University. Boas would eventually gain widespread fame—and derision—as the father of modern anthropological notions of cultural relativism and as a leading antiracist scholar. In the fall of 1905, Boas published his first article on African Americans, “The Negro and the Demands of Modern Life: Ethnic and Anatomical Considerations,” in the popular reform magazine Charities. African American intellectuals immediately recognized Boas as a key ally in the fight against scientific racism in large part because of his immigrant

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420 Baker, Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture: 5-7
421 Baker notes that Boas has long engendered the ire of cultural conservatives as the “Godfather of the Multicult Nightmare” and the fabricator of the false “equalitarian dogma.” Baker also argues that both then and now, anti-Semitism -and lingering suspicion of his fundamental unAmericanness- has been a contributing factor in academic and popular critiques of Boas. See 'The Cult of Franz Boas' in Baker, Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture: 156-219.
Jewish roots, which marked him as a fellow outsider. In early 1906, DuBois wrote to Boas, inviting him to Atlanta University to speak at an annual conference on the Negro in American Life. Boas’ commencement address, on the cultural basis of racial behavior and the historic significance of Africa, refuted prevailing theories of the Negro’s biological deficiencies. Linking culture to race, Boas sought to reorient anthropology toward the study of African Americans while producing a systemic critique of white supremacist ideology.422

When anthropologists eventually did turn to the study of the Negro, they employed three methodological approaches. The first was folklore and the search for the continuity of African culture in the Americas. The second approach took the nexus of class and race as its primary focus to measure the cultural, social and psychological toll of racism. The final approach involved physical or biological anthropology, which informed the work of the respective committees on migration, race characters and the American Negro. Despite not being touted at World’s Fairs or other mediums of popular culture, this discourse played a vital role in the processes of race formation on both sides of the color line. Advocates of the New Negro Movement used anthropology, particularly folklore, to develop and validate African Americans and their culture, while NRC social scientists used physical anthropology to delineate blacks’ fitness for industrial modernity. Baker notes that throughout the 1920s, anthropology remained a segregated discipline, rendering a “paramount practical service to the nation” by helping to establish legal and de facto Jim Crow throughout the nation.423

Recently, historians have cited the Great War and the immediate postwar era as a time in which race and racial fitness were increasingly linked to color and the body. This was a period

422 Ibid Baker 208-209; Levering Lewis, DuBois: Biography of a Race: 351-353
423 It was not until the 1930’s and 40’s that anthropology began to be used by activists, educators and lawyers to provide scientific proof of racial equality and better facilitate efforts towards desegregation. Baker, From Savage to Negro: 125-127.
that witnessed the hardening of racial categories in the legal realm as well as the public imagination, as is clear from the birth of the Caucasian and the rise of the New Negro. Postwar anthropology represents a detour in this process. The NRC’s use of anthropology amounted to an emergence of neo-Lamarckism—which advocated for the malleability of racial types through acquired traits—at a time when strict Mendelian models of biological determinism dominated social scientific discussions of race. Madison Grant warned lawmakers, “it has taken us fifty years to learn that speaking English and wearing good clothes and going to school does not transform a Negro into a white man.” For Grant, no amount of social engineering could obscure this fact. Convinced that “all the nation’s economic, social and political problems were intimately bound up with the reactions of different peoples in our midst,” NRC social scientists—specifically anthropologists—hoped to use the results gleaned from wartime testing to build the case that national efficiency was contingent upon delineating and regulating shifting cultural and biological racial demographics.424

For social scientists across the color line, the war yielded mixed results regarding African American racial fitness. The black sociologist Charles Johnson noted, The Negro worker can no more become a fixed racial idea than can the white worker. Conceived in terms either of capacity or opportunity, the employment of Negroes gives rise to the most perplexing paradoxes. If it is a question of what a Negro is mentally and physically able to do, there are as many affirmations of competence as denials of it. Amidst the rapidly shifting ideologies, identities and aesthetics of race, maintaining white supremacy necessitated buttressing social norms with the fiat of scientific racial expertise.

Distinguishing between “colored work” and “white man’s work” had to be rationalized along

424 Grant warned that “Americans will have a similar experience with the Polish Jew, whose dwarf stature, peculiar mentality and ruthless self interest are being engrafted upon the stock of the nation.” The crux of Grant’s argument was the likeness between African Americans—seen as racially incompatible with whites—and immigrant groups tenuously seen as white. From an eugenic perspective, the “one drop rule” by which any degree of black ancestry made one a Negro, also applied to near white races such as Jews. Slotkin, Lost Battalions: 455.
ostensibly scientific lines. The sociologist A. E. Jenks cited the need for applied racial labor knowledge noting, “of what value were material gains if civilization itself is to fail?”  

**The NRC and the Production of Racial Knowledge in Postwar America**

In April 1916, President Wilson charged the National Academy of Sciences with organizing “the scientific agencies of the United States.” As the likelihood of America’s entry into the war increased, so too did the need for a more efficient coordination of the nation’s intellectual expertise. The National Research Council (NRC) was created in December 1916, only four months before Congress’ declaration of war against Germany. In May 1918, the President issued an executive order requesting the Academy to perpetuate the NRC and defined its peacetime duties: “to stimulate research and apply the knowledge to the public welfare; to plan comprehensive researches and to minimize duplication by cooperation; and to gather up and render available existing scientific and technical knowledge.” Wilson’s choice to head the NRC, the biologist John C. Merriam, proposed a science “defined by ‘method,’ oriented to ‘control,’ and sustained by organized professional structures to promote research.”  

The Council was divided into thirteen divisions, eventually merging many of its activities with the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). Founded in 1923, the SSRC was committed to sociological inquiries into various social groups and was instrumental in establishing a pattern of independent cooperation among the nation’s social science organizations.  

The rise of postwar social science expertise was due to the growth of the wartime state and capitalist-funded charitable foundations. Before the war, the major foundation in the field, Russell Sage, had limited itself to social welfare studies rather than the promotion of social

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425 Johnson, ‘Black Workers in the City’; A.E. Jenks to Mr. Hal Smith, Attn. Ford Motor Company, December 13, 1923, NRC Committee on Anthropology, APS  
426 Ross, *Origins of American Social Science*: 396-397  
427 A.E. Jenks to Mr. Hal Smith, Attn. Ford Motor Company, December 13, 1923, NRC Anthropology Committee, APS
sciences per se. Following the war, the Carnegie Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation contributed vast sums of money to the development of social science expertise. The NUL’s Department of Research and Investigations—responsible for most of the research and publications on African American workers in the 1920’s—was initiated by an $8,000 three year grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Likewise, the SSRC was entirely dependent on Rockefeller money for its summer conferences, advisory councils and fellowship money. Dorothy Ross argues that this corporate largesse was motivated by a chance to clear the family name and a faith in the “emerging scientific idiom of the social sciences.” Ross claims that in contrast to the “amateurish philanthropy” of the past, this new idiom promised “both distance from political controversy, and knowledge that would allow the real control of social change,” which was decidedly conservative.428

The preeminent “social problems” of the postwar era revolved around the interconnected issues of labor and race. The NRC’s division of Anthropology and Psychology was charged with the collection and dissemination of “all available existing scientific and technical knowledge” on race and racial difference and its relation to labor. All of the division’s various committees—on “Migration,” “Race Characters/Racial Differences,” and the “American Negro”—were established as “clearing houses” for racial knowledge. NRC officials believed that the best way to influence public policy was to create a critical mass of knowledge “which could assist the American nation and race toward her goal of developing civilization.” Committee members identified five key areas “in urgent need of attention:” a bibliography of Negro anthropology and psychology; research on development of the Negro child; “investigations of the full blood Negro American and Negro mentality; studies of the Negro in Africa to determine the persistence of

racial traits” and “the collection of families of full bloods and browns for future investigations.”\textsuperscript{429} Throughout all of these studies ran a eugenic obsession with heredity and racial purity.

Eugenics intersected with anthropology—specifically physical anthropology—through the work of Professor Ales Hrdlicka. A Czech immigrant, Hrdlicka was largely responsible for making physical anthropology a well-defined field within the discipline through his establishment of \textit{American Journal of Physical Anthropology} (1918) and the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (1929). He was also instrumental in securing positions for Madison Grant and Charles Davenport on the NRC’s Anthropology Committee. These elite connections provided Hrdlicka with vital political influence. In a 1921 speech at American University, he explained the links between anthropology and eugenics and their implications for public policy: “from now on evolution will no longer be left entirely to nature, but will be assisted...and even regulated by man himself......This particular line of activity is known today under the name Eugenics.... (which) is merely applied anthropological and medical science—applied for the benefit of mankind.” In the early 1920s, social scientists increasingly turned to immigration as a forum in which the laws of biology could be transformed into social policy.\textsuperscript{430}

\textit{Race and Space: The Racial Basis of Migration}

Postwar social scientists were obsessed by the processes of migration and its racial consequences—not the least of which was the sudden appearance of masses of nonwhite workers in the metropolises of western industry. Previously “out of the way” brown, black and yellow men were now industrial factors. Lothrop Stoddard warned that, “colored migration is now a

\textsuperscript{429} A.E. Jenks to R. Yerkes, NRC File,APS; These projects were united around a common concern regarding diversity’s role as an agent of racial evolution. i.e. Were “racial hybrids” a cause or effect of racial degeneration?, ‘Report of the Committee on the Study of the American Negro’, 1928, NRC File, APS

\textsuperscript{430} Baker, \textit{From Savage to Negro}: 93-94.
universal peril, menacing every part of the white world.” Elites in both the public and private spheres were quick to recognize the international dimensions of this phenomena. President Warren G. Harding remarked, “whoever will take the time to read and ponder Mr. Stoddard’s book on *The Rising Tide of Color*…..Must realize that our race problem here in the United States is only a phase of the race issue the whole world confronts. Surely we gain nothing by blinking at the facts.”

Fears over foreign immigration were inextricably tied to anxieties regarding the migration of African Americans stateside. NRC members worked diligently to link these processes through the language of social biology. The failure of certain races to stay in their appropriate places could lead to the injection of inadequate germ plasma into the bloodstream of the republic.

Progressive social scientists also interpreted the political aspects of migration in pathological terms. Labor radicalism was seen as a social contagion and a sure sign of racial degeneration. “Bolshevists,” claimed Stoddard, “are mostly born and not made.” President Wilson worried that black soldiers would be “our greatest medium in conveying bolshevism to America.” Progressive reformers feared that southern black migrants, untethered from traditional social restraints, would fall prey to the menacing specter of “Bolshevism....which sought to enlist the colored races in its grand assault on civilization.” For Stoddard, Bolshevism’s insidious and rapacious nature was a product of its “Asiatic mind,” which saw the “very existence of superior biological values as a crime.” The “great Negro quarters of New York, Chicago, and other northern cities” were seething with ideas and emotions, “which by the power of mass contagion, may engender sudden and startling developments.” Linking fears of labor radicalism and racial

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431 *NY Times*, October, 27, 1921: 11.
pollution, Stoddard described nightmares of “red scares, yellow perils, brown hordes and black problems” consuming a fragile postwar white supremacy.⁴³²

Many African American radicals readily embraced a eugenically inspired anti-imperialism in which the “darker masses would eventually overthrow their degenerate white masters.” Davarian Baldwin argues that pan Africanists—such as Hubert Harrison, Cyril Briggs and Marcus Garvey—consistently denounced the interconnections between “colonialism, global capitalism, racial science and racist social formations in transnational metropolises.” To the dismay of white elites, the demographic and conceptual shifts of this era spilled the private lives of a “dark” proletariat onto the public streets of global cities. Drafting the manifesto for the 1921 Pan-African Congress, DuBois acknowledged these global processes and his hope for freedom from “the industrial machine and the need to judge men as men and not as material and labor.”⁴³³

To address the racial dimensions of migration, the NRC established a “Committee on Race Characters” (CRC) in the spring of 1921. Though short lived, the CRC conducted some intriguing work delineating “the relation of anthropology to Americanization.” At the University of Minnesota, Dr. Albert Jenks, Professor of Anthropology, developed an “Americanization Training Course,” under CRC auspices, to investigate “the anthropological dimensions of assimilation.” He argued “that it was not until America was rudely awakened by a time of national peril that she realized the magnitude of the task before her of assimilating the various people in her midst.” Jenks believed that in this respect “anthropology has an opportunity for paramount practical service to the nation.” Trained to “know peoples, in physiological and psychological terms,” graduates would work with social workers, police and industry to ease the

nation’s disparate populace into their proper occupational niches. Jenks’ prospective committee was especially interested in anthropological research on the Negro, or “the least authentically and commonly understood race group in America.” African Americans, as the oldest of America’s “foreign groups,” were seen as an ideal test case for determining the physiological and mental effects of assimilation on present-day ethnic groups.434

The CRC’s failure to secure proper funding soon led to calls for a new committee. In September 1922, the NRC’s “Committee on Anthropology and Psychology” recommended the establishment of a committee for the scientific study of human migration under the direction of Robert Yerkes, the man responsible for the infamous Army, IQ tests. Two months later, the “Committee on Scientific Problems of Immigration” (CSPI) held its first conference in Washington D.C. The conference was attended by some twenty individuals representing a wide range of disciplines, such as biology, economics, psychology and anthropology. Funded by the Russell Sage Fund and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, the committee’s goal was to consider, “from the view of natural science, the complex migration situation resulting from the world war and from the virtual elimination of space as a barrier to movements of men and race intermixture.”435

The CSPI ultimately proved too narrow for the transnational demands of its work. In early 1923, in order to “see the world-situation clearly and without individual, national or racial bias” members dropped their focus on “immigration” and adopted the broader designation, “Committee on the Scientific Problems of Human Migration” (CSPHM). Throughout the spring and summer of 1923, the committee sought to “speedily bring all the resources of science to bear

434 Albert Jenkes, University Training Course in Americanization or Applied Anthropology , Scientific Monthly, March 1921; Jenks to Yerkes, Suggestions for Research of the Committee on Race Characters, October, 23, 1923, NRC Correspondence, APS
435 “Selecting Immigrants’, Davenport before a preliminary meeting on Human Migration, May, 3 1920, Davenport File, APS
on the study of migration.” Members noted that considering the “important and imminent modifications of national immigration policy,” knowledge of “human traits and potentialities—individual, occupational and ethnic—” was vital. The committee requested a sum of $60,000 for studies into the psychological, anthropological and socioeconomic factors of migration. The latter two connected matters of “racial physical characteristics, normal and pathological,” to “immigration’s relation to labor supply and its distribution and relative adequacy among the different industries, trades and arts.” Committee members became convinced “that one could not form a judgment on the problem of immigration so far as it concerns the United States without a consideration of the race problem in the broadest sense.”

The CSPHM was committed to undertaking “a comprehensive biological evaluation of the processes going on in America resulting from the inflow and subsequent assimilation of a wide variety of racial groups.” Linking race to place, members drew on the work of renowned climatologist Ellsworth Huntington and his colleagues at the NRC-funded “Committee on the Atmosphere and Man.” The CSPHM, in developing its own climatologist investigations—the theory that climate was the determining factor in racial evolution and migration—relied heavily on a pre-war study by Frederick Hoffman on blacks in Canada. Hoffman had argued that “Negroes experience in Canada proves conclusively that there is no tendency on the part of the Negro to migrate to far northern latitudes nor any inherent power of successful adaption and race survival.” He found that in 1901 the black population of Canada was 17,437 against 16,877 in 1911. In the meantime, the aggregate population of Canada had enormously increased “and the environmental conditions were probably never as favorable to Negro progress in the Canadian

436 “Suggestions for Committee on Scientific Problems of Human Migration”, Jan 25 1923; Report and Recommendations of Migration Committee April, 2, 1923; Proceedings Conference on Human Migration NRC, Nov, 18, 1922, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation (LSRM) Correspondence, Rockefeller Archive Centre, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y
437 Bender, American Abyss: 64.
Dominion than they are at the present time.” Hoffman concluded that the “race is not holding its own; it is not increasing by an excess of births over deaths and in Canada as in the U.S., is distinctly subject to an excessive disease liability and mortality due to its inherited race traits.”

Within these models of environmental racial determinism, races out of place were inevitably races in decline.

NRC social scientists believed genes forged in specific environmental conditions, were the driving force of migration. Notwithstanding migration’s socioeconomic factors, observers affiliated with the CSPHM saw the instinct “to wander, or nomadism, as one with a hereditary basis.” While previous immigrants from northern Europe had made a conscious decision to emigrate, the present day hordes of colored laborers were seemingly driven by an almost “primal urge to seek new opportunities.” While the former represented the hardiest stock of the Nordic race, the latter were the “dregs of humanity.” Dan Bender argues that “climate, race, and migration transcended the nation allowing white scholars to forge a racial kinship with their European peers” in opposition to the colored hordes. Therefore, developing a transnational catalogue of racial taxonomies was vital for the “wise regulation of mass movements of mankind” and the “safe development of social biology” at home and abroad.

By 1919 there was a broad public and social scientific consensus in favor of immigrant restriction. Yet differences remained regarding the kind, stringency, and duration of such a policy. NRC members figured prominently in the deliberations of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, chaired by Congressman Albert Johnson. A former officer in the AEF, Johnson was virulently anti-Communist and also the president of the Eugenics

439 Davenport, Race Crossing Unpublished Material, Davenport Papers, APS; Bender, American Abyss: 76-78;
Research Association, which had long lobbied for immigration restrictions on “inferior” racial stocks. Johnson hired Harry Laughlin of the Eugenics Records Office, and disciple of NRC member Charles Davenport, to ensure the congressional deliberations maintained a racial focus. As the committee’s expert on race biology, Laughlin testified, “the character of a nation is determined primarily by its racial qualities; that is by the hereditary, physical, mental, and moral temperament of its people.” Citing the results of wartime intelligence testing, Laughlin argued that the melting pot could not be “allowed to boil without control” in blind pursuit of the national motto that declared all men to be equal.440

The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 constituted a profound shift in national immigration policy, from a period of relatively open European immigration to greater restrictions on the former and the reiteration of Asian exclusion. Davenport remarked that “before the war it was generally regarded as impractical to make a selection of the fit on the other side. The war has now shown the possibility of doing so.” Yet even the bill’s most ardent advocates saw it not as a solution to the immigrant invasion, but as “the beginning of a new epoch of national reconstruction and racial stabilization that would culminate in a reforged America.”441 Most importantly, the act facilitated the emergence of a singular white identity fashioned out of the nation’s white and “near white races” from Southern and Eastern Europe. Corporatist elites agreed that, given the apparent unsuitability of nonwhites as long term sources of labor, the nation should concern itself with “making that which we have doubly efficient.” Francis A. Walker’s “beaten men from beaten races” would now be transformed into sturdy and responsible

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440 Throughout his testimony Laughlin was also in close contact with Yerkes student, Professor Carl Bingham, currently conducting a study into the “internationalizing or universalizing of methods of mental measurements” under the auspicious of the CSPHM. Like Yerkes, Bingham took a positivist view of intelligence testing, believing it to be a latent, definable racial trait- a definitive index of racial fitness for American citizenship. Report and Recommendations of Committee on Scientific Problems of Human Migration, April 2, 1923, Report of CSPHM-July 1 1923, LSRM Collection Series 3, Box 58, Folder 629, Rockefeller Archive Centre

441 Slotkin, Lost Battalions: 455; Bender, American Abyss: 244.
Caucasians to stem the flow of colored labor. DuBois, in an effort to forestall the racial splintering of the international proletariat, urged black workers that “we will make America pay for her injustice to us and to the poor foreigner by pouring into the open doors of mine and factory in increasing numbers.”

In just a few short years, the Negro had replaced southern and eastern European immigrants as the primary object of American social scientific inquiry. Historians note that while “there was little question that locking the doors of Ellis Island ruptured the Mason-Dixon Line, observers still worried about blacks’ ability to withstand industrial labor.” Mass migration to the North meant that “for the first time in history the Negro had a chance, to get his hand upon the thing by which men live, to become for the first time a real factor in the world of labor.” To replace the dwindling pool of immigrant labor and escape the repressive sharecropping system of the Jim Crow South, African Americans were exhorted by NAACP officials to “COME NORTH” where the “demand for Negro labor was endless.” As the Negro problem went national, the northern dominated social sciences were forced to engage with “race contacts as present realities, not distant theories.”

Wartime evaluations of African American labor proved ambiguous. Firstly, the institution of draconian “work or fight” laws, aimed primarily at poor southern African Americans, reinforced the notion that the Negro would not work free of coercion. This anxiety grew as southern black migrants moved north into wartime industries which lacked the traditional

443 Matthew Jacobson has also argued that the “idea of a Caucasian race represents whiteness ratcheted up to a new epistemological realm of certainty.” Jacobson, *Whiteness of A Different Color*: 94; Bender, *American Abyss*: 242.
444 Guterl, *Color of Race*; 49; See Odom’s theory of the ‘Black Ulysses’ to see how this played out in the shifting labor-specifically lumber- economy of the south-and how southern blacks were also seen to be incompatible with modernity. William P. Jones, *The Tribe of Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005)
constraints of Jim Crow. Assessments of their performance varied. National Urban League officials noted that while many employers conceded the “adequacy of Negro labor,” others cited “the race’s natural inertia,” “unreliability” and “shiftlessness for high speed production” to rationalize pushing African Americans out of their “temporary” positions following the war. Officials at the War Department confidently declared, “clearly the Negro has failed to adjust himself to industrial life and must be returned to his natural occupational environment in the South.” Eventually, NUL officials were forced to admit that “the readjustment of the Negro to northern conditions is a difficult task, of course, that must be continued and intensified if the position gained during the war is not to be lost.”

African American military fitness came in for a similar battering. Despite official pronouncements by General John Pershing that blacks had “measured up to every expectation of the Commander in Chief,” expectations had been very low to begin with. Almost immediately following the armistice, black soldiers were subjected to taunts and ridicule in the mainstream press, which declared that “the darkies had merely smiled their way through the war.” Mainstream papers were filled with comic accounts of African American soldiers fleeing from their first encounter with shelling and expressing befuddlement with foreign French ways, all whilst shuffling and shucking in a stereotypical “nigger” dialect. In 1925, Ret. General Robert Lee Bullard, commander of the 92nd Negro Division “caused quite a stir” when he stated that along with being “intractably lazy” and “wholly lacking in initiative,” the men under his command generally “had no idea of what is expected of soldiers.” Bullard concluded that if one

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446 Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: 466-467; Slotkin, Lost Battalions; 405-407.

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“needed combat soldiers, and especially if you needed them in a hurry, don’t put your time upon Negroes.”\textsuperscript{447}

Negative assessments of black soldiers consistently noted African Americans’ seemingly congenital lack of willpower. The consensus amongst military officials was that Negro soldiers required harsh military discipline. Army officials justified the need for segregated units in part because of blacks’ supposed lack of soldiering qualities and because they feared that the race’s “natural torpor” would infect the ranks. The trope of “Negro lassitude” was cleverly inverted by the editors of the \textit{Eugenical News}, who simultaneously reinforced the idea of the African American worker as threat, claiming that, “the worst thing that ever happened to the area of the present United States was the bringing of large numbers of Negroes, the lowest of races, to our shores. America called for cheap labor that its whites might enjoy the luxury of the parasite which is fed by its host without effort of its own. Now we realize that this host bids fair to destroy the parasite.”\textsuperscript{448}

African Americans—especially those schooled in the Tuskegee/Hampton model of vocational uplift—challenged this thinking by casting black labor as a bulwark against the potential deluge of foreign labor poised to stream out of war ravaged Europe. While Stoddard cited “the profoundly destructive effects of colored competition upon white standards of labor and living,” Kelly Miller characterized black workers as able-bodied and law-abiding American citizens. Drawing on the prewar rhetoric of Washingtonian uplift, Miller argued it was unnecessary to look to foreign shores to offset any labor shortage when such a “large and sympathetic group was within reach.” When officials at U.S. Steel released a statement deploiring

\textsuperscript{447} Literary Digest, June 14 1919: 23.  
labor shortages due “principally to present and pending immigration laws,” Tuskegee’s Emmett Scott proposed the use of black workers. In contrast to often “defective foreign labor,” the Negro worker was “not an alien, he possessed a strong body and a real attachment to American institutions.” The NUL lamented that employers “were ill prepared to make use of Negro labor,” instead opting for “white labor of all ranks, even the most unskilled and ignorant foreigners who greet our arrival with widespread and unreasoning hostility.”

However, this increasingly dated form of racial uplift had to be adjusted to the facts of mass migration and African Americans’ experience of industrial modernity in the North. The philosopher Alain Locke, in his seminal essay, “The New Negro,” argued that the relative “newness” of the New Negro was only “because the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man,” a “creature of moral debate and historical controversy.” The Negro no longer represented the sturdy yeoman farmers of Washington’s imagination, dutifully “casting their buckets down” in their “natural” southern homeland. Locke saw the mass exodus out of the South as a social and political movement toward a “larger and more democratic chance.” Migration had transformed African Americans into a national, mobile and increasingly unknowable force.

“City Negroes:” Urbanization and the New Negro Type

Postwar assessments of black labor fitness were complicated by the ambiguous results of wartime testing, mass migration, and the physiological effects of modern urban life upon the thousands of southern black migrants surging northward. Between America’s entry into the war and the stock market crash of 1929, African Americans left the South at an average rate of 500


per day, or more than 15,000 per month. By 1930, more than a million blacks had left the region of their birth. The 1920 census revealed that, for the first time, more Americans lived in cities than in rural areas. These sprawling metropolises were draining both the nation and the world’s open spaces. The new reality was that through a “strain of peculiar racial status and the terrific pressure of modern life,” the “city creates its own types.” In the immediate postwar years, the most prominent of these was the Negro. Sociologist Robert Park claimed that African American migration out of the “caste-ridden rural south” and into cities meant that their situation could no longer be depicted as a “natural history” but would now have to be investigated as “social history” by social scientific methods. Through a speeding up of human life postwar, urban modernity was changing the mentality and physiology of black and white alike.

White elites had long viewed the modern city as a source of social and racial degeneracy. The prewar era was rife with the accounts of “old stock Americans” taking in the exotic sights, smells and sounds of urban life amongst its exotic, foreign inhabitants. However, the war provided elites with a language—eugenics—that allowed them to link an earlier rhetoric of urban reform, which located degeneracy in social causes, to one rooted almost exclusively in heredity. Madison Grant argued that the Nordic type was handicapped by a natural aversion to industrialism and urban life: “the cramped factory and crowded city quickly weed him (the Nordic) out, while the little brunet Mediterranean can work a spindle, set type, sell ribbons or push a clerk’s pen far better.” According to Grant, the “somewhat heavy Nordic blond who needs exercise meat and air cannot live under Ghetto conditions.” In the postwar era, Warren Thompson of Cornell University noted that “city life seems to be unfavorable to the raising of

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even moderate sized old stock families among all except the poor.” By this time, the Caucasian had displaced the Nordic and the new Negro had emerged as a leading urban type; both trends reinforced the notion of the city as a source of racial degeneration.\(^{453}\)

African American thinkers were not immune to eugenic interpretations of urbanization as detrimental to racial progress. Postwar black observers drew heavily on prewar investigations, such as the Atlanta University Studies, which predated DuBois’ *The Philadelphia Negro (1899).* Led by R.R. Wright, the Atlanta studies were an early effort by African American social scientists to determine whether there was a causal relationship between biology, urban poverty and vice. Although environmentalism eventually carried the day over genetics, researchers at Atlanta failed to achieve complete consensus. Those that rejected environmental causes tended to use class and cultural analyses, citing working class African Americans’ failure to measure up to white middle class norms of respectability. Eugene Harris of Fisk University, in “The Physical Condition of the Race: Whether Dependent Upon Social Conditions or Environment,” posited that a genetic disposition rooted in slavery and manifested in class as the reason for blacks’ failure to acclimatize to modern urban life. Despite its rigorous empirical character, even DuBois’ *Philadelphia Negro* acknowledged the ways in which urbanity seemingly exacerbated the degenerate traits and tendencies of “the lower classes of Negroes.”\(^{454}\)

Less than a decade later, many African American social scientists began to reject the links between urbanism and racial degeneracy. George Haynes saw the “increasing urbanization of the colored race as an inevitable process.” Haynes saw urbanization not as a sign of racial decline, but as a sign of racial progress. Black migration to urban centers was driven by the same circumstances which drove whites: “the divorce of workers from the soil brought on by


\(^{454}\) Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars:* 23-25.
technological advances which reduced the relative need for agricultural workers; the shift from handicrafts to the factory and the subsequent growth of commercial and industrial centers.”

Haynes rejected Hoffman’s racial essentialism, claiming that

the problems which grow out of his (blacks) maladjustment to the new urban environment are solvable by methods similar to those that help other elements of the population…improvement in the living and working conditions has its effect upon the health and morals of Negroes just as it has in the case of other elements of the population. Good housing, pure milk and water supply, sufficient clothing which adequate wages allow, street and sewer sanitation, have their direct effect upon health and physique.455

African Americans’ continued to push for social and environmental models of the black urban experience during the war and well into the postwar years. Key initiatives included the NUL’s “National Negro Health Week,” launched in conjunction with the U.S. Public Health Service. Joined by agencies such as the National Negro Business League, the American Social Hygiene Association, American Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A., the organizers of “Health Week” linked job advancement to health. Keeping fit and maintaining a healthy lifestyle was the key to not only “reduce the cost of preventable disease and death, but to also increase vitality, resistance to disease, and the well being, earning capacity, and service of the healthy citizen to home, community, and country.” During the first week in April—to commemorate the birthday (April 5) of the late Booker T. Washington—officials from these various agencies held workshops, lectures and film screenings to educate African American communities throughout the nation (specifically in the north) on the importance of hygiene and sanitation at home and in the workplace. Moralistic approaches to health were being slowly displaced by mechanistic ones that

455 Whereas Hoffman saw cities as the Negro's graveyard, Haynes saw the atomizing effect of urban centers as blacks sole hope for survival in the modern world. For an extended critique by Haynes of Hoffman's index of the African American death rate in southern cities see Haynes, Negro at Work: 34-38.
posited the “the human being as living machine” and the need to place health and hygiene along “modern scientific lines.”

Developing health capital was instrumental in the NUL’s broader strategy of promoting efficiency as the key to eliminating workplace racism. A fitter worker was a more successful worker with ever greater occupational opportunities. NUL officials argued that the limited gains made by African American workers during the war demonstrated the ability of market forces to mitigate prejudice. The systematic distribution of health expertise and vocational training was deemed essential to racial uplift. Led by Charles Johnson, the NUL’s Department of Research and Investigations, along with Opportunity magazine, were at the forefront of research on postwar African American workers. Founded in January 1923, Opportunity was home to a new generation of African American social scientists and social workers. In addition to providing a forum for fledgling literary talent, the magazine represented a break from prewar reformism through its “desire to approach...new problems with a new increased scientific technique for dealing with them.”

The wartime rise of scientism led to a resurgence in hereditarianism, which tended to chart migratory processes in broad strokes. Joe W. Trotter Jr. argues that while scholarship during the Great Migration “placed black migration within a larger historical context,” this often came at the “expense of examining this process in depth over time.” Postwar progressives tried to reconcile this disconnect by charting black migration and urbanization in explicitly physiological terms. The editors of The Survey characterized the migration and urbanization of

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456 Program of the Eighth Annual Negro Health Week, April 2 to 8, 1922, NUL Papers, NARA.
458 Francille Wilson, Segregated Scholars: 152-153.
“tropical colored laborers” out of their natural rural southern habitat as a “physiologically violent act” with irrevocable historical consequences. For many observers, blacks encounter with the stimuli of the modern city revealed itself in explicitly physiological terms. This assumption guided the work of Melville Herskovits, who unsuccessfully attempted to measure a cross section of Harlem’s inhabitants “to assess the short and long term effects of migration on Negro Physiognomy.” Building on Franz Boas’ earlier work on immigrant physiognomy, Herskovits anticipated that environment, not biology, was the determining factor in blacks’ urban development. Herskovits corresponded frequently with Boas on this proposed project but it never came to fruition due to a lack of financial resources. Nevertheless, Herskovits’ abortive project reveals a shift amongst anthropologists, from hereditary to cultural models of racial difference and racial development.

African American thinkers also blended hereditary and cultural critiques of black urbanity. In The Black Worker in the City, Charles Johnson argued that blacks, “by tradition, and probably by temperament” were the antithesis of the modern urban type, their “métier was agriculture.” Adopting a hereditarian review, Johnson claimed that the average black body was literally incompatible with modern work processes, citing “the in-complex gestures of unskilled manual labor and even domestic service; the broad, dully sensitive touch of body and hands trained to groom and nurse the soil, develop distinctive physical habits and a musculature appropriate to simple processes.” Johnson saw these processes in explicitly spatial terms, claiming, “it is a motley group which is now in ascendancy in the city. The picturesqueness of the South, the memory of pain, the warped unsophistication, are laid upon the surface of the city.

460 Gershenhorn, Melville Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge: 111.
in a curious pattern.” Alain Locke echoed this cultural model of black migration as “the Negro’s deliberate flight not only from the countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern.”

Migration and rapid urbanization reopened debates about the black birth rate, the statistic previously cited to argue for blacks’ imminent extinction. Indeed, following the war, popular ideas “about Negro health and extinction had suffered severe shock in the light of improved medical science.” According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of African Americans nearly doubled between 1870 and 1920, leading the editors of the World’s Work to confidently declare, “Death now awaits the hope that the Negro will die.” Between 1900 and 1910, the decennial increase in black population was around 11 percent, with ten million African Americans making up roughly 10 percent of the nation’s population in 1910. Although this rate was commensurate with whites—both native and foreign born—the black birth rate still remained well below that of whites for the next ten years. Whether due to birth control, poverty, war, clerical error or the postwar influenza epidemic, the 1920 census revealed that African Americans entered the third decade of the century at just under 10 percent of the national total. Though the race may have avoided extinction, to many observers it appeared to be stagnant.

Theories of black extinction endured in the postwar era, especially amongst African Americans. As late as 1924, The Forum contended that African American migrants to the North would “gradually die out, for there he seems to lose his fecundity.” Marcus Garvey concurred, claiming that “the Negro is dying out, and he is going to die faster in the next fifty years.” The historian Carter Woodson conceded that on “account of this sudden change of the Negroes from

one climate to another and the hardships of more unrelenting toil, many of them have been unable to resist pneumonia, bronchitis and tuberculosis.” However, Woodson was quick to point out that many of the reports on black migrants’ poor health “have been greatly exaggerated.”

The mainstream press peppered analysis of the Great Migration with accounts of migrants freezing to death on the cold and unforgiving streets of Northern cities. NUL officials agreed: “it is a strange fact that in the cities of the North, the native born Negro population, as if in biological revolt against its environment, barely perpetuates itself. For whatever reason, there is lacking that lusty vigor of increase which has nearly trebled the Negro population as a whole.” Within the past sixty years, the natural increase of this old Northern stock, apart from migrations, has been negligible.”

For many African Americans—especially those affiliated with nationalist separatist groups like the UNIA—this lack of fecundity was linked to economic pressures and a lack of racial integrity. According to the editors of the UNIA’s Negro World, the remedy for blacks’ inferior socioeconomic position called for “clean and orderly sexual relations” as a basis for a self sufficient black capitalism. Strong and productive races maintained their racial purity. UNIA members infused the discourse of contemporary political economy with the tenants of black nationalism and eugenics. In contrast, UNIA critics, such as DuBois and Kelly Miller, couched their eugenic impulses in the rhetoric of class and fears of “the masses” out-breeding “the classes.” For the populist UNIA, the focus was exclusively racial. Linking economic uplift with racial integrity, Garvey warned that “if we do not seriously reorganize ourselves as a people...our

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465 Charles Johnson, The Negro Worker in the City
days in civilization are numbered.” Garvey’s vision of a martial and masculine “race never conquered” was one of undiluted blackness.466

_The New Negro and the Caucasian: Race Mixing and the Rise of Postwar Bi-Racialism_

One of the most significant forms of racial knowledge to emerge from wartime evaluations was biracialism. Ultimately, postwar debates over the effects of migration and urbanization on African American workers rested on whether a clearly defined Negro type existed. Through the discourse of hybridism, NRC anthropologists became fixated on what Melville Herskovits termed the “provenience of the African ancestry of the American Negro.” Wartime evaluations had convinced anthropologists that racial physiology was a reliable index for measuring race and industrial racial fitness. Anthropologists were especially interested in tracing these various types over space and time through the narratives of industrial evolution. NRC officials claimed that to “forge a nation out of disparate peoples, Americans must realize that this is part of a ceaseless warfare with the stubborn biological forces of nature.” National health was contingent on eliminating any biological irregularities, such as mixed race peoples, from the republican body politic.467

“Race crossing” and its relation to labor fitness preoccupied the postwar NRC. A.E. Jenks noted that the “question of so-called disharmony in crosses demands attention more urgently than almost any other, as no nation can survive except under the conditions nature imposes.”468 Scientism, labor unrest and anti-colonialism transformed local discourses of “miscegenation”

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466 Guterl, _Color of Race:_ 132-133.
467 ‘NRC Committee on the Negro Preliminary Report’: 2, NRC Correspondence, APS; William McDougall, a British member of the NRC argued that America’s “tardy” entry into the war- “if it was right in 1917 then it was equally right in 1914”- was due to the, “lack of a national mind; chiefly because it comprised many individuals and some large communities that were only very partially assimilated.” William McDougall, ‘The Problems of Unassimilated Groups’, Proceedings of the Conference on Human Migration, Nov, 18, 1922, LSRM Papers, Rockefeller Archive Centre
468 A.E. Jenks to R, Yerkes, ‘Suggested Research Projects of the Committee on Race Characters’, October 23, 1923, NRC Papers, Race Characters File, APS
into a transnational phenomenon which made rigorous scientific analysis necessary. Recent scholarship on American empire has elucidated the links between domestic anti-miscegenation statues, their colonial counterparts, and the respective role of each as a transnational node of racial labor control. At home and abroad, these methods of sexual surveillance were couched in the rhetoric of hygiene and carried out under the auspices of public health programs. In the fall of 1926, the NRC began arranging a “Committee on the American Negro.” While the committee was designed to focus on the “anthropological and psychological dimensions of the Negro,” the real attention was on “how far race mixture and race contact may affect social hygiene and our civilization.” Though African Americans made up approximately a tenth of the population, officials feared that a supposed rise in race mixing had led to blacks being “perhaps the least known of any part.”

The Committee on the American Negro was a who’s who of the era’s self-described race experts: Charles Davenport, Ales Hardwick, E.A. Hooton and committee chairman R.J. Terry. Surprisingly, Boas—the leading purveyor of anti-racist social anthropology and scourge of the eugenics set—was actively sought out for membership. Boas was present at the committee’s founding meeting in Philadelphia in December of 1926 and even seconded the recommendation of Davenport and Hrdlicka that the committee’s first order of business should be a “bibliography of prior and current research on the American Negro.” Though the committee retained a commitment to original research, many felt this was beyond its financial and institutional means. Instead, the committee committed itself to the consolidation of knowledge regarding “the

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469 Warwick Anderson, “Pacific Crossings: Imperial Logics in U.S. Public Health Programs” in Alfred McCoy, Francisco Scarano, Editors, Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); NRC Meeting of the Committee on a Study of the American Negro March, 19, 1927, NRC Correspondence, APS
biological, psychological and physiological aptitudes and aspects of the full-blood Negro and of the mixed population.\(^{470}\)

Since the antebellum era, the mulatto had been characterized as morally, mentally and physically deficient, owing to a mixture of “discordant strains.” Though mixed race peoples were often perceived as intelligent or cunning due to their superior white blood, they were invariably seen as physically feeble and lacking in fecundity; this was a result of the savage and virile physiology of their African forbearers having been diluted by an overtaxed white intellect. Following reconstruction the mulatto came to embody all the dislocations, violence and racial fears of the era. In *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, Frederick Hoffman attributed African American’s high mortality rates to increasing levels of miscegenation. Throughout popular culture—most famously in Thomas L. Dixon’s novel *The Clansman*—images of the mulatto as a social and sexual threat persisted. The cultural practice of endogamy was rigidly observed and enforced by most blacks and whites to prevent social mobility across racial lines.\(^{471}\)

Postwar Negrophobes and black nationalists found common cause in the belief that race crossing was socially and biologically detrimental to racial industrial progress. In the fall of 1923 Garvey wrote to John J. Davis, the Secretary of Labor, on the subject of the “Negro problem.” Noting that “the 20th century Negro in America was different from the Negro of the last century,” the UNIA president posed a series of questions to Davis designed to gauge the department’s commitment to Blacks’ repatriation to Africa. Garvey linked race purity to industrial advance, querying Davis as to whether he believed “that the Negro should be encouraged to develop a society of his own for exclusive social intercourse” along with a drive to

\[^{470}\] NRC Meeting of the Committee on a Study of the American Negro March, 19, 1927, NRC Correspondence, APS

\[^{471}\] Ibid.
“create positions of his own in industry and commerce in a country of his own.” Michelle Mitchell notes that postwar “uplift ideology adapted quite readily to the period’s characteristic eugenic thinking,” specifically in Garveyite calls for racial purity as a means to racial progress.472

A concurrent strain of thought—although it was a decidedly minority one—held that race crossing was a positive practice. Motivated by personal and political considerations, DuBois had long railed against descriptions of the enfeebled and infertile mulatto. However, in an era that equated racial vigor with manly strength, DuBois’ demeanor as a refined and somewhat precious intellectual often undermined his attempts to argue for the vigor of mixed race peoples. Franz Boas, in his anthropological work for the prewar Immigration Commission, argued that race mixing was the only way to instill a much needed vitality in “an industrially and socially (not biologically) inferior black population.” Years later, in a piece entitled, “The Problem of the American Negro,” he reaffirmed his belief that since racism rested on social awareness of differences—exacerbated by economic competition—then the solution was to diminish these differences as much as possible. Yet even Boas, the famed anti-racist and cultural relativist, saw amalgamation as a one way street which entailed the disappearance of African Americans into an colorless, and by default white, mass populace. For Boas and many of his social scientific peers, the mulatto was merely a detour on the road to whiteness.473

Prewar theories regarding the relation of race mixing to increased rates of venereal disease, criminality and diminished vital capacity were famously expounded by Frederick

472 Garvey to Davis, October, 4, 1923, RG 174, General Records of the Department of Labor Files 1907-1942 Box 19 Entry 1, NARA, Washington D.C.; Mitchell, Righteous Propagation: 230
473 DuBois produced a striking visual rejoinder to these characterisations through a photographic exhibit of “respectable Negro types” at the 1900 Paris Exposition, later published as Health and Physique of the American Negro (1906). Shawn Michelle Smith, Photography on the Color Line; Degler, Social Darwinism in American Social Thought: 79-81
Hoffman in *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*. In 1915, Hoffman traveled to Hawaii as part of his efforts to gain a clearer understanding of the “vicissitudes of racial health and race mixing on a global scale.” Upon arrival in the islands, Hoffman was disturbed by the prevalence of race-mixing amongst the natives which had produced “an envenerated race beset by poverty, drug use and an ‘impotent lassitude.’” All of the vices of the uncivilized were present: “the neglect of infants by native mothers, the gradual diminution of the fish supply and the spread of loathsome disease (TB) have been reinforced by the newly-acquired vice of opium smoking.” Moreover, the mixed Hawaiians “lacked the racial vitality and self-control of the Asiatic consumers and the results of this vice are therefore the more disastrous.”

Hoffman’s travels in the Pacific and the West Indies seemed to him to support the prevailing belief of progressive era social scientists in the primacy of race and racial admixture “in determining an individual’s life span and resistance to disease.” Unless something was done (Hoffman was unclear as to what), “there are probably now living men of voting age who will see the last Hawaiian” as this “mongrelized race” followed the American Negro into extinction. Hoffman’s sense of racial noblesse oblige led him to conclude that although “the colored man was not nor would ever be the equal of the white man,” a “just sense of international race relations depended upon the precise recognition of inherent and permanent inequality in physical, mental and moral traits.”

Wartime assessments of mixed-race peoples further complicated narratives of African American labor fitness. Testing revealed that whites and blacks were physiologically more alike than different. Evaluations of white and African American soldiers returning from France in

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474 "Travels in Hawaii", Frederick Hoffman Papers, Box 13, Butler Library Rare Book and Manuscripts, Columbia University.
475 Ibid.
476 "Race Pathology", Frederick Hoffman Papers, Box 11, Butler Library Rare Book and Manuscripts, Columbia University.
1919 showed that mulattos possessed a more “well defined musculature and proportionality of appendages” than their white peers. Tests showed that, on average, African Americans, both mixed and “pure bred,” had many physical advantages over whites. Blacks, broadly defined, were much less prone than whites to suffer from defects of the spine, obesity, deaf mutism, deafness and diseases of the eyes, nose and throat. Mulattoes’ high scores on the army IQ tests recalled previous theories of racial hybrids’ apparent mind and body imbalance. Charles Davenport characterized mulattos as more “restless on the whole than the Negro and less easily satisfied with his lot—possibly due to a disharmony introduced by the cross.” Robert Park diagnosed the mulatto as a “marginal man” consigned to an ineffectual existence because of his inability to join the supposedly “superior white group” or create a separate caste from the “pure-blooded Negro.”

Examinations of race mixing at the high tide of American nativism revealed key cracks in the white leviathan. Fascination with the mulatto evinced lingering anxiety over the stability of racial categories. In 1890, the census bureau made its first and only attempt to divide peoples of African ancestry along the lines of “negro,” “mulatto,” “octoroon” and “quadroon.” Following 1920, the category of “mulatto” disappeared altogether from the federal census. The editors of Opportunity ruefully remarked, “men who, by and by, ask for the Negro will be told—‘there they go, clad in white man’s skins.’” Anthropologists dismissed arguments for the mulatto as a new or distinct race, arguing that mixed race individuals “possessed a low degree of physical variability” and would eventually be subsumed into the larger mass of African Americans. Yet, defining the mulatto as Negro—via the one drop rule of blackness—required shifting the

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physiological and social boundaries of both blackness and whiteness. Speaking to an NRC conference on “Racial Differences,” Dr. A. Cole of Columbia remarked, “if we do find changes occurring in bodies of individuals who make up our immigrant groups; if our Negro is changing; if blending is going on, it must lead to radical readjustments in our concept of race.”479

From the black belt of Dixie, to the cane fields of Jamaica, to the law chambers of Virginia, NRC anthropologists saw mixed race peoples as unsettling avatars of racial modernity. Previous social scientific assessments of racial labor fitness had been exercises in mutual negation; aimed at determining the work races could not, or would not, do in relation to other races. Social scientists hoped that an evaluation of racially “in between peoples” would allow for a more definitive appraisal of the respective laboring fitness of the New Negro and Caucasian.480 The logic of Jim Crow led anthropologists to posit the mulatto as a literal mix of black and white types, rather than as a new racial type. Stoddard described “racial mongrels” as those “for whom in every cell of their bodies is the battleground of jarring heredities.”481 For observers across the color line, the “race—or more specifically the Negro—problem” was a matter of social biology best mediated through the mulatto.

Members of the Committee on the American Negro were eager to build on wartime intelligence testing to chart the contours of race mixing. In 1925, under the auspices’ of the Committee on Human Migration and Race Characters, Dr. Joseph Patterson of George Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee conducted studies on local school children to gauge the relation

479 Gershenhorn, Melville Herskovits: 40-45; Dr. Cole Conference on Racial Differences, Washington D.C. Feb, 1928, NRC Files, APS Material
480 Otto Klineberg, a graduate of McGill and professor of psychology at Columbia, attempted to compare southern and northern “pure and mixed” African Americans “with reference to speed and accuracy of mental and physical performance to determine whether or not there was a racial norm independent of cultural envoir.” However like many NRC studies, Klineberg’s faltered from lack of financial resources. NRC Division of Anthropology and Psychology Committee on the Negro, Preliminary Report 1926, Committee on the American Negro File, APS
481 Stoddard, Rising Tide of Color
of intelligence to race difference and “racial ingenuity.” Building on the work of Yerkes, Patterson developed medical models of the “maladjusted” mulatto as a means to trace the definitive outlines of black and white intelligence and their respective “aptitude for modern civilization.”\textsuperscript{482} Patterson ignored Yerkes caveat that “these intelligence tests do not measure occupational fitness nor educational attainment; they measure intellectual ability which has been shown to be important in estimating military value.”\textsuperscript{483}

Notwithstanding mulattoes high test scores on the army IQ tests, Patterson believed that intelligence testing engendered “a naturalistic attitude in a community toward behavior and the success or failure of individuals in particular.” As people came to feel that accomplishment was based “upon innate characters with some degree of training, rather than the haphazard factors and arbitrary volitions of individuals” racial hierarchies could be preserved. Patterson stressed the need, when comparing races or racial hybrids, to compare the percentage of different occupational classes. A committed eugenicist, Patterson felt that inter and intra-racial testing was key to allowing various races to “regulate the selection of factors for the production of desirable types,” thereby eliminating “maladjusted strains” like the mulatto.\textsuperscript{484}

NRC investigations of “race crosses,” in both a national and transnational context, allowed social scientists to reconcile African Americans’ newfound status in industrial evolution with the need to strictly maintain segregation at home and reinforced whiteness abroad. At home or aboard, deviation from the “natural laws” of racial integrity was seen as both a cause and effect of industrial underdevelopment. Charles Davenport defined “hybridized people” as a

\textsuperscript{482} Patterson to Yerkes, May, 20, 1924, Yerkes Papers, Correspondence File, APS; E.H. Fish, ‘Human Engineering’, \textit{Journal of Applied Psychology}: 262.

\textsuperscript{483} Gould, \textit{Mismeasure of Man}: 228-229.

\textsuperscript{484} Patterson to Yerkes, May, 20, 1924. Yerkes Papers, Correspondence File, APS; Patterson, Conference on Racial Differences, The Division of Anthropology and Psychology NRC Washington D.C. Feb. 25-26, 1928, NRC Papers, APS.
“badly put together people and a dissatisfied, restless, ineffective people.” Despite the body’s “great capacity for self adjustment it fails to overcome bad hereditary combinations.” The lingering influence of climatology led social scientists to consistently link inferior or sluggish tropical labor with racial admixture. For evidence of the deleterious effects of race mixing on a society’s industrial evolution, NRC members turned to “the indolent republics and colonies” of the Caribbean and of Central and South America. Latin America offered a good “field for the study of racial crosses...as the social environment is much more uniform, there being in some countries little or no race prejudice and discrimination of the sort that is alleged to prevent the Negro and the Mulatto in the U.S. from ‘coming into their own.’”

Anthropologists viewed the mulatto as a canary in the evolutionary mineshaft—a cautionary tale of social, economic, and biological decline. Fittingly, the mulatto became a focus for anthropologists as a part of a discipline that Patrick Brantlinger describes as a “science of mourning” devoted to collecting and conserving the remnants of dying peoples. Even before the war, the socioeconomic imperatives of global white supremacy had reduced the mulatto to a legal, social and biological anachronism. The most prominent scholarly treatment of this process in a global context was Eugen Fischer’s *Rehobother Bastards and the Problem of Miscegenation Among Humans* (1913), which was based on research on Germany’s East African colonies. After the war, Fischer’s was followed by L.R. Sullivan, who produced *Half Blood Sioux* (1920) and Columbia’s Clark Wissler, who wrote *Distribution of Stature in the United States* (1924). A compatriot of Boas, Wissler believed racial admixture to be rampant throughout the American population, even going so far to put “the negro” of Davenport’s *Army Anthropology* in mocking quotation marks. Subsequent studies in the field included *Mestizos of Kisar* (1927) by E.

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485 Brazil was seen as particularly notable in this respect. Davenport “The Effects of Race Intermingling” *Proceedings of American Philosophical Society*, Volume 56, Number 4, 1922: 366.
Rodewaldt, Dunn’s *Hawaiian Hybrids* (1928) and Melville Herskovits with *Race Crossing in America* (1928).

Anthropologists saw the tropics, or the rural south, as a kind of racial laboratory where the natural laws of racial heredity prevailed, unfettered by the artificial social restraints of modern industrial civilization. Social scientists, regardless of their area of study, believed that the “primitive races provided good opportunities for strictly scientific studies of mortality problems. Until such races come into contact with civilized man they generally present a healthy, robust and vigorous appearance.” In March 1926, the Carnegie Institution of Washington accepted a gift from an anonymous donor, who requested an investigation into “the problem of race crossing, with special reference to its significance for the future of any country containing a mixed population.” Carnegie’s Department of Genetics, in conjunction with the NRC, appointed an advisory committee of: Davenport, E.L. Thorndike and Robert Yerkes’ former assistant, W.V. Bingham. Morris Steggerda, a promising young zoology student at the University of Illinois “with excellent training in genetics and psychology” was appointed chief field investigator. In the summer of 1926 Steggerda and Davenport traveled to Jamaica to see firsthand the effects of race mixing on the nation’s industrial health.

Jamaica's proximity, common language, varied demographics and co-operative colonial authorities made it an ideal source of study for American racial thinkers. Whereas Haiti occupied pride of place in the cultural imagination of New Negro internationalists—especially following U.S. occupation of the island in 1915—Jamaica was the destination of choice for white social scientists. Anthropologists like Herskovits had conducted field work on the island for years. In

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fact, Herskovits was largely responsible for convincing the NRC and the Carnegie Foundation to agree to Davenport and Steggerda’s proposal for research on the island. The ubiquitous Hoffman had visited Jamaica and Cuba in late 1916 to conduct an investigation into tropical mortality. Hoffman found that much like blacks stateside, blacks in the islands suffered from poor respiratory health due to supposedly innate physiological deficiencies like diminished lung capacity. He had argued that rates of tuberculosis and syphilis in Jamaica were comparable to those amongst American blacks. Thanks to Hoffman’s efforts, Prudential declined premiums to the non-white populace of the West Indies well into the late 1940’s.\(^{488}\)

The NRC’s plans for Jamaica were ambitious; they planned “a study of Negroes and mulattoes in comparison with whites living in the same locality, with special reference to their innate qualities, fitting them for carrying on modern civilization.” Along with anthropometric and mental measurements, Steggerda was eager to obtain samples of basal metabolism—a measurement of oxygen consumption, blood pressure and body temperature believed to be the best index of an individual’s level of nutrition and vital activity. At the outset, Steggerda suspected that the “racial metabolism of Jamaican blacks and browns” would be much lower than that of whites from the temperate zone, confirming the former’s apparent “tropical lassitude.” Given that 85% of the island’s population lived in rural districts working in the production of sugar and other foodstuffs, measurements of agricultural workers were key for producing a representative population sample. Davenport believed that because “the entire population depends—in one manner or another—upon the fruit of the soil for its livelihood this

\(^{488}\) Hoffman had argued that, “the difference in mortality of the two races is not so pronounced as between the white and colored populations of American cities, but is sufficiently large to establish substantially the same race tendency to premature death among the colored population of the West Indies that we meet with among the colored population of this country.” In the case of Jamaica, Hoffman was far more willing to ascribe this to the poor and unhygienic living conditions in which the island’s colored majority lived, rather than any ‘innate’ racial traits. Hoffman, *Race Traits*, 69-71.
unoubtedly has an effect upon the physical measurements of the population.” The bulk of initial measurements were to be conducted at the island’s schools and municipal institutions—spaces that “lent themselves most readily to scientific work”—before proceeding to an analysis of the agricultural communities.\footnote{489} Arriving in Kingston, Davenport and Steggerda immediately made contact with the local colonial authorities. The U.S. State Department put them in contact with the island’s Assistant Colonial Secretary, Superintending Medical Officer, the Director of Education and officials of the Jamaica Hookworm Commission of the Rockefeller International Health Board. The Americans toured the Kingston Hospital, penitentiary and lunatic asylum and were assured that staff members and inmates would both be made available for measurements. Davenport and Steggerda found their keenest supporter in one H.J. Newman, the principal of Mico Training College. Founded in 1834, Mico College was a small training school for male teachers and subsequently modeled along the lines of Hampton and Tuskegee, although with less emphasis on vocational training. Steggerda and Davenport measured the entire student body—“fifteen Negros and forty-six mulattos”—and used the school as the primary site of their operations because of its central location and ability to house the bulky apparatus required for measuring basal metabolism.\footnote{490} From September 1926 to October 1927, Steggerda conducted his field work with occasional help from Davenport, who frequently shuttled between Jamaica and the States. In December 1926, Steggerda returned to Cold Spring Harbor and presented his initial findings to the NRC and Carnegie Institute fellows in New York. Following these meetings, it was arranged that physical anthropological data should be collected for fifty adults of each sex of three groups:\footnote{489} Conference on Racial Differences’, NRC Committee on Anthropology, Fall 1928, NRC Files, APS; Davenport, Race Crossing in Jamaica: 289-291.\footnote{490} Ibid: 10-12.
“pure-blooded negro, mulatto and white, from the same social or occupational level if possible.” Steggerda was also to acquire data for a developmental series exclusively on negroes and mulattos. In January, Steggerda returned to Jamaica, where he spent the next ten months traveling throughout the island measuring all variety of its inhabitants. Steggerda’s final reports totaled approximately 8,000 sheets. The records were scored as they were received and codes for each trait were tabulated and adapted to Hollerith punch cards similar to those used in wartime evaluations of recruits.491

Davenport and Steggerda’s findings—published in Race Crossing in Jamaica (1929)—focused on five factors: evidence of increased variability in race characters, evidence of dominance or recessiveness, appearance of new qualities, social traits and “evidence of hybrid vigor.” Summarizing their findings, Steggerda and Davenport found that amongst the traits in which Blacks and Whites differed genetically, “Browns” (peoples of mixed race) were quite variable. No evidence of dominance or recessiveness of any particular traits was found, nor did Jamaica's Negros exhibit any new genetic qualities or mutations. Given the seeming persistence of African traits and tendencies, “the burden of proof is placed on those who deny fundamental differences in mental capacity between Gold Coast Negros and Europeans.” In terms of mental capacity, Browns on average were found to be “intermediate in proportions between whites and blacks....though an excessive percent seemingly failed to be able to utilize their native (read white) endowment.” Assessing racial hybridity, the authors curtly concluded, “no evidence of hybrid vigor is found in Browns.”492

According to the authors, heterosis, or “hybrid vigor,” occurred when the union of two races—both of which were unable to express their full developmental potential—produced a

491 Ibid.
compensatory capacity for growth in their offspring. Typically, evidence of heterosis materialized in the first generation of hybrids. Though hybrid vigor was readily apparent in nature—especially in varieties of maize and cotton—observers doubted whether the same held true for humans. Mixed race peoples were constantly derided as infecund and lazy, while simultaneously vilified as insatiable sexual deviants. In the fall of 1927 Davenport began a correspondence with the efficiency consultant firm of Harrington Emerson. During an extensive correspondence, Davenport and Emerson mused on the potential benefits of race crossing. Emerson argued that “as with seedlings, extraordinary diversity, some being far above the parent stocks in excellence often occurs.” Emerson—a white man—offered a rare endorsement of race mixing: “the line of the Dumas in three generations showed what an infusion of Negro blood could do.” Davenport and Emerson agreed that under “proper supervised breeding” in specific environments, hybrids could possibly exhibit “greater adaptive social and industrial powers than their pure-bred ancestors.”

However, this was a minority view amongst contemporary social scientists and represented a mere, albeit intriguing, detour in Davenport’s generally consistent hereditarian world view. Davenport’s work in Jamaica disabused him of the idea that racial hybrids possessed a kind of “beneficial adaptability.” The basal metabolism records—the most accurate index of vital capacity—indicated that “Browns” registered slightly below both Blacks and Whites. Davenport noted that while mulattoes tested between whites and blacks in terms of “physical proportions and mental capacity,” an “excessive number seemed not to be able to utilize their native endowment.” This data seemingly confirmed popular conceptions about “enfeebled

493 Employing pre-war models of eugenics, Emerson argued that racial traits and tendencies resided in the genes: “The pure Aryan as I know him is essentially coarse minded, his blasphemy is hideous, his obscenity disgusting, his drunkenness brutal. He might be benefited by a blend with a race in which blasphemy is pleasantly familiar, obscenity only piquant, and intoxication delightful.” Emerson to Davenport- October 1927, Davenport Papers, Correspondence, APS.
mulattos” lacking both fecundity and vitality. Moreover, Jamaica’s racial demographics—the “undiluted Africanisms of its Negroes” and its small yet “pure European” population—meant that its mixed population comprised a clear mix of “warring identities” that were entirely incompatible with one another. Davenport and Steggerda argued that the insidious effects of race mixing transcended national boundaries, and they hoped to apply their findings as incontrovertible evidence for the need to maintain and expand prohibitions against miscegenation stateside.494

Just as anthropometry and vocational rehabilitation were intended to fit blacks into their proper occupational or social niche, anthropological analysis of race mixing was driven by the need to link racial form to function and reestablish stark racial labor hierarchies in the postwar labor economy. NRC members saw the Negro—either in his “pure” or “mixed” form—as either a prisoner of his environment, his biology or both. Based on wartime evaluations, postwar social scientists anticipated that “homogeneity in occupation is directly related to the physical traits of groups.”495 Dissecting the economic foundations of postwar American race relations, the NUL’s Abram Harris noted, “the apologetic school of American race relations considers the social distance between white and black Americans as conforming to a natural order of preordained and inescapable physical, mental, and moral differences.”496 For NRC officials, developing a catalogue of racial labor typologies therefore seemed possible and necessary to maintain postwar American efficiency.

This utopian vision of racial labor control was complicated by NRC anthropologists’ experiences in the West Indies. In Jamaica, race mixture seemingly led to “social and

494 Ibid; Davenport, Race Crossing in Jamaica  
495 Davenport, Conference on Racial Differences, The Division of Anthropology and Psychology NRC Washington D.C. Feb. 25-26, 1928, NRC Papers, APS  
occupational stratification based on a degree of white blood which interferes with racial solidarity." Observers felt that because biological imperatives were not driving peoples to self-segregate along racial lines, legal and de facto Jim Crow was needed stateside and abroad.

Melville Herskovits, through his own work on race-mixing, confirmed eugenicists’ worst fears, arguing that “the very term ‘Negro’ is social rather than racial [and, as in the United States,] means ‘not all white.’” Herskovits anticipated the messy cultural pluralism of the 1930’s. He accurately characterized the faltering hereditarian bi-racialism of the postwar era not as white versus black, but as a race to the bottom meant to determine who was definitively not white and who, therefore, was precluded from the benefits of white privilege.

The regulatory initiatives of the Progressive era, and their draconian wartime manifestations, sapped the public desire for greater government control over social policy. In the spring of 1929, just prior to the publication of Race Crossing in Jamaica, the Committee on the American Negro disbanded. In March, Chairman R.J. Terry presented his resignation to Davenport and Boas on the pretext that “someone in the east who is in closer touch with the foundations will assume this function.” In reality, the committee had ceased functioning by the fall of 1928. Like its predecessors, the CRC and CSPHM, the Committee on the American Negro failed to secure adequate funding and maintain any kind of institutional stability. The various studies undertaken by its members, the majority of which remained incomplete, were often conducted under the auspices of their respectively better endowed academic or philanthropic foundations.

The NRC’s drive to create a clearing-house of racial knowledge and develop a racial science defined by method and oriented to racial labor control floundered on the shoals of postwar antistatism. Despite the NRC’s efforts to link social biology to national efficiency, and

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497 U.G. Weatherly, “The West Indies as a Sociological Laboratory, The American Journal of Sociology
499 Terry to Davenport, March 1929; Terry to Boas, March 1929, NRC Correspondence File, APS
to link racial form to racial function, there was little aptitude on the part of lawmakers and the public to fund or facilitate the necessary studies.

**Conclusion**

The social scientists of the NRC were ultimately unable to achieve a sustainable and applicable mass of racial labor knowledge from wartime testing. However, the war and wartime testing did reshape narratives of African American labor fitness in three significant ways: wartime migration and military service definitively established the Negro as a factor in industrial civilization; rapid migration and urbanization were cited as effecting mental and physical changes on African American workers; and national efficiency became linked to racial integrity through transnational discourses of race crossing. Postwar social scientists and their legislative allies constantly despaired over the failure of nature to correct itself to fit their desired racial ends. For many observers the very persistence of an ostensibly unnatural practice like race crossing was a prime example of the need for scientific intervention in seemingly natural evolutionary processes.

The Progressive drive to place social policy along biological or racial lines culminated in the 1924 Immigration Restriction Act and Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act, which prohibited inter-racial marriage and provided for the sterilization of the “unfit.” Whereas the former was responding to a racial landscape from which the Negro was largely absent, the latter directly addressed postwar fears regarding the emergence of the New Negro. Yet passage of both these acts—though hailed at the time by their supporters as the culmination of a long crusade—actually marked the beginning of the end of eugenic social policy. Socio-economic wartime imperatives had irrevocably destabilized biological models of racial labor fitness and left social scientists scrambling to devise new methods of racial evaluation. The NRC’s use of
anthropology—the science of race and culture—in their investigations into the ever-evolving Negro type mirrored this shift in the production of racial knowledge.

Scientism, a melding of the “pure and social sciences,” failed to definitively solve the Negro problem in practical terms, although it did manage to tentatively lay out new models for defining and quantifying the Negro as problem. Though NRC social scientists were increasingly unable to define the physiological and social parameters of the Negro problem—as made clear by studies of race mixing—they remained convinced that the elusive Negro type remained a distinct physiological and mental entity whose productive output could be clearly and ‘scientifically quantified.’ Yet as Mia Bay notes, “ironically just as the white scientific establishment was finally beginning to dismantle the racial edifice built by nineteenth century science, racial essentialism was achieving unprecedented popularity in some corners of the black community,” such as the UNIA and various other nationalist organizations.

NRC social scientists’ persistent and furtive attempts to define and quantify a New Negro type revealed that the triumph of whiteness was far from assured by even its most ardent ideological and legislative architects. In 1915, DuBois, in “The African Roots of War,” observed that one of the unintended consequences of global capitalism was that white on white violence on the world stage exposed the dark side of progress and undermined the racial supremacy of progressive industrial nations. The NRC was committed to rebuilding the racial knowledge which had sustained these prewar networks of white supremacy. Social scientific quantification, and by extension commodification, of the black mind and body was an attempt by corporatist elites to reestablish racial labor hierarchies and further alienate African American workers from their own labor power, relegating them to the margins of the labor economy. Abram Harris cited

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500 Ross, Origins of Social Science: 472; Committee on the American Negro, Proposals for the Organization of Investigations of the American Negro, NRC Files, APS
the persistence of this “color-caste feeling” for the failure of a logic which teaches that “the ultimate interests of socially disadvantaged whites and blacks are more coincidental than that of white capitalists and white wage earners” to take hold amongst American workers.\textsuperscript{502}

The New Negro was “present at its own making,” a product of processes and relationships—war, migration, and urbanization—which, to cite E.P. Thompson, “owed as much to agency as to conditioning.” This paradox was neatly summarized by the anthropologist Arthur H. Fauset, who claimed, “the New Negro had been in America for a long time, yet everyone had grown so used to seeing Negros that practically no one discovered that differences were taking place under our very eyes.” Whereas prewar race theorists had posited culture or race “traits and tendencies” as the basis for biological racial difference, wartime and postwar observers tried to invert this model by substituting biology as an index for racial character or pathology. The futility of this process was on display in postwar studies of race mixing. Ultimately, wartime testing unwittingly ended up accelerating the decoupling of race from biology and towards a more social model.\textsuperscript{503} By the interwar years, war, migration, urbanization and a perceived rise in race mixing had transformed the Negro into a physically present, yet deeply ambiguous, figure to social scientists across the color line. What was clear was that the ‘Negro’—whether in biological or social terms—had became an object of mainstream social scientific inquiry.

\textsuperscript{502} Baldwin, \textit{Chicago’s New Negroes}: 10; Ross, \textit{Origins of Social Science}: 472; Abram Harris, ‘Economic Foundations of American Race Division’ in \textit{Black Scholars on the Line}: 288
Epilogue

“The supreme fact of mechanical civilization is that you become a part of it, or get sloughed off (under). ... A few generations from now, the Negro will still be dark, and a portion of his psychology will spring from this fact, but in all else he will be a conformist to the general outlines of American civilization, or of American chaos.”

Jean Toomer (1923)

“Can a people live and develop for over three hundred years simply by reacting? Are American Negroes simply the creation of white men, or have they at least helped to create themselves out of what they found around them?”

Ralph Ellison (1964)

Since reconstruction, the African American experience has been animated by the tension between assimilation and segregation. In the early twentieth century, this tension—voluntary or otherwise—was exacerbated by rapid industrialization, migration and war. The question at the heart of the progressive era “Negro Problem” was the place of the Negro in the nation’s industrial past, present, and future. The wartime state transformed African Americans into industrial factors on a national scale for the first time in modern American history. Social scientists employed sociology, anthropometry, vocational rehabilitation, and anthropology to produce new racial labor hierarchies linked to color and the body. These efforts to reconfigure racial labor fitness from a product of innate traits and tendencies, to one rooted in biology, ultimately failed. Yet, despite the gradual move from biological to socio-cultural models of race, African Americans remained objects of inquiry within the social scientific imagination.

Racial oppression has been central to the development and maintenance of capitalism in the United States and throughout the globe. Sociologist Robert Miles argues that racism functions as part of the labor process, not merely as an ideology, because it shapes the way work is organized and exploited. W.E.B. DuBois was one of the first social scientists to develop a systematic critique of a transnational racial capitalism sustained through war. DuBois described

the early twentieth century world market as one where “labor is cheapest and most helpless and profit is most abundant. This labor is kept cheap and helpless because the white world despises ‘darkies.’” Racial degradation, or the delineation and commodification of social difference, was the linchpin of global capitalism. For DuBois, “the World War was primarily the jealous and avaricious struggle for the largest share in exploiting the darker races.”

Exploitation of the mass of the world’s workers was contingent on developing new models of racial labor control.

World War One mobilized African Americans for the work of war and organized social scientists to develop new methods of measuring racial labor fitness. Initiatives such as the draft and vocational rehabilitation aspired to transform rural southern black migrants into modern worker-soldiers. Wartime imperatives intensified the proliferation of various regulatory institutions and practices for the surveillance and discipline of the working body. According to one observer, “the war provided extraordinary opportunities for the study of different races and their various physical and mental aptitudes.” This mania for racial categorization revealed the racial basis of western modernity, rooted in what George Lipsitz describes as “the liberal Enlightenment commitment to categorizing, classifying, and controlling.” Wartime testing reaffirmed an allegiance to Enlightenment categories of nationality, ethnicity, race and cultural integrity. Rather than representing a breakdown of western civilization, the war laid bare its governing racial epistemologies often in distinctly corporal terms.

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507 Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*: 177-179; Paul Gilroy charts the beginnings of modern rationality in the slave labor sugar plantations of the Caribbean. For Gilroy, the emergence of “race” in this early modern context is “an important reminder that making politics aesthetic was not a governmental strategy that originated in twentieth century fascism,” Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*: 2, 47-49; Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000): 56.
At the dawn of the twentieth century, DuBois declared, “the problem of the twentieth century is the color line” in anticipation of the century’s vast diasporas, transnational labor economies, anti-colonial movements and the rise of a mass global culture. Following the “war to end all wars,” DuBois linked the lines of race and work through the dichotomy of color and the ideology of global white supremacy: “all through the world this gospel is preaching. It has its literature, it has its priests, it has its secret propaganda and above all -it pays!” Analysis of black working class agency must be tempered by an acknowledgement of the overwhelming power of the state, especially in wartime, in sanctioning categories of race and racial labor fitness.

Historians of race and labor must heed the admonishment of scholars, such as Theda Skocpol, to “bring the state back in” to better determine how racial labor hierarchies are embodied on both the shop floor and the battlefield. Time and time again the regulatory demands of the modern American capitalist state have drastically circumscribed African American social and occupational advancement.

The “Negro problem” pervaded American social discourse throughout the twentieth century. Though the terms may have changed—“Negro,” “Black,” “African American”—the question remained the same: could peoples of African descent be effectively reconciled to the social, economic, and cultural imperatives of American capitalism? Essentially, this came down to a case of how to define, regulate, and commodify social difference while maintaining a white supremacist political economy. Social scientists across the political spectrum believed this question was best answered by self appointed neutral white observers. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, African American social scientists found themselves largely excluded from mainstream racial debates.

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508 DuBois, *Darkwater*: ix; Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
Subsequently social scientific objectivity became seen as the sole purview of whiteness, evinced in seminal works by the likes of Franz Boas, Gunnar Myrdal, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. For the author Richard Wright, these studies effectively reduced the Negro to “America’s metaphor,” one that was intimately related to the legacy of slavery but that ultimately corresponded to no fixed cultural or biological attributes common to blacks. Wright noted that “the word Negro in American means something not racial or biological, but something purely social, something made in the United States.” This thesis contends that the modern Negro type- African Americans as objects of social scientific inquiry- which came of age in the post-World War Two era, was born in the draft boards, factories, trenches, hospitals and university classrooms of the Progressive Era.509

The metaphor of race persists in today’s “post-racial America.” Despite the election of the nation’s first African-American president, racial inequality still poisons the republican body politic. Black and white Americans continue to be separated by vastly unequal access to jobs, education, capital and health care. Though blacks account for only approximately 13% of the national population, they comprise almost 60% of the nation’s prison’s population; blacks are seven times more likely to be imprisoned than white men while Hispanic men are three times more likely. Despite the growth of a substantial black middle class, millions of blacks still reside in the nation’s inner cities and are effectively cutoff from the mainstream labor economy, toiling in menial service industry jobs or the violent drug trade. Mass deindustrialization has reduced many of America’s cities to veritable wastelands. The current economic downturn has only

served to exacerbate these processes.\footnote{Roediger, \textit{How Race Survived US History}: 210-211.}

Postmodern theories of race as metaphor must be incorporated into an explicitly material or structural framework of American capitalism. The historian Theodore Koditschek reminds us that “whether or not we want to call our epoch ‘postmodern,’ it is still very much capitalist.” Race still matters as a concrete means to define and create social inequality. The persistence of race can be attributed to its infinitely malleable nature—what some scholars have referred to as the “changing same.” For Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, “racial capitalism has been undying and constantly changing, shedding its old skin as Douglass said it would and reappearing in ever newer forms: slavery, sharecropping, proletarianization, and the labor marginalization” of contemporary globalization. Nikhil Pal Singh argues that racial hierarchies have been historically constitutive, rather than inciminal, to the development of the American capitalist state. Invariably, racial capitalism will inevitably mutate to accommodate the nation’s shifting racial demographics from a traditional white-black binary, to a brown or beige America in which so-called racial minorities will constitute the majority population.\footnote{Koditschek, ed. \textit{Race Struggles}: x.; Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, ‘The Changing Same’: 38., and Roediger, ‘White Without End? The Abolition of Whiteness; or the Rearticulation of Race’, \textit{Race Struggles}: 98; Cornell West, Jorge Klor de Alva, ‘On Black Brown Relations’, \textit{The Cornell West Reader} (NY: Basic Books, 1999) 499-514; Nikhil, P. Singh, \textit{Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy}, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).}

Racism has been a part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West since the birth of global capitalism amidst the Atlantic slave trade. These models of racial labor control received the imprimatur of science through physical and mental testing during World War One. Although wartime sociology, anthropometry, vocational rehabilitation, and anthropology failed to create new racial labor taxonomies linked to color and the body, they affirmed race as an organizing
principle of American labor economy and blacks as objects of social scientific inquiry. George Lipsitz notes that race remains a problem for all Americans, not just blacks. Dismantling racial capitalism’s inequalities does not mean distancing ourselves from western traditions of thought and reason. Instead, it is meant to claim a special place for antiracist thought within these methodologies, and to interrogate their implicit racial subtexts, which impoverish us all.\textsuperscript{512}
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