

20 The New Black Sociology

Bringing Diasporic & Internationalist Perspectives

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Black scholars in the field sociology operate in a discipline which faces the following problems. First, the discipline largely defines social problems within the boundaries of the American nation state. Research which engages with global approaches is seen as operating outside of American sociology's central interests. Second, the intellectual perspectives on black life are narrowed within this nation-first paradigm. However, our colleagues in history, black studies, English and cultural studies have centralized diasporic and internationalist perspectives in their intellectual inquiries into black identity, politics and culture. Black sociologists, therefore, work within the confines of a discipline which depoliticizes and a-historicizes the condition of an internal and international black diaspora.

These epistemological gaps leave the New Black Sociology in a position to chart an important course of social inquiry which connects local black life to global processes. In this chapter, I focus specifically on how a black internationalist perspective is important to the development of the discipline of sociology. One important way to forge this intellectual future is by using the heritage of African diasporic studies as a departure point for studying black societies cross-nationally. Cities and migration/immigration are discussed as empirical entrees into developing diasporic and internationalist approaches in the enterprise of sociological knowledge production of black life.

Before I go on in this chapter, I want to say briefly what I perceive to be the institutional and corporate challenges of black scholars in 21st century white sociology and its implication for opening the intellectual scope on black communities. When the volume *The Black Sociologist: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*¹ was published, James Blackwell and Morris Janowitz were writing during a time of major global social and political upheaval. Published in 1974, black sociologists who contributed to the volume came together during an epoch of global black resistance and a changing political economy. Their work elucidated that the widespread alienation and second-class citizenship of black people in everyday life was a mirrored practice within the discipline. The historical intellectual segregation of sociology was being called into question. The contributions of black

scholars such as Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois and Franklin Frazier were largely denied in the discipline. In what was a Jim Crow Sociology² structure, black scholars were creating innovative theories and methods of our social world, but were excluded from the intellectual ranks of their white colleagues.

Since the publication of *Black Sociologists*, the contributions of black scholars have been many. The historical and sociological work of W.E.B. Du Bois has been revived by Aldon Morris, Earl Wright II, and Marcus Hunter. The work of William Julius Wilson, Patricia Hill Collins, Elijah Anderson, Orlando Patterson and many others have been paradigm shifting. Black sociologists have been integrated into the field, and have inspired generations of new directions in research (eg. Mary Pattillo, Al Young, Lawrence Bobo). The current publication of this volume, *New Black Sociologists*, comes together as we have seen improvements in the treatment of black scholar and scholarship in the discipline.

However, as many black political leaders have noted since the Civil Rights Movement, we have come a long way, but still have far to go. As a result of the legal mandates for black inclusion in institutions of learning and work, black sociologists have increased in number since the 1960s. However, the problems of black exclusion from the intellectual enterprise continues to organize the discipline, and relegates black sociologists to the position of what Patricia Hill Collins has called an “Outsider Within”³ status. The state of scholarship on black communities continues to be hindered by the white normativity of the discipline and subjectivities of its dominant scholars. As this volume is being crafted, the neo-Civil Rights Movement known as Black Lives Matter has emerged as the newest form of political resistance to state sanctioned violence against black men and women, economic inequality, LGBT exclusion and violations against immigrants. Therefore, the words of black sociologist James Blackwell in 1974 continue to ring true today: “The political and social injustices which black people live in renders inapplicable the categories of sociology revealed from white society.”⁴ This reality places significant moral and political weight on black sociologists to undo the damage which has been done and heal the injuries which have been inflicted on black communities in America. It also mandates that white sociology transform itself from the inside out.

Repairing Black Histories

In order for the Negro to chart its future, he has to remake his past.

Arturo Schomburg

One of the foundational aspects of sociology is historical analysis. This relationship between sociology and history, however, becomes fraught in the context of the U.S. Sociology and its relationship to black communities. Since history is most often written and read from the perspective of modern

empires and imperialists, the serious incorporations of black history into sociology are mediocre, at best. This ahistorical perspective on processes in the black community has led to the problematic studies of black geographies and the proliferation of assimilation paradigms. In order to do innovative social analysis, sociologists must rely on the work of historians who are excavating buried histories of the black Atlantic. In order to understand the patterns of social organization and culture which we empirically observe, one has to be a strong historian. One important avenue of doing this is by understanding the pivotal moments of black agency in revolutions, migrations and community building within and outside of the U.S. This requires sociologists to take on a black diasporic and internationalist perspective. The absence of a systematic Sociology of Slavery, Sociology of Reconstruction, Sociology of Black Resistance and Sociology of Jim Crow and the Great Migration demonstrates the disciplines aversion to social phenomenon which are at the core of the black past, present and future.

In doing this historical recovery work, studies which examine black poverty, mobility, gender relations or cultural art forms cannot be separated from the events which created the initial and subsequent dispersions of the African diaspora: the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and racism. Leading black historian Robin Kelley elucidates that the nationalist and racial challenges of developing accurate epistemologies of the black community, too, have characterized the discipline of history. He argues that in the context of these intellectual and political barriers “Black historians had to write the history of a “homeless” people, a people who resided in a country that was largely hostile to them – indeed, an entire global system that was both hostile and a central catalyst for their dispersal. In such context, how could anyone not write histories that are transnational?”⁵ The omission of diasporic, transnational, pan-African, international perspectives when studying black communities, therefore, entirely misses the on-the-ground identities and practices that shape the interior and political lives of black communities. In *Making Our World Anew* (2000), Kelley and Lewis⁶ bring to the fore that the category “African American” emerged under the formation of the American nation state in the 1700s. Enslaved and free Africans saw themselves as interconnected to a global African diaspora of families and tribes dispersed by the transatlantic slave trade.

To miss the connection between the history and contemporary black struggle, possibility and creativity across manmade national boundaries is to miss the core experience of being black in America. Kelley and Lewis share: “By invoking Langston Hughes’s call to ‘make our world anew,’ we recognize that African Americans historically understood their plight and their possibilities in global terms.”⁷ By exploring the sociology of black communities in the Mississippi Delta, Southside Chicago, and Sacramento, it’s important to see the linkages across a global black map which spans from Kingston, Jamaica; Accra, Ghana; Lagos, Nigeria; Paris and Marseilles, France; Bahia, Brazil; and San Juan, Puerto Rico. This international

perspective requires that sociology understand the black experience as one of exceptional creativity, agency and hybridity across borders, and in the face of constant displacement and protest.

An important scaffold for bringing internationalism back into sociology is central to the work of sociologists Michael O. West, William G. Martin and Fanon Che Wilkins. In their book, *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*,⁸ the editors call for reclaiming the interconnected traditions of black struggle and resistance at the local and global level. The authors argue that global perspectives on the black condition have been largely suppressed in academic research. As a result, research on the Caribbean, Latin America, North America, Continental Africa, Black Europe and Asia were segregated. Subject areas of African studies, Caribbean Studies, Black Europe Studies, and African American studies were treated as separate entities, operating in disconnected, and sometimes competing, silos. This epistemological and ontological division of the global black experience undermines the “conscious interconnectivity and interlocution of black struggles across man-made and natural boundaries – including the boundaries of nations, empires, continents, oceans and seas.”⁹ The result has been sociological research which misses the centrality of cross-national black identities and politics in the formation and constant remaking of the modern world.

West et al. remind us that the black internationalist counter narrative is not a new phenomenon, but is a historical product of black agency which began on the shores of West Africa during the slave trade and manifests in current cultural and political expressions of resistance to white supremacy across the black world. In a project of black historical recovery, the authors mark three key moments in the development of black internationalism: 1) The Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), 2) The Great War and the Black Internationalist Revival at the turn of the 20th century and 3) Decolonization and Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s.

In the early decades of the 20th century, W.E.B. Du Bois dedicated his life’s work to changing the oppression of the world’s “darker races.” He stood from a globalist perspective, and sought out how black liberation would also help free the world of racism, colonialism and imperialism. The culmination of his works called out racial capitalism across territories as the cause of racial oppression. The Pan African Congress became a central institution for strategizing how to eradicate white control over the non-white world. He held meetings across the Atlantic, in Paris, Berlin, and New York which cultivated a collective sense of urgency for black liberation across nation-states and empires. Pan-Africanism, however, as a method of and inquiry into political resistance has fallen by the wayside since the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. In the next sections, I discuss the state of the literature on black geographies and immigration and how bringing international perspectives back in provide new possibilities for the sociology of black communities.

Black Geographies

African communities in the Diaspora are living, breathing, dynamic entities, made such by the very environment in which they are forced to exist and by their very struggle to survive. Because of their unique characteristics – skin color, history and others – the establishment of a black community anywhere in the world outside of Africa has usually been a gigantic task and a constant signal to whites to oppose its formation.¹⁰

One of the areas of social inquiry which would undergo significant enhancement with a black diasporic/internationalist perspective is the field of urban and community studies. Since the Great Migration of millions of black people from the American South and the Global South into Northern cities, sociologists have investigated the *urban negro problem*.¹¹ This field of research is largely dominated by white male sociologists and quantitative methodologies. Much of the research in this area analyzes blacks as being inner city residents, a people largely locked out of opportunities for social and residential mobility by racial segregation. Other important interdisciplinary research examines the qualitative experience of racial violence, displacement, the culture of migration, and gender.¹²

The Chicago School of Sociology is credited with conducting foundational studies of urban life and training generations of graduate research on cities.¹³ However, long before the Chicago School produced studies of black city life, W.E.B. Du Bois published *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* an unparalleled sociological investigation into the social condition of black freedmen and fugitive slaves in Philadelphia's 7th ward, or what he aptly called "a city within a city."¹⁴ Over a century later, the place of black people in urban research, however, has fallen into ideological traps which impede rather than facilitate deeper understandings of black life in cities. For example, since the major racial transformations since the 1970s across U.S. cities urban researchers rely on a black, poor, inner city/white, middle class, suburban binaries. This categorization system does not reflect the lived experiences of black communities, and robs students of cities of opportunities for complex theoretical and methodological development. A stream of research on the internal heterogeneity of black space and place and the suburbanization of black communities are a few of many examples of the diversity of black urban life.

Since the Civil Rights era, a proliferation of studies of black neighborhood formations¹⁵ and the institutions where residents negotiate this spatial inequality together in everyday life have been published.¹⁶ Many are *ghetto* studies, and investigate the structural and cultural factors which perpetuate the concentration of black people and poverty in particular in American cities. The most notable of these studies is William Julius Wilson's work, *The Truly Disadvantaged*.¹⁷ Wilson integrates structural and cultural explanations to explain the persistent and detrimental concentration of black poverty in segregated and underserved sections of the metropolis.

While these works have advanced our knowledge about how blacks negotiate the racial and economic disadvantages imposed upon them, they also limit the units of analysis to the neighborhood, metropolitan area, region or the nation state level. Poverty, protest and mobility in Southside Chicago is better understood, however, as a global phenomenon of black oppression and agency also seen in *Cite Soleil*, Port au Prince and *Cidade de Deus*, Rio de Janeiro.

The emphasis on the ghetto has dominated how black space is operationalized and studied. Recently, researchers have called for the removal of the ghetto as a short hand approach to black urban space in favor of more nuanced approaches that reflect the heterogeneity and interconnectivity between spaces where blacks congregate in significant number. Ghettos are diverse and different places with a myriad of local and global expressions. Mario Small argues that “the strong conception of the ghetto glosses over these and other differences by presuming that black urban poverty looks and feels the same, faces the same challenges and has the same consequences, everywhere ... The vast differences in character and context across poor black neighborhoods in the twenty-first century must be *theorized*, not assumed away.”¹⁸ In this vein, the connection of local black geographies to global ones is also an important theoretical and methodological advancement for the field. The formation of black communities in Houston, Texas and Detroit, Michigan are inevitably different, yet tied to one another and to the construction of black urban societies in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Accra, Ghana. The connection is not only the common history of the black diaspora with slavery, colonialism and racial capitalism. The common thread is the active movement of knowledge, goods and people across these spaces, and the strategies of their home countries to control black social and spatial mobility.

As we pause to see how far Sociology has come, and the distance it still has to go, blending together Chocolate City Sociology and black internationalist framework has the potential to build innovative inquiries into the global urban black world. The new theoretical approach to black urban sociology, Chocolate City Sociology¹⁹ calls for studies of black urban America which create knowledge on how structure and agency come together to shape the experiences of black city residents. I am engaging in the asset-deficit dialectic which Marcus Hunter and Zandria Robinson argue allows us to see that the racial policies and practices imposed on black people are “challenged, disrupted, interrupted, facilitated and debated by and among Black Americans at the same time that they were being instituted.”²⁰ This allows us to see black agency cross-nationally, and place value on political expression across these places.

A global black perspective on the role of structure and agency in cities across geographical spaces would lead to stronger theories and methodologies of the condition and development of the urban black world. A marriage between these paradigms allows us to bring together the history of urban

places, black migration, and the African diaspora. Through this framework, we can see how the black diaspora across geographies and centralized within *chocolate cities* (as well as rural towns and suburbs) is constantly on the move through its migrations, remaking streets, schools, and, suburbs, towns and villages in the process. This approach requires sociologists to trace the spatial dimensions of black life through its roots, routes, and geographies, and from them chart pathways of truth-telling about the interior aspects of black life, politics and culture. In this vein, I am calling for a sociology of the urban black world that sees the experience of black agency and place-making²¹ in U.S. cities and suburbs, as tied to the urban processes of labor, protest and creativity occurring in the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa. In turn, the developments in urban black life in cities such as New York and Los Angeles are seen as tied to the social, political and economic developments occurring across black Global South.

Other People's Niggers & the Assimilation Problematic

Colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.
Stuart Hall, in "Culture, Identity and Diaspora"²²

I've attended several conference proceedings in community and urban sociology where black communities are repeatedly represented as lowly, criminal, ghetto, and violent. It always comes as a shock to me, opening a wound of constant dehumanization that characterizes the experience of outsiders in sociology. When I look to my left and right at various colleagues, they are nodding their heads in agreement with these research findings. My experience in the subfield of immigration studies is no different. One would assume that a diasporic and international perspective would be central to the social inquiries of sociologist of immigration. For some it is. However, the better part of the field engages with assimilationist frameworks, arguing that there is a white middle class and black American underclass which immigrants must negotiate their lives between.

The study of the relationship between blacks and immigrants suffer from nationalist, isolationist and racist perspectives. Although black people from both the American South and Global South began migrating to major American cities in large number in the mid 20th century, this phenomenon was seen as largely separate processes. Therefore, there are blacks who were from America, and then there were blacks who are not. White people and scholars make this distinction. Native and foreign-born black engage in their own cross-nation discourses and disagreements. However, what this false dichotomy does is it problematically uses the manmade nation state boundaries and natural boundaries of the Atlantic as true barriers of the transnational black experience. As Robin Kelley has put it, "large bodies of water

are not barriers but are avenues for transnationalism, trans-oceanic trade, cultural exchange and transformation.”²³

Seeing the black migrations and immigrations as being a part of a larger story of black agency and displacement in the 20th century Atlantic is an important avenue of future social inquiry. However, the demise of a global black consciousness since the 1970 has left a void in sociological inquiries into the cultural expressions and creativity of black people, as well as their comparative strategies for negotiating the enduring effects of white domination. Instead, immigration studies’ use of black ethnic heterogeneity perpetuates discourses which support racism in the academy. For example, during a moment when blacks were calling for rights and equality, the conservative intellectual Thomas Sewell manipulated statistical research to argue that West Indians socioeconomically outperformed black Americans. Sewell’s following opposed racial desegregation in housing and education and policies to redress historical institutional anti-black exclusion. Sewell used black immigrants as a model minority to set up a dualism that reinforces white domination. Black immigrants were constructed as exceptional in order to demonstrate the cultural inferiority of black Americans and their propensity to remain caught in a “cycle of poverty.” The outcome of this research has been that black immigrants and black Americans were politically pitted against one another. This divisive research resembled the divide and conquer colonial policies which helped empires undermine collective political mobilization among colonized proletariats. Anthropologist Jemima Pierre notes that the emphasis on post-1965 black immigrants’ cultural distinctiveness and ethnicity are tools for reinforcing the academies narrow views and practices towards black Americans. Pierre argues that the

the relatively new interest in acknowledging heterogeneity in the United States Black community is less an issue of appreciating Black cultural and historical diversity and difference than one of the shifting nature of racialist discourse.²⁴

The fundamental error of immigration studies lies in the discursive violence waged against black Americans in the name of assimilation paradigms. The paradigm has produced generations of research which erroneously places the onus for racial inequality on the culture of black Americans.²⁵ Sociologist Vilna Bashi Treitler²⁶ has called for the “dethroning” of assimilation theory in explaining black inequality. She states:

Sociologists adhering to assimilationism act out in their scholarship the same social distancing from African Americans that these other ethnic groups performed and continue to perform. In fact, it is this aspect of the assimilationist idea that continues to resuscitate a warped framing of Oscar Lewis’s culture of poverty rubric that effectively uses science to further denigrate African Americans.²⁷ In sum, assimilationist scholarship

provides little or no attention to the durable nature of racial structures; turns a blind eye to intermixing and conjoined ethnic histories that are the very definition of assimilation except when that involves loving and living with nonwhites and accepting their ways, especially when it is not a model of “downward assimilation”; and outright ignores counterfactual data that shows Euro descendants no longer monopolize the top of the economic scale.²⁸

Assimilationists interpret the social condition of black Americans without a systematic understanding of how white America has disadvantaged them. Immigration studies scholars use black Americans as a reference group for the mobility trajectories of immigrant groups.²⁹ While they acknowledge that racialization plays a role in the experiences of black Americans, and shapes the experiences of immigrants, many publications conclude that exposure and “assimilation” into the black American community, not institutional racism, relegates the children of immigrants into the underclass. In their view, “ethnic values” of hard work, delayed gratification, and cooperation with whites saves the children of black, Latino, and Asian immigrants from the adversarial and oppositional culture of black Americans. Ethnicity, however, is a product of nation state formations, and the black identity, agency and politics has and continues to transcend it. A global perspective on black migration, the history of racial intermixing, and social mobility is needed to re-orient this field of research towards the on-the-ground realities of migrant/immigrant life in a racialized world. Recent work on the transnational constructions of race and power by immigrants are moving in this black internationalist direction.³⁰

Recently immigrationists have tried to move away from this culturally racist approach. In part due to the backlash from an intellectual community of radicals, new publications in the field acknowledge that black Americans are a class heterogeneous, spatially diverse group with traditions of political organizing and educational and social institutions which facilitate black mobility. It is now acceptable to conceive of black immigrant integration with black Americans without stirring up fears of their descendants to the permanent underclass. The children of black immigrants can become black American and still graduate, attain jobs, marry and be successful. Who would have thought? In another tactic of self-salvation, immigration analysts have also argued that civil rights institutions have been a vehicle of upward mobility for black Americans, and this can also be true for Latino and Asian immigrants. Yet sociology continues to fall deeper into colonial style renditions of black America which insult, injure and keep open the doors of black intellectual and psychic oppression in the name of reviving assimilation perspectives.

In Franklin Frazier’s first article for *The Crisis* in 1924, he wrote that the one-dimensional representations of blacks in the Jim Crow South was one of the most disturbing aspects of white institutional racism.³¹ The description

of black people as either “saints or stones” stripped them of personhood, histories and private lives. We have no personality, no story, no history. As sociologists of immigration tokenize black immigrants in their research, they are re-inscribing these age-old constructions of black Americans. A Black Sociologist is then left to question, are we even *seen* at all in these discourses? If white sociology does not understand our culture, how we worship, how we mourn our dead, how we raise the next generation, what foods we eat to restore our health, what our worries are at the end of the week, how we celebrate the transitions of life such as love, newborn babies, birthdays, and holidays, how we commemorate our ancestors, or how we heal, how can they be charged with building knowledge about the social problems that plague us and our similarities or differences with other groups?

Although Park and Burgess race relations theory³² was an advancement from the scientific racism paradigms which dominated academic and public thinking in the late 1800s, it oversimplified the social experience and condition of black American urbanites. Later iterations of this work have villainized and maligned black Americans. These sociological investigations also do what Paul Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic has worked against: they center the nation state and created a dichotomy between native-born and foreign-born blacks that is ahistorical, depoliticized, and ignores the global black struggles for self-actualization and liberation. A Black internationalist perspective which bridges black migration and immigration within and across territories together is the more appropriate departure point for exploring how a multilingual, multinational and multiracial black community negotiate *la présence Africaine* along with global systems of domination and control.

I’d like to share some reflection from my travels to Europe and the Caribbean that demonstrate the urgency of black diasporic and internationalist paradigms in sociology. In 2006, I attended the James Baldwin conference, held at the American University of Paris. This international conference brought together scholars, artists and friends influenced by Baldwin’s literary and political legacy. It was there that the assimilation problematic in the United States, England and France became clear to me both intellectually and personally. During a panel presentation, I witnessed a debate about how the poor treatment of black immigrants from Senegal sharply contrasted with the widespread acceptance and celebration of black Americans in Paris. The panelist and audience argued that Blacks who were from the societies which were under the French empire were treated with Parisian style racism. Black Americans, however, were welcomed and celebrated for their intellectual and artistic contributions.

They were each, however, black in a white society. The most poignant reflection articulated there was that “the French liked everyone else’s niggers, except for their own.” This reflection helps us look at the white American brand of anti-black American racism with fresh insight. The

treatment of different black groups within these white societies did not mean racism had been transcended. In fact, countless black Americans noted racial encounters with police. Instead, the differential treatment of black Americans and black immigrants was more of a reflection of constructions of whiteness across empires than it had anything to do with the identities, values, practices, or parenting styles of black people themselves.

After the conference, I visited Fort De Joux, the fortress in the Jura Mountains near the Swiss border where Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the Haitian Revolution, was imprisoned in 1802 and died in captivity in 1803, less than a year before Haiti achieved its independence. In the throes of a civil war, Napoleon dispatched an expeditionary force to Saint Domingue to restore the French empire's colonial domination of the resource-rich island. Espousing the ideals of the French Revolution, "liberté, fraternité, and égalité," Toussaint fought for black dignity through the liberation of slaves. Fort De Joux represents the determination of the French to prevent enslaved Africans on a faraway island from seizing the revolution's promises for themselves. A century later, black American writers and artists would travel to France because they felt that the weight of black oppression in the United States was lifted in the *arrondissements* of the Paris.

World War I Black G.I.s, literaries and artists were among these traveling luminaries. Richard Wright was among many who saw Paris as a sort of racial refuge. Wright noted that he felt more freedom on a Parisian block than in all his travels throughout the United States. However, how does one reconcile France as a racial haven but also a country whose empire was built on the exploitation of black slave labor and the political project of assimilating the inferior black race into *la culture française*? As white racism undergoes constant reconstruction across time and space, sociology would benefit from employing an internationalist lens to analyze the various regimes of oppression, encountered by a multiethnic, multilingual black diaspora. This will help us build a more complete body of knowledge of both the black and white Atlantic.

A (New) Black Sociological Imagination

The ideas shared in this chapter arise from my sociological imagination. Reading the work of C. Wright Mills³³ as an undergraduate, I learned that the events which I had witnessed growing up in Flatbush, Brooklyn were local and international expressions of black struggle and culture. I was born of first generation Haitian immigrants who arrived in the belly of the beast two years prior to my birth. From the racial residential segregation of Jews from blacks to the political rallies in the Haitian community to usher in their first democratic election of Jean Bertrand Aristide in the 1990s, diasporic social processes were played out on the stages of Brooklyn's streets, churches, community centers, and homes. Like many black scholars who emerge from diasporic neighborhoods in cities, you were pan-African,

transnational, global, international before you learned how to spell your name.

My downstairs neighbors were Puerto Rican, to my left, they were from North Carolina and to my right, Spanishtown, Jamaica. My landlord was Hasidic Jewish, and the super of our building was Dominican. My classmates' families were from every Caribbean country from Cuba to Venezuela, my teachers were the descendants of Italian and Irish immigrants. My neighborhood was where the black, indigenous and white Atlantic congregated. We purchased our vegetables in Chinatown and our bagels in Italian Sheepshead Bay.

The sounds of Salsa woke us up in the morning, reggae marked the end of the school day and Hip Hop put us to bed at night. Botánicas and voodoo ceremonies occurred across the street from storefront Pentecostal churches. We took for granted that English, Patwa, Spanish and Kreyol were the neighborhood official languages and that goat, collards, pork, fried plantains and sweet potato pie were Thanksgiving staples instead of turkey, mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie. I was surprised to learn that this level of encounter, blending, cultural expression and conflict was not reflected in the sociological paradigms of cities and migrations that shape public and academic knowledge.

As a graduate student in what was and still is a demography-centered program, I was discouraged from exploring the intersection between my biography and public issues. Black scholars were discouraged from studying their own communities (unless it was to the benefit of advisers), contending that they were doing "me-search." Although disturbed, I explored the identity among black Haitian youth, but worked tremendously hard to demonstrate my removal or outsidership to the community. I felt I was in an academic prison with white sociologists as the gatekeepers of my scholarly creativity. A vision for a black sociology was clouded; a diasporic or international black sociology was out of the question. I was told that I should save such pursuits for later in my scholarly career.

Both in graduate school and as a postdoc, I engaged in self-directed readings of historical black social theorists. But the gap between that perspective and the formal requirements of my graduate program was jarring. The reading list for comprehensive exams was sprinkled with white sociologists' favorite token scholars of color, and the remaining 95 percent of the literature was a cross between self-congratulatory citations and the inclusion of my professor's friends and colleagues research. How was this objective? From my independent reading, I learned that Anna Julia Cooper had developed a framework to analyze the connections between racialized sexism and sexualized racism through her intersectional experiences as a black woman coming of age in the South during Reconstruction and Jim Crow.³⁴ At the end of the nineteenth century, W. E. B. Du Bois³⁵ constructed the concept of double consciousness, which is the foremost philosophy of individual and collective black identity in the white-dominated, post-emancipation United

States. Du Bois drew on his own experiences as a black child growing up in a white New England town to articulate the contours of this social theory. His Pan-African politics could easily be connected to his paternal grandfather's travels to post-Revolution Haiti.³⁶ If Du Bois and Cooper were considered great intellectuals who had used their biographies as entrees into theorizing racial and gender inequality, why were young black sociologists being discouraged from doing so today? Why should I extinguish the fire within which led me to explore black internationalism, migration, and the diaspora? This problematic situation is one of the many tensions black scholars must wrestle with. Most white sociologists do not think about this (nor would they volunteer to). I often think of black sociologists and knowledge that have perished in this cross-fire.

The merging of my biography with the understanding of Haiti as a perpetually punished site of black revolution and of urban black America as a site of the racial containment and cultural expression of the black diaspora has sharpened the lens through which I see the future directions of sociology. Political and artistic ventures from the U.S. to the Caribbean allowed Frederick Douglass and Zora Neal Hurston, to use black travel and migration to explore what Daphne Lamothe calls "bounded and symbolic sites of black culture."³⁷ Like Michael West and colleagues, the work in the field has led me to see Haiti as a critical example of where the new black sociology should start its historical heritage and its intellectual pursuits.

Haiti's legacy of black revolution and current culture and politics on the global stage give us a road map on the state of the global black diaspora. In 1804, after thirteen years of intense political and military struggle, enslaved Africans declared that Haiti was an independent nation of free black people. No longer would the terms black and slave be companions on this territory. At the time, the revolution in Saint Domingue, and the expulsion of Napoleon Bonaparte's army, sent chills down the spines of slaveholding whites across the U.S. South and the European colonies in the Caribbean. They refused to conceive of African slaves as potentially free people, particularly since they had seized their freedom through a war in which most of the country's French residents were killed or forced to flee.

The Haitian army, led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, had interrupted a modern global economy built on the unpaid labor of enslaved Africans. In the years that followed, the U.S. refused to welcome Haiti into the sisterhood of nations and insisted that Haiti be suppressed and punished. In the imagination of whites, black freedom threatened their control over racial slavery, would lead to black uprisings, and eventually cause the demise of a lucrative plantation economy and white supremacy. Since then, Haiti has come under recurrent military occupation and economic domination by foreign actors, with everything from its agriculture to its politics being undermined by multinational corporations and governments. The signs of neocolonial exploitation are visible everywhere. A walk along the roads of Les Cayes in the southwest corridor of the countryside reveals rice fields

long and wide. Yet a drive through the streets of Port au Prince show advertisements for imported American rice products. American rice has flooded the food market, uncut the sale of local rice products, and destroyed the profits and livelihoods of local farmers. This looks and sounds a lot like the political and economic sabotage of communities and institutions across the black world in the last five centuries.

Conclusion

White regimes of domination have a common goal, but different methods. Comparative black geographies provide a more complete picture of these variations. In New York, white domination is perpetuated through creating an upper middle-class city which systematically locks blacks out of housing, safety, healthcare, restaurants, nightlife, and public spaces. In less affluent and cosmopolitan parts of the United States, it is now done through the formation of white nationalist and white supremacist groups, who call themselves the alt right, and intimidate and threaten black progress. In Johannesburg, white domination is reproduced by setting college tuition prohibitively high for the black majority, which has been suppressed economically, socially, and culturally through generations under apartheid. In Paris, blacks are contained in *banlieues*, where they are economically marginalized. They are both rendered politically disposable, but are hyper visible targets of the police state.

The common thread of the black Atlantic gives us the tools for continuing to forecast imperial policies which wreak havoc on black communities but also a sense of diasporic political commonality which has declined since the post-War era. The idea of international solidarity throughout Africa and the African diaspora has existed ever since the days of Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and Zora Neal Hurston and was reignited by the Black Panther Party in its internationalist campaign for black liberation and self-determination. Sociology's task includes documenting and recounting the international connections that have characterized the black struggle for liberation. Sociologists can stand on the shoulders of literary scholars and historians, and anthropologists, as well as writers, artists, musicians, actors, and filmmakers who have focused on the phenomena missed, are isolated from or ignorant of, or never developed the desire to pursue.

This means relying on the black travel memoirs of Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou, teaching Stuart Hall's work on black diasporic filmmaking, reading the poetry of Aime Cesaire, analyzing the music of Peter Tosh and Gladys Night, and creating intellectual and artistic reparations for the aboriginal people of Australia. It also means paying attention to the places where the black diaspora meets and redefines politics and culture. This could be in the dance clubs which host Trap, Reggae and AfroBeats nights, and weddings where couples jump the broom and money is sprayed on the dance floor by community elders. We have to seek answers for why

the African origins of the tango have been lost, why the first free black republic in the world is besieged by imperialism and neoliberalism, what entities owe reparations to descendants of South Carolina's plantation, why some communities have asked for equality instead of demanding revenge, why black and Mexicans are treated as antithetical in the imagination of nationalists, why Brazilian grandmothers are often darker than their grandchildren, and why the descendants of Depression – era migrants in California believe that they would have been better off if they had stayed in Georgia. This is sociology, and Black Sociologists have the tools to see this with open eyes and tell the story the way it is experienced by black folk from Pretoria, South Africa, to Detroit Michigan, and Adelaide, Australia.

Notes

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- 4 Blackwell & Janowitz, 1974, 341–367.
- 5 Kelley, R. D. (1999). "But a local phase of a world problem": Black history's global vision, 1883–1950. *Journal of American History*, 1077.
- 6 Kelley, R. D., & Lewis, E. (2000). *To make our world anew: A history of African Americans*: Oxford University Press.
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- 8 West, M. O., Martin, W. G., & Wilkins, F. C. (2009). *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the age of revolution*: University of North Carolina Press.
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- 10 Walters, R. W. (1997). *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora: An analysis of modern Afrocentric political movements*: Wayne State University Press, 32.
- 11 See Adelman & Tolnay, 2003; Drake & Cayton, 1945; Du Bois & Eaton, 1899; Haynes, 1913; Tolnay, 2001.
- 12 See Brown, 2016; Chatelain, 2015; Griffin, 1996.
- 13 See Drake & Cayton, 1945; Suttles, 1968; Thrasher, 1926; Wirth, 1928.
- 14 Du Bois, W. E. B., & Eaton, I. (1899). *The Philadelphia Negro: A social study*: Published for the University.
- 15 See Anderson, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Massey & Denton, 1993; W. J. Wilson, 1996, 2012.
- 16 Anderson, 2003; Duck, 2015; Liebow, 2003; MacLeod, 1987; Sampson, 1987; Sampson & Morenoff, 2004.
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- 20 *Ibid.*, 398.

- 21 Hunter, M. A., Pattillo, M., Robinson, Z. F., & Taylor, K.-Y. (2016). Black placemaking: Celebration, play, and poetry. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 33(7–8), 31–56.
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- 25 Ibid.
- 26 See Pierre, 2004; Treitler, 2013, 2015.
- 27 See Kelley 1997; Pierre 2004.
- 28 Treitler, V. B. (2015). Social agency and white supremacy in immigration studies. *Sociology of race and ethnicity*, 1(1), 153–165. p. 162.
- 29 See Alba & Nee, 1997; Gordon, 1964; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Telles & Ortiz, 2008.
- 30 Joseph, T. D. (2015). *Race on the move: Brazilian migrants and the global reconstruction of race*: Stanford University Press.
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