

RACE, CLASS, AND SOCIALIZATION:  
ALLISON DAVIS AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN SOCIAL THOUGHT

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Race, Class, and Socialization: Allison Davis and Twentieth-Century American Social Thought

Thesis directed by Professor Mark Pittenger

This project is an intellectual biography of the African-American social scientist Allison Davis (1902-1983). It uses his career and thought to investigate the history of twentieth-century American social thought, the history of social science, and African-American history. In particular, it shows how Davis's lived experiences with race and class, as well as his first-rate formal education, made him a pioneering anthropologist and educator. After contributing to the New Negro Renaissance, Davis entered social science and published two classics, *Deep South* (1941) and *Children of Bondage* (1940). Both were theoretically and methodologically innovative, and both furthered the larger environmental revolution within social science that made clear the socially-constructed nature of human difference, and hence helped to displace essentialist views. His growing stature within the social-science community prompted the University of Chicago to hire him in 1942. This landmark appointment helped to racially integrate the faculties of other predominantly-white universities, and it made Davis an early civil rights pioneer. As a professor of education at Chicago, Davis had his largest social impact. He investigated the cultural differences between social classes, thus reconciling cultural and structural theories. His work pushed school districts across the country to abolish their use of culturally-biased intelligence tests, and it laid the intellectual foundations for the federal Head Start program. Understanding education as an instrument of democracy, Davis fought for far-reaching educational reforms, including the abolition of racial segregation. Among other achievements, his work here contributed to the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

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## **Introduction**

*Every man, black, white, purple or green, must exercise his faculties with some degree of fullness, if he is to feel any sense of repayment for living.<sup>1</sup>*

--- Allison Davis

Late in his life, Allison Davis sat down among esteemed friends, including a medical doctor and a philosopher. After speaking broadly among themselves on pressing issues of the day, a more existential question arose among the group: “What is the purpose of life?” Though the doctor and the philosopher had eagerly tackled the contemporary issues, they shied away from answering that intractable human question. Allison Davis did not. He told them, “The purpose of the human body and brain, existentially viewed...is full use and enjoyment.” “Man is the most complex reality in the universe,” he continued, “far more miraculous than the stars or the planetary system....But the operational goal of this intricate organism is simple....It is to use its extremely complex resources in such a way as to enjoy its existence.”<sup>2</sup> With this brief statement, Davis made clear two things about himself. First, he was a man fully engaged with life’s deepest, most existential questions. Indeed, after a lifetime spent enduring the injustices of racism, he had long ago come to terms with the utter absurdity and tragedy of life. His response to this predicament, though, represented the second thing about Davis. He refused to despair, and he chose to develop himself as best he could, and to assert his right to exist. In that way, he carved out a sense of meaning and purpose for his life. The fundamental goal of his entire career was to cultivate the potential of not just himself, but of all people, by destroying the arbitrary social inequalities that inhibited personal development and shackled human potential. In his

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<sup>1</sup> Allison Davis, “The Negro Deserts His People,” *Plain Talk* 4 (January 1929): 52.

<sup>2</sup> Allison Davis, Allison Davis Papers, Box 66, Folder 4, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

twentieth-century American life, he targeted race and class barriers above all else. This project tells the story of his particular fight, and what it reveals about American society, past and present.

## **Nature and Scope**

The trajectory of Allison Davis's career serves as the framework for this project. Born in 1902 as William Boyd Allison Davis to an affluent, lighter-skinned African-American family in Washington, D.C., Davis gained an Ivy League education before teaching English at Hampton Institute in the 1920s, while also contributing to that decade's New Negro Renaissance. Cognizant of the environmentalist trends within social science, in 1931 he switched careers to social anthropology, eventually completing a notable community study of Natchez, Mississippi called *Deep South* (1941). In the latter half of the 1930s, he participated in the important culture-and-personality school in the social sciences, publishing an influential volume on black youth in the South called *Children of Bondage* (1940). In addition to working with Gunnar Myrdal on his landmark study of American race relations, *An American Dilemma* (1944), in 1942 Davis played a significant role in desegregating the faculties of Northern universities through his appointment to the Department of Education at the University of Chicago. Davis's greatest achievement, however, was in helping to cultivate a distinct brand of culture-and-personality thought that portrayed social class as a type of culture that was passed along through the processes of socialization. This was his most powerful idea, and he used it to undermine racial segregation, to expose the cultural biases of intelligence tests, to prescribe innovative educational reforms, and to lay the intellectual foundation for antipoverty programs such as Head Start—all with the

intention of defending human potential against the arbitrary constraints of race and class inequalities.

The present project is best defined as an intellectual biography of Davis. Given his underappreciated contributions listed above, and because he “knew that ideas drive change and that sweeping change, historic change, requires ideas of the broadest possible scope,” Davis is a particularly fitting subject for an intellectual biography.<sup>3</sup> He was a prolific scholar who waged the battle against race and class inequality in the realm of ideas.

If “intellectual biography” is the most apt description of this project, however, one major qualification is in order. Davis may be the principal subject of this story, but so too are a number of much larger subjects including American race relations, American social science, the civil rights movement, and the New Negro Renaissance. In other words, I am interested above all in how knowing Davis’s story furthers our understanding of American history generally, rather than in recovering the “contributions” of another “great man” for the historical record. To be sure, any fair assessment of Davis would discern how he was in many ways exceptional and made several distinct contributions to American life. I address that material, but I emphasize not his exceptionalism, but rather how his life and goals were rooted in his own social experiences with race and class in America. This study’s central research questions, then, are: how can a knowledge of Davis’s life and thought inform our understanding of American social and cultural life? And how and why did Davis shape Americans’ understanding of race, class, and socialization?

My answers to these questions comprise the substance of this study. To answer them, this project considers Davis’s long twentieth-century life, from 1902 to 1983, and it also charts

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<sup>3</sup> The Davis Center, “W. Allison Davis ’24,” Williams College, <http://davis-center.williams.edu/daviscenter/allison-davis/> (accessed April 10, 2014).

his influence into the twenty-first century, as Davis continues to live on in the realm of ideas and in public memory. The bulk of the story, however, lies in the period from 1930 to 1950, for this is when Davis's thought was most innovative and influential. I argue that taking the "long view" of Davis, across time, space, and disciplinary affiliation, deepens our understanding of American social-constructivist thought and how various political and social projects mobilized it. His life shows how racial oppression and relative class privilege within a rapidly changing society combined to produce a formidable black intellectual who was able to lay bare American systems of social stratification more clearly than most of his peers. His elite and diverse disciplinary training, as well as his lived experiences as a member of an oppressed racial minority, deepened his vision. After attempting a literary career, he dedicated his energies to social science. He became part of the rising tide of environmentalist social science in interwar America that displaced essentialist, hereditarian theories of human difference. First taking up the pioneering methods of social anthropology, which examined social stratification, and then turning to culture-and-personality analysis, which scrutinized socialization and learning, he helped to lead the way in explaining how systems of race and class stratification informed the behaviors of all Americans positioned within those systems. Combining the humanistic features of his literary training with the innovative methods of anthropology and psychology, Davis developed pioneering educational research that put the onus of responsibility for change on the social system itself, not on individuals attempting to navigate that system. As a result, Davis helped to counteract entrenched race and class inequalities, to galvanize practical social reforms, and to defend human potential.

## **Methodology**



As a work of intellectual history, this project takes ideas seriously. Ideas matter as agents of social change, as rationales for the status quo, and as forces for instigating and directing social action. But ideas are also inseparable from the larger social processes that produce them, and from the individuals who adopt, adapt, and redeploy them for different ends. This study is above all concerned with the shifting but also logically consistent ideas of one black intellectual as they developed and evolved over time. Relating especially to Davis's ideas on social stratification and socialization, this project asks: where did they come from, and where did they go? In more technical terms, how were Davis's ideas socially constructed, transmitted, and received?

My methods for addressing these questions synthesize the three main approaches to intellectual history: the history of ideas, the social history of intellectuals, and contextualization. The history-of-ideas approach was the founding methodology of the field in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and it involves tracing the internal logic and consistency of systems of thought. Early intellectual historians often treated the transmission of these ideas rather casually, at times positing a type of genealogical transmission through great men. The social history of intellectuals approach and the contextualization approach both grew out of the field's identity crisis in the 1970s amid the rise of social history, and later cultural history, and the justifiable criticism of elite-focused histories. The social history of intellectuals approach still centers on intellectuals – those individuals leading in the construction and articulation of ideas – but it emphasizes far more how each intellectual is enmeshed in a wider social context that inevitably shapes his or her worldview. With the contextualist approach, intellectual historians concern themselves with what the leading spokesman for that approach, David Hollinger, called

“communities of discourse.”<sup>4</sup> These historians see the field as concerned with shared questions, such as “what is the nature of a good society?” or “what is the basis of knowledge in an age of science?” This approach broadened the field and allowed new voices to contribute to the debates. For example, scholars could now look to particular institutions, cultural forms, or subaltern peoples as contributing to these discourses – even if in less precise and less articulated forms. What is more, this approach foregrounded not only the production but also the deployment, circulation, and reception of ideas, and by doing so it grounded the nebulous, abstracted “isms” of earlier intellectual history in the social life in which those concepts took form and were adapted over time.

As an important forum on “The Present and Future of American Intellectual History” attests, a synthesis of these three approaches remains the dominant approach of the field.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the foregrounding of particular intellectuals who are embedded within social history and within various communities of discourse, and the emphasis on how ideas are internally logical (or illogical) and are then circulated and received, remains the primary focus. Furthermore, the emphasis on reception and the political uses of ideas continues to be a key part of this discussion. To be sure, this rough consensus is not absolute. Daniel Wickberg has called into question the assumption of always beginning with an embodied thinker or text as the central focus through which ideas actually exist.<sup>6</sup> Borrowing from postmodern, Foucauldian theory, he calls for intellectual historians to question this assumption and to consider projects that prioritize “discourses” that exist prior to and apart from individuals, which individuals then inhabit. In this

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<sup>4</sup> David Hollinger, “Historians and the Discourse of Intellectuals,” in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (1979)

<sup>5</sup> “Forum: The Present and Future of American Intellectual History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (April 2012): 149-248.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Wickberg, “The Present and Future of American Intellectual History,” *The Blog of the Society for U.S. Intellectual History*, April 3, 2012, <http://s-usih.org/2012/04/present-and-future-of-american.html> (accessed November 12, 2014).

sense, he was reverses whom and what we prioritize: thinkers and texts, or more nebulous discourses. Despite the utility of Wickberg's critiques, I reject the notion that ideas exist apart from the individuals or groups of individuals who espouse them. The field remains on its strongest footing when scholars examine "ideas as manifested by human actors within ever-broadening circles of context."<sup>7</sup> My project, therefore, foregrounds Davis the human being, the social actor, and the thinker; it then traces his intellectual development over time in relation to social history and ever-widening communities of discourse. As someone who labored always to root individual thought and behavior within the larger social environment, Davis himself would have found this approach to intellectual history appropriate.

For my source base, I draw from a wide range of both published and unpublished materials. Above all, this study is rooted in archival collections at the University of Chicago, Fisk University, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago finished expanding and renovating the Allison Davis Papers in 2009, and that collection serves as the principal one for this project. The Allison Davis Papers generally, as well as many of the specific sources consulted at the other archives, had yet to be seriously analyzed in the scholarly literature until the completion of the present study. In addition to these archival materials, this study also draws from a wealth of contemporary scholarly journals, periodicals, and books to locate the primary issues and debates at the time, and hence to contextualize Davis and his work.

## **Historiographical Contributions**

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<sup>7</sup> George Stocking, Jr., *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 115.

Given his indisputably pioneering accomplishments as hinted at above, Davis's absence within the literature is conspicuous. In the last several decades, historians of African Americans have recovered major black voices that American racism had silenced by marginalizing and excluding them from the historical record. We now have many books dedicated to prominent black intellectuals in the twentieth century and beyond. For example, monographs on contemporaries of Davis such as Ralph Bunche, Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, Carter Woodson, Rayford Logan, William Fontaine, and Oliver Cox now exist, alongside many works on the most famous figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Booker T. Washington. Even more, scholars have now dedicated several monographs to Davis's two closest black intellectual peers, Charles S. Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier.<sup>8</sup> Civil rights historiography has also taken a biographical turn, as scholars have moved beyond biographies of only the most prominent male leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. We now have biographies of female civil rights leaders such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and Septima Clark, all of which make clear the centrality of black women to the movement and the diverse styles of leadership underpinning it.<sup>9</sup> Yet despite all of this new scholarship, Davis remains neglected, even though he played a significant role in the civil rights movement, and

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, see: Patrick J. Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership Beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); Richard Robbins, *Sidelines Activist: Charles S. Johnson and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996); Anthony M. Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); James E. Teele, ed., *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> See Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Dutton, 1993); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

even though he rivaled Johnson and Frazier in significance among his generation of black thinkers and within American social science more generally.

Apart from the lack of full monographs dedicated to him, Davis is also glaringly absent from many studies to which he would have been relevant. Harold Cruse failed to discuss Davis in his famous examination of black intellectual life, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.<sup>10</sup> David Levering Lewis's standard account of the New Negro Renaissance, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, did not mention Davis.<sup>11</sup> Nor did Daniel Singal's important examination of interwar Southern intellectual life and the Victorian-to-Modernist transition, *The War Within*, refer to Davis.<sup>12</sup> Equally glaring, James O. Young's instructive book on the generational conflict among black intellectuals in the 1930s said nothing of Davis.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, Jerry Gershenhorn's more recent book detailing the racial politics of Melville Herskovits excluded Davis, as did Patrick Gilpin's and Marybeth Gasman's 2003 book on Charles S. Johnson.<sup>14</sup> These are all problematic omissions, for Davis played an important role in the subjects of these books.

The literature that does exist on Davis can be divided into two main categories: biographical and accretionist. Most of the biographical works are short entries seeking to capture Davis's significance as an African-American intellectual. For example, he is included in several black biographical dictionaries.<sup>15</sup> James Anderson also provided a brief discussion of

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<sup>10</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York: Morrow, 1967).

<sup>11</sup> David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Knopf, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought In the South, 1919-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> James O. Young, *Black Writers of the Thirties* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1973).

<sup>14</sup> Jerry Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, the entries for "Allison Davis" in S. A. Brown, *Negro Caravan* (New York: Arno Press & New York Times, 1969); A. A. Shockey and S. P. Chandler, *Living Black American Authors: A Biographical Directory* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1973); J. A. Page, *Selected Black American Authors: An Illustrated Bio-Bibliography* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1977); W. Augustus Low and Virgil A. Clift, eds., *Encyclopedia of Black America* (1981).

Davis's landmark appointment to the faculty at the University of Chicago in an article about African Americans and the academy in the postwar United States.<sup>16</sup> More sustained treatments of Davis do not exist. Above all, most of these sources aim to recover the life of a notable black man in twentieth-century America, but they remain few and only partial.

The second type of literature on Davis is what I call "accretionist." The emphasis here is on discussing how Davis's research added one small piece to far larger projects. Scholars from many different fields have used Davis to discuss his contribution to a social-science discipline, or they have used him as an exemplar of a particular type of research practice or way of conceptualizing race, class, and education. Dallas Browne provides one of the more substantive treatments of Davis, but his emphasis is on highlighting a "pioneer" within the field of anthropology and using him to illuminate the history of and diversity within that field.<sup>17</sup> Davis's friend, colleague, and one-time student, St. Clair Drake, has written the most about Davis, but his writings too have mainly focused on Davis's work as part of anthropology and the black experience.<sup>18</sup> Another example of this accretionist scholarship is Michael Hillis's briefer exegesis of Davis's key works as they pertain to contemporary educational theory and practice.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> James D. Anderson, "Race, Meritocracy, and the American Academy during the Immediate Post-World War II Era," *History of Education Quarterly* 33 (Summer 1993): 154.

<sup>17</sup> Dallas L. Browne, "Across Class and Culture: Allison Davis and His Works," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, eds. Ira E. Harrison and Faye Harrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 168-190. See also: Faye V. Harrison, "The Du Boisian Legacy in Anthropology," *Critique of Anthropology* 12 (September 1992): 246-51.

<sup>18</sup> St. Clair Drake, "In the Mirror of Black Scholarship: W. Allison Davis and *Deep South*," in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1974): 42-54; St. Clair Drake, "Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 9, New Perspectives on Black Education (Summer 1978): 85-95; and St. Clair Drake, "Anthropology and the Black Experience," *Black Scholar* 11 (September/October 1980): 4, 21-24.

<sup>19</sup> Michael R. Hillis, "Allison Davis and the Study of Race, Social Class, and Schooling," *Journal of Negro Education* 64 (Winter 1995): 33-41.

More typical are works not centered on Davis at all. John Gilkeson's *Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America* is representative of how most scholars use Davis.<sup>20</sup> Here Gilkeson mentions Davis only as he helps to flesh out the social-anthropological research programs advanced by Lloyd Warner in the 1930s. Several key sociological works examine Davis in much the same manner, though in these cases they relate Davis to strains in what they conceive as sociological thought.<sup>21</sup> Ellen Lageman and Morris Finder demonstrate a similar tendency with regard to the field of education, though with more substance.<sup>22</sup> Lageman shows how Davis's work in the 1940s illuminated key aspects of the University of Chicago's Committee on Human Development, which was a central organ for interdisciplinary educational research. Finder, a scholar who knew and worked with Davis, discusses him mainly as a way of highlighting educationist Ralph Tyler's research agenda. Finally, Daryl Michael Scott and Alice O'Connor write about Davis similarly to show how he helps to illuminate wider discourses on black culture and poverty, respectively, and how such discourses related to social policy.<sup>23</sup>

Overall, the literature on Davis is fractured and incomplete, but if pieced together, it makes abundantly clear that Davis was a significant and pioneering figure within American history that warrants fuller consideration. Though much of it is gestured at rather than fully explored, various scholars have at least partially identified Davis's pioneering theoretical and

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<sup>20</sup> John S. Gilkeson, *Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America, 1886-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 94-96, 120.

<sup>21</sup> Vernon J. Williams, Jr., *From a Caste to a Minority: Changing Attitudes of American Sociologists Toward Afro-Americans, 1896-1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989), 165; Pierre Saint-Arnaud, *African American Pioneers of Sociology: A Critical History*, trans. Peter Feldstein (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 78, 91, 134; James B. McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem: The Failure of a Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 153, 171-73, 174, 182-86.

<sup>22</sup> Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Educational Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 152-53, 155, 179, 234; Morris Finder, *Educating America: How Ralph W. Tyler Taught America to Teach* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 43-46;

<sup>23</sup> Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 27-29, 35-37, 39, 52-54, 64-66, 124, 128, 167, 198, 223; Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 63-64, 66, 75-76, 85-87, 89, 95, 97, 107, 198, 209.

methodological work in anthropology, culture-and-personality, and education; his landmark appointment to the University of Chicago faculty; and his impact on educational policy regarding intelligence testing, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and Head Start. Unfortunately, almost all studies treat these topics in isolation, and they only scratch the surface of Davis's actual contributions and the politics surrounding them. At the same time, the person and personality behind all of this work remains almost entirely unclear. My project will provide the first full accounting of Davis's career over time and across disciplinary affiliation, and it will explain the moral and ideological objectives underpinning his long career. In the process, I will more fully flesh out Davis's contributions listed above, as well as neglected ones such as his literary thought during the New Negro Renaissance. I will also ground Davis's public career in the social experiences that gave it form, particularly those during the first third of his life in Washington, D. C., in the Northeast, and in Virginia. My aim is to put Davis on the map by showing how he belongs within the pantheon of significant twentieth-century American intellectuals.

Of course, much of Davis's significance for American history is actually revealed in accounting for *why* he has been so marginalized within the literature despite his notable achievements. There are three primary reasons. The first was Davis's involvement with many different disciplines. Few figures moved so fluidly between fields, in Davis's case from English to anthropology, and from psychology to education. This has left his treatment within the literature fragmented by discipline, because various scholars have examined Davis's work *within* a particular discipline rather than *between* multiple ones. Davis's movement across disciplines both diminished his body of work within each discipline and made it more difficult for scholars to locate the disciplinary origins of his theories and methodologies. Compare this to black scholars such as Charles S. Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier, who both remained firmly within



sociology and developed a large corpus of work clearly rooted in the tradition of Chicago Sociology. That they both have multiple books about them is thus less surprising given sociology's clear claim to them.

The second reason for Davis's invisibility was the iconoclastic nature of his ideas and his research traditions. During the New Negro Renaissance, for instance, this included a literary style steeped in Irving Babbitt's unpopular "New Humanism," and in his experiences in southern Virginia rather than the urban North. More importantly, the two ideas that most defined Davis's career were caste and class. In developing them, Davis drew from a largely European form of anthropology that was foreign to the United States, and which straddled both sociology and anthropology. Davis used the novel field of social anthropology to lay bare the intractable, structural bases of social, racial, and economic inequality in the United States. Though his ideas would have resonated more during the Great Depression of the 1930s, which is the context in which they originated, they were not widely read until the outbreak of World War II and into the immediate postwar period. In that new context, Davis, like Lloyd Warner and C. Wright Mills, would continue to make the case for structural inequality even amid major social change, discerning the fundamental continuities in operation. However, most Americans in the postwar era found those ideas anachronistic. African Americans could not be a caste, many reasoned, amid wartime changes in race relations, one of which was symbolized in Davis's own appointment to the University of Chicago. Social class could not be so significant within a society in which the middle class was rapidly expanding and affluence was reaching unprecedented levels. Furthermore, participant observation and community studies could not yield reliable, authoritative information when statistical data and quantitative analyses were in vogue. By the 1960s, when Americans newly "discovered" poverty, institutional racism, and the

flaws within statistical and quantitative data, Davis's prescient ideas and methods had been largely forgotten. In this way, Davis fell victim to the context of the times, to his non-traditional disciplinary involvement, and to the iconoclastic nature of his ideas. Those ideas have yet to be rediscovered and fully appreciated for their vigor and foresight.

The final and most important reason for Davis's neglect, however, stems from the politics of knowledge production and how it is perpetuated over time. Many of the scholars whose research excluded Davis entirely were simply not aware of him and his relevance to their projects. Without meaning to, they participated in the ongoing marginalization of Davis's work, which was first ratified by the explicitly racist division of labor of the mid-twentieth-century academy. Despite being the lead author of *Deep South* and *Children of Bondage*, Davis's white collaborators—Lloyd Warner, Burleigh Gardner, and John Dollard—received more of the credit. Despite being the theoretical leader and chairman for *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*, credit went more to Kenneth Eells, Ralph Tyler, and other white contributors to the book. Such was the dilemma of the black scholar of that time, even when that scholar managed to gain a rare appointment at a major predominantly-white university.<sup>24</sup> Given that Davis was initially barred from the faculty club at Chicago and that its Department of Education openly debated the appropriateness of him teaching white students at all, the logic behind Davis's marginalization within social science becomes clearer. Most African Americans of Davis's generation were forced merely to follow the research programs as set out by white scholars, and to provide research that would bolster the production and profile of the white male scholars who controlled

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<sup>24</sup> For an intellectual biography that takes up the dilemma of being a black intellectual as its primary theme, see Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

the academy. Although Davis managed to break this mold in an exceptional way, he would nevertheless be denied credit and rendered partly invisible.

Awareness of the racist division of labor within the academy has prompted scholars in the latter part of the twentieth century to excavate the past with an eye to the contributions of marginal actors. Such work has fundamentally transformed how we understand the politics of knowledge production, the nature of the knowledge itself, and the people involved in constructing it. But much remains to be done in what some have called “decolonizing” historical and social-scientific knowledge. This project contributes to that larger mission.

Since anthropology was Davis’s central field (his work within education can be seen as a type of applied anthropology), this project builds especially upon efforts to “decolonize” anthropology. Faye Harrison’s *Decolonizing Anthropology* (1991), Ira Harrison’s and Faye Harrison’s *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology* (1999), and Lee Baker’s *From Savage to Negro* (1998) are all important landmarks in this tradition.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, *African-American Pioneers* even includes an essay on Davis, locating him squarely within that inquiry. Collectively, these works have investigated how anthropology has at various points served to bolster racial oppression. For example, in *From Savage to Negro*, Baker shows how turn-of-the-twentieth-century anthropology merely ratified the segregation and disfranchisement of blacks within the United States.<sup>26</sup>

Equally important, decolonizing anthropologists have challenged the stature of white anthropologists in the field by showing how they relied upon the labor and experiences of

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<sup>25</sup> Faye V. Harrison, ed., *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation* (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1991); Ira E. Harrison and Faye Harrison, eds., *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*; Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Baker, Ch. 1-4.

minority peoples to develop their ideas and to advance their work. This has been particularly significant with regard to Boasian anthropology. While not discounting the importance of Franz Boas and his many influential white students, including Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Melville Herskovits, and Edward Sapir, decolonizing anthropologists have shown how the Boasian tradition—so ably constructed by George Stocking—has marginalized the contributions of black anthropologists. For instance, in *African-American Pioneers*, the authors make clear how Herskovits, the “father of African-American anthropology,” relied upon the work of black researchers (Zora Neale Hurston and Louis King) in his studies, because those researchers could gain privileged access to black people around the world.<sup>27</sup> Franz Boas himself relied upon the research of Native Americans such as Ella Deloria, and his radical ideas on race were not only developed in conjunction with black people such as W. E. B. Du Bois, but in fact were anticipated by them.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, while white people became mired in the myriad ideologies of white supremacy throughout American history, black people never needed instruction as to their equal humanity. As John Lewis put it, “If a man is chained to a chair, does anyone need to tell him he should struggle to be free?”<sup>29</sup> This project examines the career and thought of Allison Davis through this same critical lens.

It is precisely because of Davis’s marginalization that he offers such a revealing look into American history. Davis’s career as an interdisciplinary scholar, an iconoclast, and an African American all helped to render him partly invisible. But these very same factors all position him to make the larger society in which he lived that much more visible. With that insight in mind,

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<sup>27</sup> Faye V. Harrison and Ira E. Harrison, “Introduction: Anthropology, African Americans, and the Emancipation of a Subjugated Knowledge,” in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*; Baker, 99-126, 168-87.

<sup>29</sup> John Lewis, “John Lewis Tells His Truth about ‘Selma,’” *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 2016.

this study of Davis contributes above all to three fields: American intellectual history, the history of social science, and African-American history.

First, this study contributes to American intellectual historiography by deepening our understanding of twentieth-century American social-constructivist thought. The case of Allison Davis helps to reveal the nature, origin, use, and creative re-use of environmentalist social science. One of the most important shifts in all of twentieth-century thought was that from heredity to environment in explaining human behavior. By the 1930s, American social scientists of all types had adopted Franz Boas's conceptions of culture as holistic, particularistic, and relativistic. In other words, Boas maintained that each culture comprised an integrated whole that was unique and equal to any other culture. Social scientists used these ideas to unseat biological-determinist and hereditarian theories across the board.<sup>30</sup> For example, Margaret Mead attacked theories of racial and cultural hierarchy by depicting a Samoan culture that was well-suited to life in Samoa, and hence was equal to—and in some ways, superior to—American culture.<sup>31</sup> But such Boasian theories of culture raised new sets of questions: above all, how do cultures reproduce themselves?

Culture-and-personality theory emerged as the central interdisciplinary effort to tackle this question, as theorists scrutinized the processes of socialization and enculturation. The central theorists were cultural anthropologists, psychiatrists, and social psychologists, and they

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<sup>30</sup> The literature on this shift is vast. A few important starting points include: George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1968); Drake, "Anthropology and the Black Experience," 2-31; Fred Matthews, "Social Scientists and the Culture Concept, 1930-1950: The Conflict Between Processual and Structural Approaches," *Sociological Theory* 7 (Spring 1989): 87-101; Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and John S. Gilkeson, *Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America, 1886-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (1928; repr., New York: Mentor Books, 1949).

made up part of what David Hollinger calls the “American liberal intelligentsia.”<sup>32</sup> In this sense, these social scientists were cosmopolitan, modernist intellectuals who sought to subvert Victorian dichotomies and hierarchies. Although this group included many ethnic and religious minorities, as well as several homosexuals, most of them were white because of the racist division of labor. Davis, however, was exceptional for his ability to contribute novel theories and methodologies as a black researcher, making his work particularly illuminating.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Davis’s training in social anthropology, which focused especially on social structure, instead of in cultural anthropology, which focused more on culturally-defined attitudes and practices, made his work particularly dynamic. Indeed, in his culture-and-personality studies, Davis emphasized the centrality of social class in addition to cultural beliefs, in order to highlight how inequality perpetuated itself. This focus on class stratification within modern society was absent from most culture-and-personality studies, which focused more on non-Western, “integrated” cultures. Furthermore, portraying class not only as an objective determinant but also as a culture, or a behavioral environment, was a novel approach that Davis helped to develop. If we can understand culture-and-personality as “cultural transmission via the shaping of personality,” then a study of Davis can show how certain intellectuals took this “single metanarrative” and expanded upon it.<sup>34</sup> For Davis, modern culture, like society, was not unitary but stratified. Therefore, it only made sense to speak in terms of “cultures” (upper class, lower class, etc.) and not “culture” within the United States. The metanarrative that guided Davis’s

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<sup>32</sup> David Hollinger, “Ethnic Diversity, Cosmopolitanism, and the Emergence of the American Liberal Intelligentsia,” in his *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 56-73.

<sup>33</sup> E. Franklin Frazier and Charles S. Johnson both affiliated at times with culture-and-personality scholars, particularly with their studies for the American Youth Commission – *Negro Youth at the Crossways* and *Growing Up in the Black Belt* – but their theoretical focus remained firmly within the Chicago sociological tradition.

<sup>34</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, “‘How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives’: Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Thought,” *Journal of American History* 96 (March 2010): 1083.

mature thought, then, was that modern society was divided into distinct class cultures that reproduced themselves through the process of socialization.

Davis's turn to education, furthermore, marked a crucial political use of culture-and-personality theory. In an important article, Joanne Meyerowitz called for more historical analysis of culture-and-personality theory and theorists, and especially for more examination of the uses toward which theorists applied their ideas.<sup>35</sup> She discusses how "modernization theorists, state welfare agencies, civil rights activists, gay rights activists, feminists, and advocates of a multicultural society" used culture-and-personality theories "in different ways and to different ends."<sup>36</sup> Davis's use of culture-and-personality learning theory informed his efforts to transform how schools and teachers taught lower-class students, assessed students' intelligence, integrated the schools, and combated social inequalities. Consequently, an intellectual biography of Davis deepens our understanding of social-constructivist thought and its origin, transmission, use, and re-use among particular practitioners.

In addition to furthering our understanding of social-constructivist thought, this project also contributes to the literature on two other important streams of twentieth-century American social thought. The first regards the dynamic interconnections between the arts and sciences. While Davis's movement from English to anthropology helped to render him invisible, it also makes clear how the arts and sciences were parallel endeavors. Specifically, Davis's critical-realist mode of literary representation during the New Negro Renaissance realistically portrayed ordinary blacks in ways that garnered respect for them, and that counteracted more licentious representations among some young radicals. Such realistic portrayals and critical aims demonstrated clear continuities with Davis's empirical approach within anthropology after 1931.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1057-1084.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 1083.

In both spheres, he provided realistic representations of oppressed peoples aimed at humanizing them and combating problematic representations. His transition to social science offered merely a new terrain on which to wage the same struggle in the politics of representation. In this way, Davis offers a clear example of how the arts and sciences shared similar humanistic projects and were in dialogue with one another.

Second, Davis embodies another important voice that eschewed the general retreat from radicalism in postwar America. He and some of his colleagues at the University of Chicago joined figures such as C. Wright Mills in continuing to emphasize the centrality of class stratification within the United States, even as the dominant discourse at the time focused on the “classless” nature of American society. This iconoclasm helped to marginalize Davis’s work, but it also reveals another important intellectual whose career bridged two eras when more class-centered analyses were prominent: the 1930s and the 1960s. Historians such as John S. Gilkeson have interpreted Lloyd Warner’s and his students’ extensions of class to the realms of culture and behavior as conservative in moving the meaning of class away from the means of production; but in fact, Davis, and to a degree Warner himself, never ignored the economic dimensions of class.<sup>37</sup> To the contrary, Davis sought to extend the analysis of economic inequalities’ significance to the cultural realm, thereby demonstrating the deeper impact of class inequalities and expanding without terribly diluting the conceptual boundaries of class. Davis’s work here was particularly significant in the realm of intelligence testing, where his conception of the cultural differences among social classes resonated with many educators. The clarity and validity of his ideas, which demonstrated the middle-class biases of intelligence tests, prompted school districts all over the country to discontinue or revise their use of the tests.

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<sup>37</sup> John S. Gilkeson, *Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America, 1886-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10.



The history of social science is the second major field for which this study has direct implications. First, this project restores interconnections between social-science disciplines, and it deepens our understanding of social-science knowledge. Yet again the invisibility of Davis is connected with the marginalization of significant interdisciplinary traditions. Davis existed in a cultural milieu in which John Dollard could suggest that “there is a single social science,” and “what now seem like discrete fields or sciences are really shadings and points of emphasis in a unified field of scientific observation.”<sup>38</sup> As someone who variously adopted the methods and theories of anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and educators, Davis is an effective case study in the permeability of social-science knowledge. Through him, we see how much the social sciences drew from one another and collaborated productively in shared projects. Perhaps most importantly, Davis’s career reveals a time when powerful interdisciplinary institutions such as Yale’s Institute of Human Relations and Chicago’s Committee on Human Development had the intellectual prerogative and financial support to carry out authoritative interdisciplinary research. This history reveals both the rewards and difficulties of carrying out interdisciplinary social science.

At the same time, Davis’s career and thought enrich our understanding of social-science knowledge. Scholars within particular disciplinary traditions typically recover the work of past theorists as that work informs their own particular disciplines. In the process, scholars can unintentionally build walls rather than bridges between bodies of disciplinary knowledge. In straddling various disciplines, Davis illustrates clearly the connections among diverse fields and within twentieth-century social-science knowledge. In particular, Davis’s class-as-a-culture

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<sup>38</sup> John Dollard, *Criteria for a Life History: With Analyses of Six Notable Documents* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), 276.

discourse developed anthropological, psychological, and sociological knowledge into a consistent framework for addressing problems within the field of education. Equally important, an in-depth study of Davis grounds disciplinary theories in the lived realities of the theorist. Uniting theory and theorist makes the social theory more comprehensible than viewing it in isolation, and it counteracts the tendency to treat theories as timeless sets of insights rather than as contingent, socially-constructed historical products. The more we historicize social-science knowledge—in this case, relating especially to social anthropology and culture-and-personality theory—the more we see discern its nature, function, and ultimate mutability. Through Davis, we see how social experiences governed by race and class directed social-science projects, informed social-constructivist thought, and ultimately influenced the larger culture. In this account, then, social science emerges as but one part of the larger social-intellectual matrix within the twentieth-century United States.

In addition to these contributions to the history of social science, this project offers two more. First, it recovers a neglected field within the history of anthropology, namely American social anthropology during the interwar period. Most histories posit a clear distinction between cultural and social anthropology at that time, where cultural anthropology was largely an American field and social anthropology was a British one.<sup>39</sup> This study shows how Lloyd Warner and his students, especially Davis, established an important social-anthropological tradition within the United States. This tradition was unique in the United States for its theoretical and methodological influences derived from Emile Durkheim, A. R. Radcliffe-

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<sup>39</sup> Jerry D. Moore, *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2009), 46-47, 117; George Stocking, Jr., “Essays on Culture and Personality” in *Malinowski, Rivers, Benedict and Others: Essays on Culture and Personality*, vol. 4 of *History of Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 4; George W. Stocking, Jr., “Radcliffe-Brown and British Social Anthropology,” in *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology*, vol. 2 of *History of Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

Brown, and Bronislaw Malinowski, rather than from the cultural anthropology of Franz Boas and his students. Specifically, this tradition was more sociological in its emphasis on social structure and continuity instead of cultural values and historical diffusion. Moreover, American social anthropology was unique in its investigation of modern American society rather than non-Western, “primitive” cultures. Its novelty made it particularly innovative, but it also led to its marginalization within the literature.

Within this significant larger tradition, Davis’s particular role—slighted because of the politics of race in the academy—was even more remarkable. Davis led two biracial (involving both black and white investigators) research studies of the Deep South at a time when research convention dictated that blacks not work with—much less oversee—white researchers.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Davis developed new social theories by blending Marxism and Warnerian anthropology in *Deep South*, and by synthesizing social anthropology and social psychology in *Children of Bondage*. These innovations made him the only African American with training in anthropology to contribute new social theories to mainstream social science in the 1930s, partly because most blacks were forced merely to follow the research programs set out by major white scholars.<sup>41</sup> Davis is therefore a quintessential pioneer within the history of anthropology whose work deserves serious attention.

Next, this study makes clear the dynamic potential of structural thought as conceptualized by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, as well as by Davis and Warner. Scholars in the latter half of the twentieth century rebelled against the potentially static portraits of society to which such

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<sup>40</sup> Harrison and Harrison, “Introduction,” in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 53; St. Clair Drake, quoted in George C. Bond, “A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake: An American Anthropologist,” *American Ethnologist* 15 (1988): 780.

structural theories could lend themselves.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, functionalist theory, especially in the hands of theorists such as Talcott Parsons, at times seemed to normalize social stasis and present social change as deviant. However, an historical reading of functionalist theory reveals how it was pioneering in revising early “processual” theories that slighted social structure and emphasized the individual interactions that formed society from the ground up.<sup>43</sup> Functionalist theory in the hands of some theorists made clear the integrated nature of society, and it explained how and why societies hung together even amid the dramatic changes accompanying industrialization.

Furthermore, adept theorists employed structural theory in nuanced ways that accounted for and did not stigmatize social change, and they used it for liberal rather than conservative ends. Davis and Warner, for example, employed structural thought in formulating the concepts of caste and class, but they saw these not as eternal realities, but as contested and changing structures that nevertheless exerted powerful forces in shaping Americans’ behaviors. Davis and Warner, moreover, elucidated entrenched systems of structural inequality in order to prescribe systematic solutions for combating that inequality. The prescience of their vision was only affirmed as American theorists in the latter half of the twentieth century reformulated these ideas, adopting kindred terms such as “institutional racism” and “social stratification.”

African-American history is the third major field for which this study has direct implications. In addition to recovering the life and thought of a neglected black intellectual, this project contributes to the historiography of the black civil rights movement. Specifically, Davis’s career deepens our understanding of the “long civil rights movement,” particularly its

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<sup>42</sup> Moore, 145; Stockings, Jr., “Racliffe-Brown and British Social Anthropology,” 132.

<sup>43</sup> See Fred Matthews, “Social Scientists and the Culture Concept, 1930-1950: The Conflict Between Processual and Structural Approaches,” *Sociological Theory* 7 (Spring 1989): 87-101.

earlier, more radical interwar phase that was focused on class inequalities and the intersection of race and class. The case of Allison Davis highlights the value of redefining the civil rights movement as a larger freedom struggle that transcended the Southern battle against Jim Crow from 1954 to 1965.

In the last two decades, historians have extended the story of this freedom struggle temporally, geographically, and conceptually. Such literature does not contest the importance of the Southern movement against Jim Crow, but it sheds light on freedom struggles that the traditional narrative had rendered invisible. For example, Robert Self demonstrates how blacks in Oakland were less affected by and concerned with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 than were the black Southerners whom whites were disfranchising.<sup>44</sup> Oakland blacks were more concerned with de facto segregation in housing and education, eroding urban tax bases, and other issues that the federal legislation did not touch. Thomas Sugrue's *Sweet Land of Liberty* provides an overview of these wider black freedom struggles across the entire North.<sup>45</sup> He also extends his analysis chronologically, spanning from the 1920s to the 1970s. Patricia Sullivan's *Days of Hope* and Glenda Gilmore's *Defying Dixie* similarly treat the earlier, radical part of "long civil rights movement."<sup>46</sup> All of this scholarship does more

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). There are numerous other examples of the new historiography on civil rights. On rethinking Black Power and the later civil rights struggle, see Peniel E. Joseph's "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 96 (December 2009): 751-76. On expanding the movement to the West and to other ethnic and racial groups, see Mark Brilliant's *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). On expanding the movement to international relations and developments, see Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). On rethinking the central actors in the Southern struggle, see Danielle L. McGuire's *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and*

than highlight different struggles across time and place; it also transforms how we understand the traditional civil rights movement. Gilmore, for instance, shows how the traditional movement was in fact more conservative than the earlier struggles, which centered more on class and the economic reordering of society than on civil rights and desegregation.

My project further explains what this more radical freedom struggle looked like. On the one hand, Davis's writing during the New Negro Renaissance reveals a radical element of the black literary movement. Davis railed against class divisions among African Americans, and he called for racial solidarity in organizing a socialist movement to overcome race and class inequalities. More consequentially, though, in the 1930s and 1940s Davis and many other blacks continued this fight in the arena of social science. In penetrating academia in the 1920s and 1930s, blacks seized upon novel opportunities to foment racial change by helping to win the contest of ideas. Davis's work tracked America's systematic racial discrimination and oppression, and it thus put the responsibility for inequality on society, not on individuals or particular races. *Deep South*, *Children of Bondage*, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, and his memo to Gunnar Myrdal are all important examples of this work. Each emphasized the need to address both class and caste stratification in fomenting social change. Consequently, Davis reveals how blacks were important actors in the social-constructivist revolution in which the environment displaced heredity as the prevailing paradigm for explaining human difference, even though most accounts have marginalized their contributions.<sup>47</sup>

By seizing upon the terrain of ideas to foment racial change, interwar black social scientists make clear the connection between ideas and movement politics. Indeed, the postwar

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*Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance: Pierre Saint-Arnaud, *African American Pioneers of Sociology: A Critical History*, translated by Peter Feldstein (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

civil rights movement built upon the intellectual consensus created partly by Davis, Frazier, and Johnson that the environment, not racial heredity, circumscribed the lives of black people. That intellectual shift made it clear that social equality was possible if the environment changed, and it created a moral impetus to make changes, because inequality suddenly became not an unfortunate reality of life but an arbitrary social arrangement that violated principles of fairness. *Brown v. Board of Education* makes tangible the connections between ideas and movement politics. That court decision relied upon the environmentalist work of Davis and others to decide that school segregation violated the Constitution because it created an environment that discriminated against black students to devastating effect. After the ruling, the modern civil rights movement was born. Activists took up the Court's rationale to challenge Jim Crow in every institution, and to make desegregation a reality on the ground. Ideas thus infused the movement and directed energies toward particular ends.

Davis's story also illustrates how elements of the earlier and more radical phase of the black freedom struggle persisted into the 1950s and beyond. Davis continued to emphasize class inequalities, and in fact class became his dominant research paradigm during his tenure at the University of Chicago. Cognizant of how race and class inequalities were inextricably linked, he attacked the class biases within intelligence tests, combated class discrimination in industry and the schools, and fought broadly for antipoverty programs. Davis recognized that black rights depended upon more than equal access to mainstream institutions, so he focused his attack upon ameliorating the class inequalities that disproportionately affected African Americans. In an almost entirely forgotten article entitled "The Motivations of the Underprivileged Worker," Davis argued that poor people needed good jobs, stable wages, and suitable places to live in

order to become full members of society.<sup>48</sup> Even as the postwar context caused him to muffle his radical views, he continued to make the case for the redistribution of wealth and the social and economic empowerment of the poor. In this way, his work represents a more radical mid-century aspect of the civil rights movement, even as emphases on racial integration and equal access loomed large in the world in which Davis operated.

Davis's career thus also links the earlier radical phase of the civil rights movement with later radical tendencies during the 1960s. Through Davis's career, we see how civil rights activists did not merely discover institutional inequality after the "heroic" phase of the movement had ended. Rather, individuals within the movement had been concerned with these issues all along, and when the movement became more radical in the mid-1960s, it had a radical tradition—and empirical data—from which to draw. So while it is necessary and valuable for historians to highlight the shifting contours of the freedom struggles, Davis reminds us of the important continuities within those struggles as well. Though the changing historical context prompted him to shift his rhetoric and tactics over the course of the twentieth century, Davis's basic aims of contesting race and class inequality remained essentially the same. For this reason, an in-depth study of Davis over time adds valuable nuance to generalizations about the anatomy of the civil rights movement.

Notably, Davis was also a pioneering figure within the "heroic" phase of the black freedom struggle when it centered on civil rights and desegregation. This project discusses Davis's path breaking but little-known integration of the faculty at the University of Chicago in 1942. His appointment to the Department of Education exposed both the dynamic changes within American race relations and the particular attributes required of such a pioneer. Though

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<sup>48</sup> Allison Davis, "The Motivations of the Underprivileged Worker," in *Industry and Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1946), 86.



Davis was radical, he had learned how to negotiate the politics of the far more conservative academy. He built strong alliances with powerful white social scientists, and his undisputed scholarly success enabled him to secure a prominent position at the University of Chicago. This was particularly important because it gave him a more powerful position through which to promulgate his progressive ideas regarding the nature of race and class inequality. In this way, Davis' integrating appointment at Chicago testified to the significance of academia as both a physical and intellectual terrain for the civil rights struggle, even as it underscored the intractability of racial inequality.

This project also contributes to the historiography of the New Negro Renaissance. Allison Davis, along with the notable black poet Sterling Brown, developed a distinctive literary style I call "Negro Stoicism" during the black literary movement. This style focused on portraying "lowly" African Americans in realistic and sympathetic ways, ultimately discerning fortitude and resilience in them. As mentioned above, this style was part of a leftist aspect of the New Negro Renaissance, which promoted racial solidarity and aimed to foster an interclass socialist movement against racial caste. In addition to highlighting this important radical aspect of the Renaissance, this study follows other histories which make clear the national, and indeed international, scope of the Renaissance, as well as its bottom-up nature.<sup>49</sup> Because Davis developed his literary style during his years in the South, and because he did so partly through his experiences with the downtrodden blacks he encountered there, we see the complexity of a movement that is still sometimes portrayed as centered in Harlem and comprising only the

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<sup>49</sup> Examples of other histories that have challenged the foundational accounts of the Renaissance include: William Maxwell's *New Negroes, Old Left* (1997), Davarian Baldwin's *Chicago's New Negroes* (2007), David Canton's *Raymond Pace Alexander: New Negro Lawyer in Philadelphia* (2010), and Erin Chapman's *Prove It to Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (2012).

“talented tenth.” In the process, the significance of little-known black social experiences at Dunbar High School and on the campuses of black colleges in the 1920s is made evident.

Finally, this project further illustrates the value of the strong biographical tradition within African-American intellectual history and civil rights history more generally. Indeed, African Americans have for centuries turned to biography or autobiography as a means to “testify” to their experiences with oppression.<sup>50</sup> Black writers have developed a rich biographical tapestry that has illuminated not merely their own lives, but the larger society that has so circumscribed their individual paths through life. For the same reasons, scholars of civil rights have sought to document the movement’s history by situating it in the lives and experiences of its participants, increasingly including the female activists too long marginalized in that history. In this project, we see how Davis’s own experiences with racism informed the trajectory of his career, and how those same experiences ultimately sharpened his vision and enabled him to understand the American social system more clearly than did most of his peers. Though Davis did not write an autobiography of his own, thus letting his scholarship be his main legacy, this project further testifies to the value of situating an intellectual such as Davis in the social realities of his life, which help to explain the contours of the larger black freedom struggle that he helped to wage.<sup>51</sup>

## Chapter Overview

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<sup>50</sup> See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Bearing Witness: Selections from African-American Autobiography in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991); and V. P. Franklin, *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths: Autobiography and the Making of the African-American Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Scribner, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Davis did not write an autobiography, but he did a various times draft versions of a novel that was clearly autobiographical in nature. However, he never published this work, and he wanted to keep the fact that it was autobiographical a secret.

This study is organized into ten chapters. The first chapter tracks Davis's social experiences during the first third of his life, from 1902 to 1931. It explains how race, class, color, and place framed those experiences and shaped his intellectual orientation. In particular, Davis learned the mores of Jim Crow by growing up in Washington, D.C. during the nadir of race relations, but his class privilege and the strong black community within Washington empowered him to thrive in school, enabling him to attend Williams College and then Harvard. The Northern context taught him how to adapt to different racial mores and showed him that he could compete with even the most talented whites. Racism then deprived him of teaching opportunities in the North, so he taught English for six years at Hampton Institute in southeastern Virginia. Here he interacted closely with poor Southern blacks, contributed to the New Negro Renaissance, and eventually prepared to change careers to social science in order to undermine Jim Crow. I explain how all of these experiences are central to understanding Davis's later career and thought.

The second chapter analyzes Davis's literary style and intellectual agenda during the New Negro Renaissance. I show how Davis aimed to grant humanity and virtue to the poor black masses through a distinctive style of critical realism that I call "Negro Stoicism." This style was significant as a middle way between black modernists and the more genteel impresarios of the Renaissance. Davis focused on the "lowly" as his subjects, but he portrayed them as stoical, seeing in them the virtues of the race and the hopes for ending Jim Crow. He combined this literature with essays critiquing both the "race chauvinism" of the older generation and the sordidness of the modernists' representations of black people. Because Davis participated in the Renaissance from Virginia, and because he drew inspiration for his work from the poor blacks he

encountered there, his ideas further reveal the national scope of the movement and the influence of bottom-up forces in shaping its nature.

The third chapter considers Davis's formal training in anthropology at Harvard and the London School of Economics from 1931 to 1933. It explains how Davis shifted from the arts to the social sciences in order to become more relevant to black people's needs by contributing to the social-constructivist trends within social science. Although he and his wife studied under Earnest Hooton and others at Harvard and abroad, this chapter shows how Davis was most influenced by the social anthropology of Bronislaw Malinowski and especially Lloyd Warner, as well as by the social biology of Lancelot Hogben. These mentors guided all of Davis's early anthropological research.

The fourth chapter tracks Davis's and his colleagues' fieldwork in Natchez, Mississippi from 1933 to 1935, and it evaluates the book that emerged from that research, *Deep South* (1941). Although the research process was difficult and dangerous, it resulted in an unprecedented depth and breadth of ethnographic material on the Deep South. *Deep South* was Davis's theoretically-innovative contribution to the environmentalist social science of the day, for it explained social behavior in Natchez as the product of caste and class forces, not biological differences. Davis's syntheses of Marxism and Warnerian anthropology, as well as his leadership of a bi-racial research team, were especially notable achievements. The chapter concludes by exploring the reception of the book, which was generally well-received and which continued to be used in college courses up through the 1970s.

The fifth chapter focuses upon the critical reception of the caste-and-class framework in particular, which *Deep South* distilled in its most sophisticated form. Davis's application of the caste concept to race relations in the South sparked a revealing social-science controversy.

While many supporters began employing the concept in their work—sometimes for very different purposes than Davis intended—critics emerged among Chicago School sociologists, black radicals, and others. In the end, few readers took on Davis’s capacious definition of caste, but the controversy was significant as a microcosm of the larger debates about social divisions within the United States.

The sixth chapter investigates Davis’s involvement in the culture-and-personality school in the latter half of the 1930s. In particular, it tracks the making and reception of Davis’s and John Dollard’s classic, *Children of Bondage*. The book embodied fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration, and it was theoretically pioneering in combining the caste-and-class framework with analyses of socialization processes among black youth in Natchez and New Orleans. The authors’ insertion of social class into culture-and-personality scholarship was particularly novel and important. In addition to theoretical innovation, *Children of Bondage* also served as a compelling document that humanized the black youth whom it described. The book’s commercial success and positive reception testified to the authors’ achievements.

The seventh chapter dissects Davis’s landmark desegregating appointment to the faculty of the University of Chicago in 1942. This appointment made him among the first blacks in the country to secure a full-time appointment at a major white university. The move was made possible through the collaboration of powerful white liberals at the Julius Rosenwald Fund and the University of Chicago, who seized upon a changing racial climate to effectively challenge the color line. Davis was a perfect candidate for this test case because of his scholarly accomplishments and collegiality, but he had to endure the difficulties of being a pioneer in desegregation. His appointment was ultimately significant in both its symbolic and its practical effects, the latter of which included his ambitious research agenda as described in the following

chapters. As such, the appointment underscored the significance of academia as both a physical and an intellectual terrain for the civil rights movement. Still, the careful maneuvering that was required to make Davis's appointment, the extent of the racism Davis faced while at Chicago, the submersion of Davis's intellectual contributions under those of his white colleagues, and the slow pace of future appointments of black faculty across the country all underscored the limits of social change and the power of America's racial hierarchy.

The eighth chapter examines how Davis's work contributed to the University of Chicago's intellectual and institutional distinctiveness in the 1940s. It explains the productive interdisciplinary research he conducted along with Ralph Tyler, Robert Havighurst, Lloyd Warner, and many others as a member of Chicago's Committee on Human Development and other organizations. In this period, Davis developed his most significant social thought, which, drawing from his culture-and-personality work, posited class as a type of culture or learning environment. Davis and his colleagues applied this framework to the family, the workplace, the acculturation process, and the school. Though some of this work did not result in major publications, it nonetheless represented the progressive application of culture-and-personality theory to social thought relating to many social institutions. Furthering the intercultural education movement, Davis laid bare the middle-class biases within those institutions, and he humanized the poor as he elucidated their distinct patterns of behavior. He thus acknowledged the agency of oppressed peoples at the same time that he underscored America's persistent class stratification, which many of his postwar contemporaries ignored.

The ninth chapter evaluates Davis's work on intelligence testing, which marked the culmination of his culture-and-personality thought and the height of his social influence. Davis's Inglis Lecture at Harvard in 1948, published as *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*,

synthesized the findings from his entire social-science career, and it drew from the research he had spearheaded at the University of Chicago. Its empirical heft and clear presentation ensured its commercial and critical success for decades to come. Essentially, Davis explained the class biases of the intelligence tests that pervaded American classrooms at the time. He argued that the tests discriminated against lower-class students by measuring middle-class skills and training rather than innate ability. Through *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* and his many public presentations of this material, Davis prompted educators and school boards all across the country to revise or abolish their use of the traditional tests, influencing educators in the 1950s as well as the 1960s. Even more, Davis's work helped to initiate a national debate regarding issues of social class, ability, fairness, and opportunity within the United States.

The tenth and final chapter traces Davis's influence in the 1950s and 1960s. Though the innovativeness and influence of his work waned in these years, Davis continued to effect social change and to apply his class-as-a-culture framework to modern problems. In particular, this chapter considers Davis's contribution to two historic achievements within the United States: *Brown v. Board* and Head Start. It explains how Davis contributed to both in direct and indirect ways. Above all, Davis was important in laying the intellectual and empirical foundations for the abolition of segregation within the schools, and for antipoverty programs such as Head Start. Though his most persuasive arguments were often marginalized within national debates on these issues, partly because he refused to emphasize the damage that poverty and racism exacted upon people, he nevertheless played a significant role in both. At the same time, Davis's work contributed to the debates over the "culture of poverty" in the 1960s and beyond, although his contributions rarely reached a large audience amid the divisive political and ideological context

in which the debates raged. Nevertheless, his ideas anticipated later critiques of the culture of poverty concept and pointed to productive ways to think about poverty.

Finally, the conclusion examines the public honors that Davis received late in his career and after he passed away. It explores the contradictions of a society that could simultaneously become more open racially and yet still fail to address the persistent race and class inequalities that Davis spent his life substantiating. I argue that to truly honor Allison Davis, Americans must try to live up to his ideas and work to cultivate human potential beyond racial caste and class. I conclude with a discussion of Davis's most significant ideas and their ongoing relevance today.



## **Chapter 1**

### **Coming of Age during Jim Crow**

*Middle-class Negroes...have been precisely those who felt the sting of oppression most keenly, those who, in spite of education, training, and intellectual skills, found themselves still barred from participation in the economic, political, educational, and cultural opportunities that were available to whites.<sup>1</sup>*

--- Allison Davis

Only a few months after Allison Davis entered the world, W. E. B. Du Bois published one of the most profound statements on African-American life ever put into print: *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). For Davis as for so many African Americans, the book would poignantly distill his own social and psychological experiences with coming of age as a black person in the age of Jim Crow.<sup>2</sup> Like Du Bois, Davis would soon learn that, despite the lightness of his skin, he was simply a “Negro” like all other people who had any trace of African blood. He, too, would learn that to be black was to be a problem; it was to exist as part of a permanently subordinate caste in a white settler society. Davis would be forced to accept the fact that no matter how much smarter or more talented he was than the white people around him, he would be deemed inferior, as well as unclean, uncivilized, and dangerous, and he would be denied full participation in American society. What is more, he would have to look on as white Americans disfranchised, exploited, subjugated, harassed, and lynched those around him who happened to share the same accident of birth.

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<sup>1</sup> Allison Davis, “Retrospect, 1965: Power and Caste,” in *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class*, Abr. ed. (1941; repr., Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1965), 342.

<sup>2</sup> Allison Davis, *Leadership, Love, and Aggression* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 150-51.

For Du Bois, to be African American was to be “shut out from [the white] world by a vast veil.”<sup>3</sup> It was to be denied true self-consciousness, and to always feel one’s “two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.”<sup>4</sup> He famously wrote: “it is a peculiar situation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”<sup>5</sup> Du Bois used the veil metaphor to evoke the physical and social demarcation between black and white people, and to illustrate how that demarcation blinded white people from seeing the reality of black people’s lives, all the while distorting black people’s images of themselves. He longed for a pluralist solution to the race problem where it was “possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.”<sup>6</sup>

While clarifying the social and psychological handicaps of living behind the veil, Du Bois also emphasized how African Americans were “gifted with second-sight in this American world.”<sup>7</sup> Here he meant that African Americans, in having to navigate the white world as well as the black one, gained a better intuitive sense of American social dynamics than the vast majority of white people, who could live comfortably only within the white world. The soundness of this insight was abundantly evident when those precious few African Americans who secured access to the highest educational institutions in the country harnessed their formal educations and their informal social experiences to lay bare America’s racial system. With *The Philadelphia Negro*

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<sup>3</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 2.

(1898) and *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois led the way here. Although his work was marginalized within mainstream social science at the time, it significantly influenced the thought of the next generation of African Americans, of which Allison Davis was a major figure. Davis's own "second-sight" would later come through powerfully in his anthropology, but it was rooted in the social and intellectual influences of the first third of his life, which took him at turns from Washington to Williams, and from Harvard to Hampton.

### **Washington, D.C. in the Nadir**

At the dawn of the twentieth century, on October 14, 1902, William Boyd Allison Davis was born in Washington, D.C. to John Abraham Davis and Gabrielle Dorothy Beale Davis. As an African American born into a century defined by the color line, Allison Davis would face all the difficulties of carving out a life in a country which treated him as a second-class citizen. Still, African-American life was highly complex and variegated across class, color, and regional lines, and the Davises were lucky enough to be firmly part of the black middle class within a city that was home to the most economically successful black community in the nation at the time.<sup>8</sup> Blacks in Washington had what one scholar called a "head start in freedom," for a free black population developed there far earlier than most places.<sup>9</sup> As far back as 1807, five hundred free blacks built a school in the Washington area, and as early as 1830 about half of all African Americans in the District were free, later increasing to 78% by the outbreak of the Civil War.<sup>10</sup> As the cotton revolution shifted the geographic center of slavery from the Upper South to the

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Gibson Hundley, *The Dunbar Story, 1870-1955* (New York: Vintage Press, 1965), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Sowell, "Black Excellence: The Case of Dunbar High School," *Public Interest* 35 (Spring 1974): 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

Deep South in the first half of the nineteenth century, Washington began to offer relative freedom for African Americans compared to the Southern slave states.<sup>11</sup> This was even more the case because of the role of the federal government in providing one of the only avenues to white-collar work for blacks.<sup>12</sup> Washington's stature as a place of relative opportunity for blacks would continue through the twentieth century, though segregation and disfranchisement would spread to there as well by the early 1900s.

Davis's father, John Abraham Davis, was one African American able to attain solid middle-class work with the government. He worked for many years as an official in the printing office, and he later served as a messenger in the War Department, making the "munificent salary of \$1,100 a year" when he passed away in 1928.<sup>13</sup> The fact that John Davis was "the owner of one of the largest farms in Prince William County" in "rural Democratic Virginia" also suggests that his affluence had been partly inherited from free blacks of earlier generations.<sup>14</sup> The Davises' lighter skin was very much connected with this greater affluence. Differences in skin pigmentation reflected complicated histories of interracial sex and cultural interaction that translated into varying social conditions. Lighter skin color connoted closer association to European ancestry, and therefore cultural "superiority." These racial views translated into social power, as the creoles of earlier generations were often free to own property (including slaves), to

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<sup>11</sup> See Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 159-244. He discusses how the Upper South transitioned from a "slave society," or one centered on slavery, to a "society with slaves," or one in which slavery was more peripheral to the economy and social relations.

<sup>12</sup> Sowell, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Special Dispatch to the Globe. "NEGRO ON \$1100 PAY EDUCATED CHILDREN: War Department Employee [sic] Shining Example: One, Williams' Graduate, Another Student at Wellesley," *Daily Boston Globe*, April 23, 1928; Joan Oleck, "Allison Davis: 1902-1983," *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol.12, ed. Shirelle Phelps (Detroit: Gale Research, 1997), 38.

<sup>14</sup> Allison Davis, *Leadership, Love, and Aggression* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 3.

vote, and generally to be full citizens.<sup>15</sup> The same processes persisted throughout the period of chattel slavery in the U.S., even after creoles largely ceased to exist as a distinct group. The distinction between “house” slaves and “field” slaves was a significant one, since “house” slaves typically associated more closely with white slaveowners and were more likely to produce mixed-race, lighter-skinned children (often through rape).<sup>16</sup> Slaveowners tended to treat these offspring much more favorably than unrelated slaves, and this often meant that they gained greater access to education and wealth.<sup>17</sup> The general point is that lighter skin came to represent superiority over darker skin, and this way of seeing translated into social power.

The stratification of the African-American community began during slavery but persisted well beyond it. Washington, D.C. is an outstanding example. A hierarchy in which the most educated, lightest-skinned, and wealthiest blacks sat atop society and the least educated, darkest-skinned, and poorest remained at the bottom developed in Washington in the 1830s but greatly expanded during and after Reconstruction.<sup>18</sup> An “aristocracy” of ninety to one hundred families comprised the upper class, and Washington emerged as the “capital of the colored aristocracy.”<sup>19</sup> These families all had light skin color and “the qualifications of the antiquity of family, money, education, and honorable occupation,” which included “the professions, political posts of more than trivial importance, banking, real estate brokerage, and businesses not tinged with menial

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<sup>15</sup> Berlin, 21-50.

<sup>16</sup> The differences between urban and rural slaves was also significant, since urban slaves often had more specialized job skills, association with wider networks of people, and increased opportunities for education.

<sup>17</sup> The white sociologist, Edward Byron Reuter, was one of the first to study mixed-race peoples systematically. He was trained at the University of Chicago under Robert Park, earning his Ph.D. in 1919 and publishing his dissertation as a book, *The Mulatto in the United States* (1918). Charles S. Johnson included in his anthology, *Ebony and Topaz* (1927), an article Reuter wrote on that same topic. See E.B. Reuter, “The Changing Status of the Mulatto,” *Ebony and Topaz: A Collectanea* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 107-110. Reuter took an “environmentalist” view in explaining the relative affluence of mixed-race peoples, portraying it as a product of more favorable social conditions and differential treatment – and not as a result of innate racial superiority.

<sup>18</sup> See Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), especially Ch. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation’s Capital* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 141.

service.”<sup>20</sup> These elites separated themselves socially and spatially from the lower classes, forming enclaves within black neighborhoods.<sup>21</sup> LeDroit Park was one such enclave, and one that Langston Hughes experienced in 1924 when he moved in with his affluent uncle, John Mercer Langston. Hughes described the black “bourgeoisie” as having “all the manners and airs of reactionary, ill-bred *nouveaux riches*,” continuing:

The people themselves assured me that they were the best people,--and they seemed to know. Never before, anywhere, had I see persons of influence,--men with some money, women with some beauty, teachers with some education,--quite so audibly sure of their own importance and their high places in the community. So many pompous gentlemen never before did I meet. Nor so many ladies with their chests swelled like pouter-pigeons whose mouths uttered formal sentences in frightfully correct English.<sup>22</sup>

This elitism and snobbery was an unfortunate legacy of a society that placed a premium on whiteness, wealth, and gentility. It was precisely this type of elitism that prompted Langston Hughes, Allison Davis, E. Franklin Frazier, and other young black intellectuals to castigate the black bourgeoisie in the 1920s. Moreover, it was these social “cliques” that Davis, along with Lloyd Warner, would later examine formally in his social-science research.

To be sure, the black elite also fought broadly for the interests of all African Americans. They fought against discrimination in services and in employment, and they “created dozens of charitable organizations, including orphanages, health and welfare centers, and recreational centers for the expanding black working class.”<sup>23</sup> Part of their motivation here stemmed from their genuine sympathy for all persons of color and their shared plight. But the elite also saw

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Of course, the black upper class was more parallel with the white middle class in terms of actual wealth and power – an observation Hughes himself made. Langston Hughes quoted in Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, vol. 1, *1902-1941: I, Too, Sing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99-100.

<sup>23</sup> Wendell E. Pritchett, *Robert Clifton Weaver and the American City: The Life and Times of an Urban Reformer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 12. See also Jacqueline M. Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation's Capital, 1880-1920* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 79, 162-5.

themselves as superior to the masses, so they labored to better the conditions of all partly to reduce their embarrassment at being connected with ordinary blacks. The elite's ongoing segregation of themselves from the masses underscores this latter point. In addition to exclusive social circles and neighborhoods, for instance, the elite also formed their own churches. In the nineteenth century, black elites such as the Wormleys and Robert C. Weaver's forebears left the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church because too many lower-class blacks attended and carried with them a tradition of emotionalism. The elite then formed the Berean Baptist Church, which was "puritanical in character" and where "fastidiousness and reserve were expected of all members and their children."<sup>24</sup> In their adoption of all the trappings of white culture, the black elite claimed their equality with white elites, but they also asserted their social distance from the black masses.

Beneath this elite class was a middle class of approximately 18,000 people, typically lighter-skinned, mixed-race people. This group enjoyed white-collar work, often as clerks with the federal government, and they embodied the Protestant work ethic in working hard, gaining formal education, behaving "politely," and dressing "well." Lower-class blacks made up the vast majority and were darker-skinned, employed in working-class labor, and generally lacked education and "refinement." Upon visiting Washington from 1878 to 1879, Booker T. Washington captured the sense of division within the black community in declaring that "Washington was no place for a Negro who wished to dedicate his life to helping his race; here false standards and selfishness predominated."<sup>25</sup>

The Davis family was clearly at the higher end of Washington's class system. The Davises' ownership of productive property, their lighter skin, and their having a household head

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Booker T. Washington quoted in Green, 143.

with a managerial position in the federal government were all signs of high status within the black community. Moreover, John Davis's many social activities, including his work with the NAACP and various fraternal orders, his role as a historian of the Oldest Inhabitants, and his service as treasurer of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, all testify to the Davises' high class status.<sup>26</sup> Still, their position was probably upper-middle-class rather than upper-class, and this likely made them critical of the "aristocrats of color" and more sympathetic to the lower classes. Either way, Allison Davis would reap the benefits of his family's relative privilege. Unlike in the vast majority of black families both in Washington and in the nation generally, Davis's mother did not need to work for an additional income. This enabled her to stay at home and impress upon Davis middle-class values and culture. For example, she taught Davis to value education and learning, from an early age encouraging him to read Shakespeare and Dickens and to develop a love for Western literature.<sup>27</sup> This passion for English literature stayed with him through his studies at college and graduate school, where he specialized in English. The significance of this cultural and class training for Davis's later success in school would certainly not have been lost on the mature Davis, who spent much of his career analyzing the implications of class and cultural differences.

Despite this relative privilege within the black community, the Davises – like all blacks – faced widespread racism and discrimination from the wider society. White Americans consistently viewed blacks as belonging to the most inferior race, and one which persisted in sufficient numbers so as to comprise an alarming "Negro Problem." After emancipation, it first

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<sup>26</sup> Special Dispatch to the Globe. "NEGRO ON \$1100 PAY EDUCATED CHILDREN: War Department Employee [*sic*] Shining Example: One, Williams' Graduate, Another Student at Wellesley," *Daily Boston Globe*, April 23, 1928.

<sup>27</sup> Morris Finder, "Davis, Allison," *American National Biography Online*. <http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-01164.html> (accessed October 27, 2012).



appeared unclear what the position of “freedmen” would be. Radical Republicans such as Thaddeus Stevens and freedmen such as Frederick Douglass labored to make freedom real not only in name but in fact. But the gains that African Americans made during and after Reconstruction, evidenced by the rise in social power of black families like the Davises, galvanized a massive counterrevolution. Southerners labored to maintain white supremacy by erecting barriers that disfranchised, immobilized, and eventually segregated African Americans into a rigidly subordinate caste.<sup>28</sup>

As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, race relations reached what black historian Rayford Logan originally called their “nadir,” or low point. The Republican Party, the Party of Lincoln and one-time party for black rights during Reconstruction, devolved into the party of big business that paid little more than lip service to the concerns of African Americans. The expansion of universities and science fueled the rise of scientific racism, which was even more pernicious than popular racism because of its stamp of authority and objectivity.<sup>29</sup> The growing secularism undermined an earlier Christian tradition that had proclaimed the equality of all human beings before God and thus helped to underpin movements for black rights such as abolitionism. In the late nineteenth century, some scientists even posited “polygenesis” instead of “monogenesis,” asserting that African Americans actually comprised a distinct species of human. This further ratified racial inequality as mere biological fact. At the same time, historians and popular culture underwrote the Lost Cause ideology, which rendered Reconstruction as a tyrannical process that Northerners used to exploit the South and turn naturally docile blacks into “uppity” and barbarous figures, depicting blacks as buffoons

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<sup>28</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), Ch. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Part I.

incapable of equal citizenship and electoral politics. Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s novel *The Clansman* (1905) and D. W. Griffith's film based on the novel, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), transmitted these ideas to the public, while Columbia historian William Dunning and his students granted authority to these ideas through scholarship.<sup>30</sup> After the horrific Civil War, white Northerners increasingly accepted such Southern revisionist accounts in order to reunite the nation. The focus on national reconciliation and soldier heroism came at the expense of racial justice.<sup>31</sup>

African Americans in Washington, then, faced precarious circumstances as Allison Davis entered the world. Beyond the insulting popular and scientific ideas consigning blacks to biological inferiority, blacks also faced new, more tangible constraints. After Congressman George White of North Carolina left the House of Representatives in 1901, no African American served in Congress again for three decades.<sup>32</sup> Through legal and extralegal measures, white Americans disfranchised blacks across the country, and blacks lost the government as an effective tool in combating racism and inequality. Though many blacks, such as John Abraham Davis, supported the Republican President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) as an ally to the race, Roosevelt's actions on behalf of black interests were more symbolic than real.<sup>33</sup> For example, he ignored a taboo by inviting Booker T. Washington to dine with him in the White

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Clansman; an Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Doubleday, 1905). Dunning's major works were *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction and Related Topics* (1904) and *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (1907). Contemporary black historians such as John R. Lynch labored to contest these racist versions of Reconstruction. See Justin Behrand, "Facts and Memories: John R. Lynch and the Revising of Reconstruction History in the Era of Jim Crow," *Journal of African American History* 97 (Fall 2012): 427-48.

<sup>31</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Office of the Historian, "The Negro's Temporary Farewell: Jim Crow and the Exclusion of African Americans from Congress, 1887-1929," History, Art & Archives: United States House of Representatives, <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Temporary-Farewell/Introduction> (accessed January 18, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Allison Davis recalled how his father was in fact a vigorous supporter of TR, describing how he "risked his very life in 1904 to vote for 'Teddy' in rural Democratic Virginia. Already marked in a town of 236 citizens as the owner of one of the largest farms in Prince William County, he further angered the whites by registering and voting." See Davis, *Leadership, Love, and Aggression*, 3.

House, but this resulted in no tangible improvements in blacks' lives. Roosevelt maintained the governmental appointments of African-American men made by President William McKinley, but he failed to go any further.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, he believed that black people were racial degenerates who were biologically inferior the white races, and who thus relied upon whites for uplift. Roosevelt's Republican successor, William Howard Taft (1909-1913), represented continuity here. Though Taft was acclaimed for appointing nine blacks to government posts – whom contemporaries called collectively the “Black Cabinet” – the practical effects of these appointments were few at a time when disfranchisement and segregation eroded the political and economic power of the black masses.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, blacks' social and economic conditions deteriorated around the turn of the century. More affluent blacks in Washington observed that “each passing year made it harder for them to purchase or rent comfortable houses without paying exorbitant prices; by the 1890's they could rarely buy at all in a conveniently located, orderly neighborhood.”<sup>36</sup> Mary Church Terrell would later describe some of these humiliations that she and others faced in the housing market in *A Colored Woman in a White World* (1940).<sup>37</sup> Though the black population in Washington increased from 59,000 to 90,000 between 1880 and 1900, the number of civil service jobs secured by blacks actually decreased in these and later years.<sup>38</sup> As in all industries, blacks were also forced into the lowliest positions within civil service and typically denied advancement to supervisory roles. Available jobs in domestic work likewise shrank at the turn of the century,

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<sup>34</sup> Green, 156-57.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, D.C.: Ransdell, 1940).

<sup>38</sup> Green, 131, 159.

though domestic work continued to be a key industry for creating opportunities for women to escape the Deep South and chain-migrate to Washington.<sup>39</sup>

Washington, moreover, did not escape the rising tide of segregation. Blacks there were spared the most severe racial repression that characterized the Deep South, avoiding lynchings (apart from the 1919 race riot) and maintaining access to some public facilities such as the library, museums, and buses and trolleys that traveled *within* the city.<sup>40</sup> But even as the “local civil rights acts stood unrepealed,” the “restaurants, barber shops, and hotels now barred Negroes as a matter of course.”<sup>41</sup> Segregation even spread within the federal government under Republican rule, dramatizing how far the nation and the Party had moved away from supporting black civil rights since Reconstruction. In 1904, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing racially segregated its employees, and separate restrooms and lunchrooms became the norm in parts of the Treasury Department and the Department of the Interior.<sup>42</sup> This only accelerated after the inauguration of the Democratic Southerner Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921), who more fully segregated the federal government and dismissed all but two of Taft’s black appointees.<sup>43</sup> One implication of this was the firing or demotion of blacks within the federal government – one of whom was John Abraham Davis, who suffered demotion.<sup>44</sup> This directly threatened the Davis family’s economic well-being and exposed the precariousness of their family’s and other elite black families’ social standing. Wilson also attended a screening of D.W. Griffith’s racist film,

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<sup>39</sup> See Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domestic in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

<sup>40</sup> Green, *Secret City*, 199.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>44</sup> Morris Finder, *Educating America: How Ralph W. Tyler Taught America to Teach* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 43.

*The Birth of a Nation* (1915), within the White House, explicitly endorsing its Lost Cause ideology and using the power of the federal government to legitimize racism.<sup>45</sup>

These tensions exploded into outright violence after World War I. A postwar recession, a growing militance among returning black veterans, and an influx of black migrants competing for work and sometimes employed as scabs ignited a series of race riots throughout the country in the summer of 1919. White Americans lynched seventy-six African Americans that year, and most of them were returning soldiers.<sup>46</sup> Race riots occurred in two dozen cities and towns, and the one in Washington was particularly horrific.<sup>47</sup> In July 1919, the riot raged for two full days while the *Washington Post* inflamed the crisis and even organized the mob, which consisted initially of a group of white soldiers rampaging through a black area in southeastern Washington.<sup>48</sup> By the time the 2,000 U.S. cavalry and marines had quelled the violence, more than a hundred people were injured and six were killed. One of the founders of black history and a teacher at Davis's high school, Carter G. Woodson, narrowly escaped being attacked by a mob of "hundreds of soldiers, sailors, and marines" chasing a black man.<sup>49</sup> Later that evening, he encountered a second mob that

had caught a Negro and deliberately held him as one would a beef for slaughter, and when they had conveniently adjusted him for lynching they shot him. I heard him groaning in his struggle as I hurried away as fast as I could without running, expecting every moment to be lynched myself.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 20. Of course, Wilson's actions sparked a powerful resistance movement among African Americans. See Nicholas Patler, *Jim Crow and the Wilson Administration: Protesting Federal Segregation in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Janken, 43.

<sup>47</sup> David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, new ed. (New York: Penguin, 1996), 23.

<sup>48</sup> Pritchett, 15-16.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis, 19. Charles S. Johnson had his own run-in with a white mob in Chicago during that city's even more horrific race riot in July 1919. As Edwin Embree recounted, Johnson "saw a man stabbed to death on the steps of the building [Urban League office]. He himself was shot at." See Edwin R. Embree, *13 Against the Odds* (New York: Viking Press, 1946), 55-57.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Though Davis likely remained safely at home during the violence, he and all African Americans in Washington were deeply disturbed by the riots.<sup>51</sup> Many years later Davis recalled simply that “I have experienced the terrorization of blacks in Washington.”<sup>52</sup> To be African-American in the era of Jim Crow was to be conscious of the ever-present threat of racial violence.<sup>53</sup>

African Americans in Washington responded in different ways to these deteriorating circumstances. One response was to escape blackness and “pass” as white. But passing was a possibility for only a small minority of African Americans, and it was fraught with danger. Most blacks thus dealt with the deteriorating racial situation in other ways. Many blacks tried to tread lightly, avoid conflict, and preserve their precarious social and economic positions. Such folks picked their battles carefully and resisted the encroachment onto their rights in subtle ways. Others, however, openly protested the advancing segregation, disfranchisement, and inequality. John Abraham Davis resisted in his own brave way by risking his life to vote for Theodore Roosevelt in “rural Democratic Virginia” despite widespread white hostility.<sup>54</sup> He was also “actively associated with the N. A. A. C. P. branch in Washington, D. C., as chairman of the anti-lynching committee.”<sup>55</sup> This fatherly model certainly informed Davis’s own fight against inequality. Allison Davis’s younger brother, John Aubrey Davis, who was born in 1913 and would later become a prominent civil rights activist, “grew up in the antisegregation movement,

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<sup>51</sup> Pritchett, 16.

<sup>52</sup> Allison Davis quoted in Barbara P. Turner, “Profile of Allison Davis; The Man and His Research,” *Education at Chicago* 2 (Autumn 1972): 23.

<sup>53</sup> On the 1919 race riots, see also Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-in: 1919 and the 1960s* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966); and William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Athenaeum, 1970).

<sup>54</sup> Davis, *Leadership, Love, and Aggression*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Davis, Allison, 1902-1983. Letter from Allison Davis to W. E. B. Du Bois, April 11, 1927. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

participating in protest activities throughout his youth.”<sup>56</sup> By all accounts, the Davises were of the more-privileged, elite types who took up their role as leaders of the race and vigorously fought racial inequality and discrimination.

Such overt black resistance took institutional form with the founding of the Niagara Movement in 1905, which later evolved into the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909. In the same way, African Americans formed the National Urban League in 1911 to provide social services and job opportunities for urban blacks.<sup>57</sup> These organizations spearheaded protests against disfranchisement, segregation, and discrimination, leading, for example, to ambitious and far-reaching protests of Woodrow Wilson’s segregation of the federal government and his screening of *The Birth of a Nation*.<sup>58</sup> African Americans took action locally, forming voluntary associations such as YMCA branches and new churches to meet the community’s own needs. Constance McLaughlin Green argues that the growing repression actually created a new solidarity among blacks in Washington, who at least temporarily overcame some of their internal class and color differences in fighting against a common foe.<sup>59</sup> That Carter Woodson formed the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915 in response to *The Birth of a Nation* testifies to the growing racial solidarity.<sup>60</sup> Coming of age during this period of race solidarity against racial oppression, Davis may have been particularly influenced by this sentiment.

So it was in the context of this complex and evolving race and class situation that Allison Davis approached maturity. Buffered against the worst of the repression in his more comfortable

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<sup>56</sup> *The Black Washingtonians: The Anacostia Museum Illustrated Chronology* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 189.

<sup>57</sup> Anthony M. Platt, E. *Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>58</sup> See Nicholas Patler, *Jim Crow and the Wilson Administration: Protesting Federal Segregation in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Green, 177.

<sup>60</sup> Janken, 85.

middle-class home, Davis learned how to adapt to a generally hostile white world and how to navigate the elaborate social cliques within the black community. Despite these internal divisions, Davis's father taught him the importance of general race pride and of active resistance to oppression. Nurtured by his mother's support, he imbibed a genuine love of learning and of Western literature. With this model of successful black parents, he saw that African Americans were equally capable of succeeding in white society if only they were given the chance. Moreover, because of his parents' more affluent, culturally sophisticated background, which had been the trademark of mixed-race peoples since slavery, Davis was able to discern what it took to navigate between white and black society and to succeed at the highest levels. As his parents impressed upon him at an early age, this success would demand hard work and dedication to education above all else.<sup>61</sup>

### **Dunbar High School**

Luckily for Davis, he had access to one of the finest secondary schools in the nation, Dunbar High School. Named after the famous black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, Dunbar High School was formed by blacks in 1916 just as Davis was poised to enter secondary school. Though it was in 1916 that this local black high school took on its modern form, the school evolved from a series of other schools dating back to 1870. In 1870, Congress defeated Charles Sumner's bill to racially integrate the nation's schools, so African Americans continued the

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<sup>61</sup> An obituary in the *Daily Boston Globe* praised John Abraham Davis's "faithful service" as a messenger in the War Department, and extolled his ability to send both Allison and John Aubrey Davis to Williams College, and Dorothy Davis to Wellesley. Special Dispatch to the Globe. "NEGRO ON \$1100 PAY EDUCATED CHILDREN: War Department Employee [*sic*] Shining Example: One, Williams' Graduate, Another Student at Wellesley," *Daily Boston Globe*, April 23, 1928.



tradition of taking charge of their own educations and developing their own schools.<sup>62</sup>

Washington blacks thus formed the nation's first public high school for African Americans in 1870 (and the first public high school at all in Washington), though in reality it served mainly primary-school functions early on, beginning modestly with only one instructor and 45 students housed in a basement. But the school quickly expanded, moving between various locations before becoming the M Street School – the immediate predecessor to Dunbar – from 1891 to 1916. During these years of transition, the school nevertheless maintained a tradition of excellence, cultivated in large measure by extraordinary leadership. For example, the school's second principal, appointed in 1871, was Mary J. Patterson, the first black woman to earn a college degree, while the third principal was Richard T. Greener, the first African American to graduate from Harvard. Such accomplished leadership reflected the high value African Americans placed on education, which had roots in slavery. Perhaps more than anyone else, slaves understood the power and importance of education for social and racial advance.

Frederick Douglass's perilous attempts to become literate reflected a larger black awareness that slaveholders used illiteracy and ignorance as tools to perpetuate slavery and racial oppression.<sup>63</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that Washington blacks spearheaded some of the most ambitious efforts for formal education, since the nation's capital remained the country's central locus for African-American culture and politics.<sup>64</sup>

When Davis entered Dunbar in 1916, it was the jewel of the African-American community in Washington. Indeed, some black students from neighboring Maryland and

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<sup>62</sup> Hundley, 13.

<sup>63</sup> See Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative and Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845; repr., Chicago: Lushena Books, 2000).

<sup>64</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "History of the High School for Negroes in Washington," *Journal of Negro History* 2 (July 1917): 252-55.

Virginia were known to provide false Washington addresses in order to attend.<sup>65</sup> The school was a large Elizabethan brick building featuring thirty-five classrooms, an auditorium seating fifteen hundred, a large library, modern gymnasiums, laboratories for science courses, and a modern kitchen and appliances.<sup>66</sup> In terms of faculty and administration, the school was exceedingly well-endowed. In addition to securing pioneers such as Patterson and Greener for school administration, Dunbar's forty-eight teachers in the late 1910s were also extraordinary figures, including luminaries such as Mary Church Terrell, Jessie Fauset, and Angelina Grimke. Denied opportunities in other industries because of their race, and drawn to a stable teaching salary guaranteed by the federal government, an impressive group of teachers secured employment at Dunbar from its founding until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, twenty of the thirty teachers at M Street in 1906 had earned degrees at prestigious Northern colleges, and five of the others gained degrees from Howard.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, many of them had earned advanced degrees in medicine, law, and the liberal arts.

One of the most notable teachers was Carter G. Woodson. Woodson had earned a master's degree from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. in history from Harvard; he founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915, and also edited *The Journal of*

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<sup>65</sup> Sowell, 8-9.

<sup>66</sup> Terrell, 252-53. To be sure, Dunbar had impressive facilities given the relative neglect from the federal government and relative poverty of the black community, but it continued to lag behind the facilities provided to white children in the city. It took ten years of protest before the government finally provided Dunbar with a sports stadium, for instance, even though the white high schools had these from the start. Overcrowding, inadequate supplies and teaching materials, and degraded facilities all plagued Dunbar as well. It was the incredible faculty, administration, and students, as well as the "missionary zeal" that characterized the school, which made Dunbar such an exceptional and successful place. See also Sowell, 9; and Mary A. Morton, "The Education of Negroes in the District of Columbia," *Journal of Negro Education* 16 (Summer 1947): 325-339.

<sup>67</sup> Indeed, teaching was one of the only paths to middle-class status among African Americans in an era when they were blocked from other professional work in government, business, and the law. In 1900, a conference at Atlanta University launched a study of the career trajectories of the approximately 2,500 American blacks with bachelor's degrees, finding that 53% of them became teachers, principals, or other educational professionals. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; repr., New York: Dover, 1994), 62-63; Hundley, 13; Howard H. Long, "The Support and Control of Public Education in the District of Columbia," *Journal of Negro Education* 7 (July 1938): 390-99.

<sup>68</sup> Janken, 20.

*Negro History* from 1916 to 1951.<sup>69</sup> Woodson spent his career writing and teaching about black history for an African-American audience. At Dunbar, he taught French, history, and English while employed there from the mid-1910s to 1922, which was precisely the period when Allison Davis studied there.<sup>70</sup> Davis may very well have studied with Woodson in this period and imbibed some of his race pride and his lessons in black history and literature. However, even if he did not take a class from Woodson, Davis was exposed to these ideas from other faculty at Dunbar, many of whom also emphasized black history and culture.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, Woodson had at least an indirect effect on Davis through Davis's relationship with Sterling A. Brown, who was a close friend at Williams College and who did study directly with Woodson at Dunbar.<sup>72</sup>

The Dunbar curriculum included "all the academic and business subjects taught in similar schools of accredited standing, as well as domestic science, printing, physical training and military science."<sup>73</sup> Dunbar was thus a comprehensive high school in an era in which most Americans saw secondary education as the culmination of formal education and the main avenue to middle-class work.<sup>74</sup> But Dunbar retained its emphasis on academic rather than vocational training, demanding that students take liberal arts courses in English, foreign languages (Latin, French, Spanish, German), history, and mental and moral philosophy.<sup>75</sup> Among other courses,

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<sup>69</sup> Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 102.

<sup>70</sup> Hundley, 143.

<sup>71</sup> Pritchett, 18.

<sup>72</sup> Indeed, in Brown's case, Woodson stayed in touch with him beyond his education at Dunbar and Williams, encouraging him to teach in the South and learn informally from the black masses. See Graham Locke, "Br'er Sterling and the Blues: An Interview with Michael S. Harper," in *After Winter: The Art and Life of Sterling A. Brown*, ed. John Edgar Tidwell and Steven C. Tracy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 368.

<sup>73</sup> Terrell, 252-53.

<sup>74</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *Black Philosopher, White Academy: The Career of William Fontaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 8.

<sup>75</sup> Hundley, 16. The ability to stay focused on academic rather than vocational training stemmed also from the formation of another school (Armstrong High School) in 1902 that focused exclusively on vocational education. See Green, 168.

Davis took three years of English, four of Latin, two of French, and one of history.<sup>76</sup> In this way, Dunbar resisted the trend toward vocational training for African Americans around the turn of the twentieth century. Dunbar faculty and administrators had themselves earned the highest academic training that the country – and sometimes foreign countries – had to offer, and they believed that African Americans had to continue to train their race to compete at the highest levels and to perform more than just vocational work. The school was thus very much in line with the Davis family's and other elite black families' view of education.

The students who went to Dunbar were among the most privileged blacks in Washington and in the country as a whole. The list of students who would go on to careers of great distinction is staggering, including Charles Drew, Benjamin O. Davis, Charles Hamilton Houston, Rayford Logan, Sterling Brown, Jessie Fauset, Allison Davis, Robert C. Weaver, William Hastie, John P. Davis, Will Mercer Langston, and many more. Still, many of Dunbar's students were lower-class. In this era before neighborhood schools, blacks from anywhere in Washington could attend Dunbar, and they did. Yet most lower-class blacks in Washington never had the opportunity to attend high school at all, and those who did more often attended vocational schools like Armstrong High School.<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, the most privileged blacks certainly sent their children to the renowned Dunbar High School. The average Dunbar student was nonetheless from the lower-middle class, many of them having a family member with a messenger or clerk job with the federal government.<sup>78</sup> The composite student picture was thus one of privilege within the black community of Washington, which of course was already one much better off than the vast majority of blacks who continued to live in the rural South. Still,

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<sup>76</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Williams College Transcript, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>77</sup> On Armstrong High School, see Green, 168.

<sup>78</sup> Sowell, 11.

even within this relative privilege, significant class and accompanying color differences persisted.<sup>79</sup>

Dunbar was a crucial institution for Allison Davis for many reasons. First, Dunbar exposed Davis to extraordinary teachers who could inspire him and nurture his intellect. That Davis was later able to excel in higher education is a testament to the excellent training offered by Dunbar in conjunction with Davis's individual talent and familial support. Second, that Davis was even able to attend Williams College, an elite Northeastern school, stemmed from the institutional connections Dunbar administrators had cultivated with several colleges. Beginning in 1901, Principal Anna Julia Cooper won accreditation for the school and secured scholarships for the best students to schools such as Harvard, Brown, and Pittsburgh.<sup>80</sup> A few years before Davis enrolled at Dunbar, Williams College began offering scholarships to the male valedictorians of each class.<sup>81</sup> Davis subsequently won this scholarship – the Horace F. Clark Prize Fellowship<sup>82</sup> – which was a testament to both his scholastic and his leadership abilities, since administrators factored in both criteria in selecting a valedictorian.<sup>83</sup> As brilliant and well trained as many of these black students were, without the institutional support Dunbar and other organizations provided, they never would have gained access to powerful white institutions. Furthermore, most African Americans who wanted to study at Northern institutions had to study

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>80</sup> Hundley, 70. Anna J. Cooper was a truly exceptional individual. She was a black woman born into slavery in 1858, dedicating her life to civil rights, women's rights, and education before passing away in 1964 at the age of 105. Her book, *A Voice from the South* (1892) is a rare and powerful treatise that argues for the educational progress of black women in order to uplift the entire black community. For more on Cooper, see Louise Daniel Hutchinson, *Anna J. Cooper: A Voice from the South* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981); and Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond: The Life & Writings of Anna J. Cooper* (Northampton, MA: Department of History of Smith College, 1982).

<sup>81</sup> Williams was an all-male school, so women could not win scholarships there.

<sup>82</sup> Department of Anthropology, Records, Davis, Allison, Box 118, Folder 24, University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center.

<sup>83</sup> Other notable valedictorians were Rayford Logan, Sterling Brown, and Allison Davis's younger brother, John Aubrey Davis. See Hundley, 77-78.

for a time at Northern preparatory schools before being eligible for admission, since most black high schools in the South were not accredited.<sup>84</sup> Dunbar students avoided this step because administrators had earned accreditation, and because faculty conducted extracurricular training sessions to help students score highly on college entrance exams.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, Davis's time at Dunbar must have been a formative experience in other ways. Certainly, succeeding at the highest levels among other talented youth must have boosted his self-confidence and prepared him for future academic success. Beyond this, though, the social makeup of the school must have shaped his developing ideas regarding class and color. If his life at home and his segregated schooling sheltered him from some of the realities of white racism, his life among his black peers and high school colleagues must have sensitized him to the stratification of and divisions within the black community. As Thomas Sowell notes, there were "class-conscious and color conscious cliques among students" at Dunbar.<sup>86</sup> Davis would have been forced to determine his position within these hierarchies and evaluate those students of other colors and classes, not to mention those who had recently migrated from the Deep South or the North. Certainly Davis would have perceived his position as being closer to the top of both the class and the color systems, but as his later writings reveal, his reaction was not to cordon himself off from the black masses, whom many of his class thought inferior or at least embarrassing. Rather, Davis sympathized with less-privileged African Americans and began to establish himself as a leader of the race. His selection as valedictorian suggests this process was already underway.

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<sup>84</sup> E. E. Just, a gifted African-American marine biologist, was one such person. He "graduated from the Classical Preparatory Department of South Carolina State College in 1899, and then attended Kimball Union Academy in New Hampshire before entering Dartmouth College in 1903." Janken, 21. See also, Kenneth R. Manning, *Black Apollo of Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Sowell, 9.

## Williams College

Davis's experiences as an undergraduate at Williams College were no doubt equally formative. In the fall of 1920, at the age of seventeen, Davis moved away from his parents' nurturing home and out of the insular racial environment of segregated Washington. He then entered a bastion of white privilege in rural, northwestern Massachusetts. Williams College opened its doors in 1793, and its founders selected Williamstown as its location partly because it was "'an enclosed place' free from 'the temptations and allurements...incident to seaport towns.'"<sup>87</sup> This all-male school was almost entirely white, with many of the students coming to this prestigious school from elite secondary academies such as Andover, Exeter, and Groton. Here Davis would encounter a very different world, but one that would deepen and inform his understanding of race and class in American society for years to come.

In many ways, Williams College was more progressive on the race question than most of the U.S. in the 1920s. The school had a legacy of abolitionism dating back to 1823 when Chester Dewey, a professor of mathematics and natural philosophy, established the first anti-slavery society in Massachusetts.<sup>88</sup> Still, it was easier to be progressive from afar, and the school waited almost a century from its founding to admit a black student – Gaius C. Bolin, class of 1889.<sup>89</sup> Even after Bolin's pioneering role, Williams continued to admit only a token number of African Americans, reaching a mere sixty by 1964. While Davis was at Williams (1920-24), there were at most seven blacks there at any one time, most of whom came from Dunbar High

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<sup>87</sup> Leverett Wilson Spring, *A History of Williams College* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 47, 42.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>89</sup> Frederick Rudolph, *Perspectives: A Williams Anthology*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Williamstown, MA: Williams College, 1983), 314.

School on scholarship. Two early black graduates of Williams who taught at Dunbar and encouraged students to apply to Williams, Willis Menand (Class of 1909) and Clyde McDuffie (Class of 1912), cultivated this Williams-Dunbar connection.<sup>90</sup> Even this tokenism, however, was progressive in an era when other elite Northern schools, such as Princeton, excluded blacks entirely.<sup>91</sup>

Williams's relative progressiveness carried over into social relations as well. There seems to have been a policy of strict formal equality both in the classroom and in official school functions, including many extracurricular activities. In an integrated classroom environment, the black students thrived and had success disproportionate to their numbers. For example, black students had a higher rate of admittance than white students into Phi Beta Kappa, the oldest and most selective honor society for the liberal arts and sciences.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, by 1930 only thirty-six blacks had attended Williams, but two were valedictorians – one of whom was Allison Davis in the Class of 1924.<sup>93</sup> In terms of extracurricular activities, black students could attend official school events such as convocations, and they could generally participate in a wide range of sports and clubs. George Chadwell, Class of 1900, for example, played varsity football, was president of his sophomore class, and participated in the Moonlight Oratorical Contest his junior year.<sup>94</sup> Rayford Logan, Class of 1916, was similarly active, joining the Student Army Training

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<sup>90</sup> Rudolph, 313-14.

<sup>91</sup> See Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900-1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

<sup>92</sup> Davis and many of his black colleagues at Williams, including Sterling Brown and Mortimer Weaver, gained admittance into Phi Beta Kappa. The importance and prestige of these admittances, granted to no more than the top 10% of the class, are evident in how black magazines and newspapers publicized them. On Mortimer Weaver's admittance in 1925, for instance, see "Social Progress," *Opportunity* 3 (May 1925): 159.

<sup>93</sup> Rudolph, 313-14.

<sup>94</sup> Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 25.



Corps and inspiring Sterling Brown to do the same.<sup>95</sup> Brown also served on the debating team, pledged Omega Psi Phi, joined the track team, and teamed up with Davis on the Commons Club Tennis Team, where they were an imposing force.<sup>96</sup> That Davis looked favorably upon at least part of his college experience at Williams is suggested by the fact that his younger brother, John Aubrey Davis, and much later his second son, Gordon J. Davis, also attended Williams.<sup>97</sup>

Yet there were clear restrictions on social equality. Black students could not participate in social affairs, such as proms, where men and women interacted.<sup>98</sup> Even more important, black students encountered rigid segregation in living and dining facilities. Sterling Brown was allowed to live on campus during his first year in 1918, but he was forced to live with a Jewish student named Victor Leo Jacobson, because Jews were a similarly marginalized minority group.<sup>99</sup> By Brown's second year, however, he was forced to live off campus in a black-owned boarding house with the three other black students enrolled at Williams. The school's initial justification for this was that Brown and the other black students had failed to pay their advance on the dorms, but Brown knew this was a lie and that his father had made that payment. The students were also then told that they would be happiest sharing residence with other black students. When Davis arrived in 1920, he, too, was forced to live in this boarding house, which he did for all four years of his academic career at Williams.<sup>100</sup> Many years later, Brown voiced

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<sup>95</sup> Sterling A. Brown, "A Son's Return: 'Oh Didn't He Ramble,'" in *Perspectives: A Williams Anthology*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Williamstown, MA: Williams College, 1983), 325.

<sup>96</sup> Joanne V. Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 23.

<sup>97</sup> Allison Davis to George Allen Mason, March 28, 1974, Allison Davis Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>98</sup> Janken, 27.

<sup>99</sup> Brown, "A Son's Return," 320.

<sup>100</sup> "The Talented Black Scholars Whom No White University Would Hire," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 58 (Winter 2007/2008): 81.

the surely unanimous black-student resentment over this treatment, saying that he could look out for his own happiness.<sup>101</sup>

Black students inevitably had brushes with racism in all sorts of other ways as well. A white man called Carter Marshall a “nigger” while on Main Street in town, provoking a fight.<sup>102</sup> Rayford Logan had an English teacher from Louisiana named Professor Licklider who used the word “nigger” in class to get students talking about Rudyard Kipling.<sup>103</sup> Though the white students in class contested his use of that term, incidents such as these underscored the sense of difference blacks inevitably felt. Often the racism was not meant in a hostile way, but stemmed merely from a false sense of racial difference. Sterling Brown, for instance, recalled how his fellow white students thought all black people could run fast because of inherent biological differences, and he remembered how Licklider criticized his writing for not having “rhythm,” which many whites assumed was part of the black “temperament.”<sup>104</sup> These assumptions about racial difference made up the world that Davis and other black students lived in, and the incidents of racism were told and re-told among black students, creating a rich oral history that Davis knew well.

The segregation and racism all blacks faced at Williams, even if relatively innocuous compared with common practices in the rest of the country, had debilitating effects. Above all, black students faced a sense of social isolation. Brown felt he “was a nobody up there,” and the other black students must have felt similarly at times, especially since they often came from all-black schools and neighborhoods where they had been part of a tightly-knit community.<sup>105</sup> On

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<sup>101</sup> Brown, “A Son’s Return,” 320-21.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 321-22.

<sup>103</sup> Janken, 28.

<sup>104</sup> Brown, “A Son’s Return,” 325, 328-29.

<sup>105</sup> Gabbin, 23.

the other hand, the general social isolation created firm bonds of friendship with other members of the out-group, who then often sought out alternative communities. For instance, Rayford Logan and John Freeman associated with other African-American waiters, bellmen, and domestic servants in nearby North Adams, where they attended dances and other social events.<sup>106</sup> Sterling Brown, for his part, joined a black fraternity at Boston University.<sup>107</sup> The nucleus of black students at Williams created lifelong bonds. Allison Davis and Sterling Brown were particularly close. Brown recalled, “I got to know Allison Davis very well. I got to know Carter Marshall and Henry Brown well. Allison Davis and Ralph Scott and I used to go for long walks, and we decided the race problem, we decided the problem of women, which was a serious thing here.”<sup>108</sup> He continued, “So at Williams I made friends with people who have been good friends, good mentors, brothers.”<sup>109</sup> Close friendships could also transcend racial lines, since black and white students still interacted in and out of the classroom, and many of the white students treated the black students kindly as friends. Davis even recalled that “two of the four or five [white] Southern students were my best friends.”<sup>110</sup> Such interracial relationships allowed Davis to understand how white people viewed the world, including race relations, and they taught him how and where to find common ground across the racial line.

A crucial part of the Williams experience, of course, was what took place in the classroom. To be sure, for many white students, the formal educational aspect of Williams was relatively unimportant, as the university functioned as more of a finishing school in those days. Max Eastman, the later socialist and editor of *The Masses*, made clear how “friendship and fun”

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<sup>106</sup> Janken, 27.

<sup>107</sup> Rudolph, 337.

<sup>108</sup> Brown, “A Son’s Return,” 323.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>110</sup> Allison Davis quoted in Barbara P. Turner, “Profile of Allison Davis,” 23.

were his central goals while he attended Williams from 1900 to 1905.<sup>111</sup> He described how his college life was “lazy, irresponsible, unambitious; it was the life of rich boys to whom college is a country club.”<sup>112</sup> He drank heavily, cut class frequently, pulled numerous elaborate pranks, and had “one firm and clear ambition: not to lead my class.”<sup>113</sup> Eastman felt he had little to prove academically in college, so above all else he sought novel social experiences.

Though Davis and the other black students at Williams also sought new social experiences, they approached college very differently. They saw it as a privilege, and they understood the need to prove their ability—and hence the ability of black people generally—to succeed there. Accordingly, Davis approached his formal education at Williams with the utmost seriousness. As a result, he benefitted greatly from the esteemed faculty at Williams and made the most of the educational opportunities before him.

One exceptional English teacher, George Dutton, stood out. Brown recalled how “Dutton *taught* me, he *taught* Allison Davis, he *taught* Mortimer Weaver,” making them read more than English literature.<sup>114</sup> His emphasis on critical realism and the modern novel came through in his diverse course readings, including Russian literature by Dostoevski and Tolstoy, French literature such as Gustave Flaubert’s novels, and even American literature, which many critics in the 1920s still viewed as far inferior to European literature, by authors such as Sinclair Lewis, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and Robert Frost.<sup>115</sup> In Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s writing, Dutton showed Davis how a writer could portray lowly characters in realistic ways that captured their internal psychological conflicts. In Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856), often credited

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<sup>111</sup> Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 133.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>114</sup> Brown, “A Son’s Return,” 328.

<sup>115</sup> Gabbin, 24.

for beginning literary realism, Davis saw Flaubert portray character development and a mundane country setting in a realistic, as opposed to a romantic, way. Through reading Sinclair Lewis, Davis learned to depict realistic American settings and characters in highly critical ways.<sup>116</sup> Like Sterling Brown, Davis “learned from Edwin Arlington Robinson’s *Tilbury Town* where he took up the undistinguished, the failures, and showed the extraordinary in ordinary lives.”<sup>117</sup> They both learned Robert Frost.

Indeed, the style of Robinson and Frost seemed to exert a particular influence on Davis. Frost, in particular, was an important American poet who represented New Englanders in realistic and stoical ways. Literary scholar Joanne Gabbin describes Frost’s “stoicism,” which both Brown and Davis distilled in their own writing: “There are no tears in this writer; there are only revelations. The passionless acknowledgement of death’s victory over a young sawmill worker...the portrait of a tormented husband who silently grieves the loss of his first born...the revelation in ‘An Old Man’s Winter Night’ that one condition of old age is loneliness—all wed Frost to stoicism.”<sup>118</sup> Davis was thus immersed in a Western literary tradition that informed both his later selection of ordinary subjects and his portrayal of those subjects in realistic and stoical ways during the New Negro Renaissance.

Some faculty at Williams impressed Davis for reasons beyond their mastery of literature. For instance, Professor Dutton was also a racially progressive and truly inspiring teacher. Brown remembered:

Dutton was teaching Joseph Conrad. He said Joseph Conrad was being lionized in England—H. G. Wells and Galsworthy and all the ladies and lords and the rest were making over Joseph Conrad and what not, and Conrad was sitting over in the corner, quiet, not participating. Dutton said he was brooding and probably thinking about his

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<sup>116</sup> Sinclair Lewis’s most famous and influential novels were *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922).

<sup>117</sup> Brown, “A Son’s Return,” 330.

<sup>118</sup> Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 28.

native Poland and the plight of his people. He looked straight at me. I don't know what he meant, but I think he meant, and this is symbolic to me, I think he meant don't get fooled by any lionizing, don't be fooled by being here at Williams with selective clientele. There is business out there that you have to take care of. Your people, too, are in a plight. I've never forgotten it. He was a great man.<sup>119</sup>

Teachers such as these further reinforced for Davis the importance of education not only for his own self-development, but for the racial advance of black people. Dutton inspired Davis to succeed.

And succeed he did. He majored in English literature and minored in European languages.<sup>120</sup> His course of study included sixteen English courses, four Latin courses, seven French courses, four German courses, two Greek Literature courses, two Italian courses, two Mathematics courses, two Chemistry courses, and two astronomy courses.<sup>121</sup> His academic and personal success was staggering, and proved to Davis that he could compete with even the most privileged whites. Professor George E. Howes recalled that

Mr. Davis's record at Williams College was almost unique. During his course he received the highest grade in all of his subjects with the exception of two semesters in freshman year – one of Rhetoric and one of Mathematics, in both of which he received the next to the highest grade... At graduation he received highest final honors in English and summa cum laude distinction. He was in the first group elected to Phi Beta Kappa and was valedictorian of his class. The estimation in which he was held by his classmates is evident from the fact that he was selected by the members of the Phi Beta Kappa group to talk for them at the annual Phi Beta Kappa dinner, at which one member of the graduating class responds to the toast for the Phi Beta Kappa Members of that class. He proved himself, while with us, modest in spite of his excellence in scholarship. He is a young man, I believe, of the highest ideals and absolute integrity of character.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Brown, "A Son's Return," 328.

<sup>120</sup> Allison Davis, Curriculum Vitae, Allison Davis Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>121</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Williams College Transcript, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>122</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, George E. Howes's Confidential Report on Candidate for Scholarship, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

Howes touched on two of Davis's exceptional qualities: his intellectual brilliance in his near-perfect academic record and his upright character that won him the respect and admiration of professors and black and white students alike. Another professor at Williams, Carroll Lewis Maxcy, reiterated these claims, calling Davis "one of the best men that have come to my notice during more than thirty years in Williams College. He has a very clear mind, and his work was without exception well and thoroughly done." He continued, "he won the regard of all who knew him, not only for his intellectual qualities but also for his personal qualities." Finally, Maxcy underscored both the difficulties Davis faced as a black student and his remarkable ability to overcome them. He wrote, "His position was not easy. A colored boy and yet the intellectual superior of his classmates, he might easily have aroused prejudice; but throughout his course, as a student working his way, he conducted himself with dignity and reserve, and won universal respect."<sup>123</sup> Davis's ability to impress but also disarm others would prove essential in entering mainstream social science and eventually in desegregating higher education.

By graduation on June 23, 1924, Davis had grown up in many ways. He earned a first-rate formal education that contributed to his developing literary style and prepared him well for graduate school at Harvard. His admission to Harvard on a scholarship was also made possible because of his outstanding success at Williams. But his informal education was at least as significant. First, he learned that he could not only survive but thrive among some of the best and brightest white students. Second, he forged relationships with other black students, especially Brown, which would endure and inform his later work and thought on race. Third, he also developed close relationships with white students, even white Southerners, which was

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<sup>123</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Carroll Lewis Maxcy's Confidential Report on Candidate for Scholarship, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

something very rare in segregated Washington. These experiences enabled him to better understand how racism differed across the country, and he became adept at navigating between the worlds of white and black. This helps explain his later success at gaining power and stature within the white-dominated academy.

Finally, and more broadly, through Davis's move to the North, he came to understand a very different racial context where racism still existed, but in novel forms. At Williams, he could associate with and befriend white peers essentially as equals, and he could compete equally in the classroom and even be upheld as a leader of the entire class (as valedictorian) as a result of his academic prowess. But at the same time he saw how his race would continue to circumscribe his life, by forcing him to live in segregated housing, banning him from certain social gatherings, and, finally, preventing him from taking a position as a teaching assistant at Williams, which he had earned. He recalled:

After graduating as Valedictorian of my college class, I was turned down as an applicant for teaching assistant by the college president on the grounds that there were too many Southern students to permit my appointment at that time. It was ironic that two of the four or five Southern students were my best friends. Yet the president had to use that excuse!<sup>124</sup>

Davis naturally found such discrimination infuriating. He was thinking of himself when he later wrote that more affluent blacks “felt the sting of oppression most keenly,” for “in spite of education, training and intellectual skills,” they “found themselves still barred from participation in the economic, political, educational, and cultural opportunities that were available to whites.”<sup>125</sup> The arbitrariness of his suffering inclined Davis towards an existentialist philosophy in this period, and it interested him in a “stoical” tradition that emphasized the fortitude necessary to endure oppression.

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<sup>124</sup> Allison Davis quoted in Turner, “Profile of Allison Davis,” 23.

<sup>125</sup> Davis, “Retrospect, 1965: Power and Caste,” 342.



Though he could not have known or appreciated it at the time, Davis's experiences with racism and discrimination comprised an ongoing informal education every bit as enlightening as his formal education. Having to confront racial barriers head on, Davis and other blacks came to better understand their nature and function in stratifying American society, whereas affluent white students such as Max Eastman did not have to see the barriers at all. The pain and frustration of Davis's informal education would later enrich his social-science investigations into Jim Crow, but even had he known it at the time, that would have been of little solace. Opportunities denied, career paths foreclosed, social freedoms delimited: this is how Davis understood the fate of being born a black man in a racist society.

Nevertheless, Davis remained resolved to act in productive ways both for himself and for black people generally. His scholarly accomplishments at Williams afforded him the opportunity for graduate study in English at the most renowned university in the country, Harvard. So he followed in the footsteps of his good friend Sterling Brown by accepting a scholarship and enrolling in the Masters of Arts program to see what else he could learn, and how else it could be used for racial and personal advance.

## **Harvard College**

At Harvard, Davis encountered a similar environment to that of Williams. Located about 150 miles east of Williamstown in the thriving metropolis of Cambridge, Harvard boasted the nation's most acclaimed scholars and teachers. It too was still mainly a training ground and finishing school for the nation's white male elite. Harvard remained an all-male school, but the same Harvard faculty on the same campus also taught women at Radcliffe College, formally

chartered in 1894.<sup>126</sup> Though Harvard held historical ties to slavery and the slave trade, it also had a legacy of abolitionism, and Harvard men perceived themselves to be racial egalitarians. Like Williams, Harvard admitted a token number of African Americans. By the 1890s, it admitted one or two black students to the College, and by the 1920s, that number was three or four.<sup>127</sup> A year before Davis matriculated in 1924, Harvard had forty-two black students—seventeen undergraduates and twenty-five graduates.<sup>128</sup> Harvard also practiced strict equality in the classroom and at formal school events, usually allowing African Americans to play on athletic teams, join political clubs, write for undergraduate publications, and participate on debate teams.<sup>129</sup>

Yet black students still had very different social experiences than white students. First, there were the daily affronts of racism in Cambridge. For example, a white barber on Harvard Square refused service to the All-American athlete William Henry Lewis.<sup>130</sup> As in Rayford Logan's classroom when the teacher used the word "nigger," white students at Harvard rallied to Lewis's defense and boycotted the shop, but these incidents still underscored the social space between whites and blacks. Similarly, a white bookstore owner with poor vision mistook the light-skinned Ralph Bunche for white and hired him. He later told him that had he known Bunche's race, he never would have hired him for fear of losing business.<sup>131</sup> Events such as

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<sup>126</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Introduction: Rewriting Harvard's History," in *Yards and Gates: Gender in Harvard and Radcliffe History*, ed. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3.

<sup>127</sup> Wendell E. Pritchett, *Robert Clifton Weaver and the American City: The Life and Times of an Urban Reformer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 20.

<sup>128</sup> Synnott, 83.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>131</sup> Ralph Bunche, "The Virtue of Color-Blindness," in *Varieties of the Black Experience at Harvard: An Anthology*, eds. Werner Sollors, Thomas A. Underwood, and Caldwell Titcomb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 117-20.

these highlighted how blacks and whites had very different experiences, and how blacks faced heightened difficulties in finding work and gaining access to basic services.

Harvard itself also discriminated against African Americans. At the same time that administrators forced Sterling Brown and the other black students at Williams to move off-campus, Harvard administrators, led by President A. Lawrence Lowell, were doing the same thing. Lowell had recently required all freshman students to live in the dorms as a way to cut down on the social cliques at Harvard. But here he foresaw difficulties with white Southern students – there were only sixty-seven of them enrolled in all of Harvard in 1923 – who might be forced to live in the same dorms as the handful of black students.<sup>132</sup> So he worked quietly to keep blacks out of the freshman dorms until the issue came to a head in 1923, after Lowell denied admission to the son of a prominent black alumnus named Roscoe Conklin Bruce. Lowell explained to Bruce that ““it seems to me that for the colored man to claim that he is entitled to have the white man compelled to live with him is a very unfortunate innovation which, far from doing him good, would increase a prejudice that, as you and I will thoroughly agree, is most unfortunate, and probably growing.””<sup>133</sup> Bruce then broadcast this blatant discrimination to black leaders throughout the country. W. E. B. Du Bois, the *New York Times*, and the NAACP’s secretary, James Weldon Johnson, all weighed in. Johnson voiced the dominant black sentiment in arguing that “by capitulating to anti-negro prejudice in the freshman dormitories or anywhere else, Harvard University affirms that prejudice and strengthens it, and is but putting into effect the program proclaimed by the infamous Ku Klux Klan and its

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<sup>132</sup> Synnott, 84.

<sup>133</sup> President Lowell quoted in Nell Painter, “Jim Crow at Harvard: 1923,” *New England Quarterly* 44 (December 1971): 629.

apologists.”<sup>134</sup> White and black Harvard alumni were generally united in condemning Lowell’s actions. Such pressure on the administration forced the school to overturn its policy of exclusion, though a de facto exclusion remained until the 1950s.<sup>135</sup> The reality was that most white Harvard men did not see the handful of black students as a real threat to their school, nor did they think it was worthwhile to sacrifice their self-professed principle of racial egalitarianism to prevent a few token black students from residing in the dorms. When it came to Jewish students, however, who made up 20% of the student body in 1925, students and administrators alike were more supportive of restrictive measures, which were eventually implemented when the university redefined admissions criteria in a more individualistic manner.<sup>136</sup>

Still, black students at Harvard also formed close bonds with one another. Robert Weaver, the younger brother of Davis’s friend Mortimer Weaver, developed a tight-knit community with other black students at Harvard in the late 1920s, all of whom became famous, pioneering figures: Ralph Bunche, Louis L. Redding, William Hastie, and John P. Davis.<sup>137</sup> During Allison Davis’s tenure at Harvard from 1924 to 1925, he very well may have been involved in the Nile Club, a black student group formed in 1922 to discuss the race problem as Davis and Brown had done less formally at Williams. The future civil rights lawyer Charles Hamilton Houston formed and presided over this group in 1922, attracting illustrious black leaders such as Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, and William S. Braithwaite to speak as guests.<sup>138</sup> Though Davis was only at Harvard for a year, he quickly located the other exceptional

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<sup>134</sup> James Weldon Johnson, “Attacks Harvard on Negro Question” (1930), in *Varieties of the Black Experience at Harvard: An Anthology*, eds. Werner Sollors, Thomas A. Underwood, and Caldwell Titcomb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 87.

<sup>135</sup> Raymond Pace Alexander, “Voices from Harvard’s Own Negroes,” in *Varieties of the Black Experience*, 90-95.

<sup>136</sup> Synnott, 81, 108.

<sup>137</sup> Pritchett, 22-23.

<sup>138</sup> John M. Fitzgerald and Otey M. Scruggs, “A Note on Marcus Garvey at Harvard, 1922,” in *Varieties of the Black Experience at Harvard*, 79-82.

black students at Harvard and forged long-lasting bonds with many of them. It was a small world for elite black intellectuals of that time, and almost all of them knew one another. When not on campus, Davis and the other black Harvard men also had metropolitan Boston to explore.

Academically, Davis further refined his literary abilities. As he later described it, “my work for my A. M. degree at Harvard was in large part in the field of comparative European literature.”<sup>139</sup> Davis followed in Sterling Brown’s footsteps in taking a Master’s degree in literature from Harvard. Brown had completed his graduate work a year before Davis entered. Given their similar interests, their similar later writing, their parallel institutional affiliations, and their friendship, Davis’s academic experiences at Harvard were very similar to Brown’s. Brown and Davis studied under two famous English professors, Bliss Perry and George Lyman Kittredge. Perry studied American literature and wrote monographs on Emerson, Whitman, and others. Kittredge, even more famous, was one of the foremost scholars on Shakespeare and English literature generally.<sup>140</sup> Brown also recalled how “At Harvard, I went into careful study of American poetry,” where he continued to learn Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, and stoical modes of representation.<sup>141</sup> Both Brown and Davis would soon emerge as New Negro Renaissance poets, and their writings would reflect this emphasis on the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Davis’s greatest intellectual influence at Harvard, however, was Irving Babbitt. When Davis left Harvard and started teaching in the South, St. Clair Drake recalled how he was

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<sup>139</sup> Allison Davis, Curriculum Vitae, Allison Davis Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>140</sup> Werner Sollors, Thomas A. Underwood, and Caldwell Titcomb, “Sterling A. Brown,” in *Varieties of the Black Experience*, 103.

<sup>141</sup> Brown, “A Son’s Return,” 330.

“bearing the message of Irving Babbitt’s ‘New Humanism.’”<sup>142</sup> Indeed, as Davis’s writing during the New Negro Renaissance attests, Babbitt’s influence was deep. Babbitt was the central intellectual leader of a cultural movement he called the “New Humanism.” The movement remained marginal in its time, though it garnered more mainstream attention in the late 1920s, and it would later influence Southern Agrarianism, neo-Orthodox Protestantism, and Modern Conservatism.<sup>143</sup> Essentially, the New Humanists’ perspective developed out of a critique of two major aspects of modern American culture: naturalism and romanticism.

Naturalism registered the impact of science on modern thought. In biology, Darwinian natural selection broke down the dichotomy between humans and animals and treated all living creatures as subject to the same forces of naturalistic change and evolution. In psychology, behaviorism measured human behavior as a product of socially-conditioned stimuli. In philosophy, pragmatism posited truth as relative and as dependent upon one’s frame of reference. In literature, naturalism portrayed human beings as hapless victims of social circumstances. In all of these ways, naturalism was a radically environmental mode of thinking that challenged previous conceptions of human beings as special, unique, and capable of exerting control over their lives. Irving Babbitt, along with the three other major New Humanist thinkers, Paul Elmer More, Stuart Pratt Sherman, and Norman Foerster, saw naturalism as deeply flawed. Fundamentally, Babbitt rejected the conflation of humans and animals, and he reasserted the dualism between man and nature. In the first major treatise of the New Humanism, *Literature and the American College* (1908), Babbitt despaired that “Man himself and the products of his

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<sup>142</sup> St. Clair Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship: W. Allison Davis and *Deep South*,” in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World*, ed. the Institute of the Black World (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1974), 44.

<sup>143</sup> J. David Hoeveler, Jr. *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900-1940* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 3.

spirit, language, and literature, are treated not as having a law of their own but as things.”<sup>144</sup> The New Humanists justified their dualistic approach to man and nature not on metaphysical grounds, but on practical, empirical ones. Specifically, they maintained that human consciousness was an observable reality, as was the ability of human beings to manipulate the environment and to shape their own destinies through self-control and human will.<sup>145</sup>

In addition to critiquing the environmental determinism of naturalistic thinking, the New Humanists observed how the underlying cult of science that produced naturalism had other negative consequences. Above all, the emphasis on practical knowledge in the pursuit of technological advancement produced a fixation on a form of “progress” that was measured in material things. Lost was the focus on the cultivation of humanity’s spiritual well-being; fading were the traditional forms of knowledge and morality that nourished that well-being for millennia. And for what? Babbitt was dismayed at Americans for “spending seventy-five million dollars a year on automobiles” while signs of “moral degeneracy” abounded, such as “the increase in murders, in suicides, in insanity, [and] in divorce.”<sup>146</sup> He mocked how the replacement of the Bible for the comic strip in Sunday reading could be perceived as a sign of progress within industrial America.

Romanticism represented the other, related cultural problem for the New Humanists. In *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919), Babbitt provided the movement’s most sophisticated critique of Romanticism. Babbitt considered a Romantic to be “the wrong type of individualist – the

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<sup>144</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1908), 30.

<sup>145</sup> J. David Hoeveler, Jr. *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900-1940* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 42.

<sup>146</sup> Babbitt, *Literature and the American College*, 64.

individualist who has repudiated outer control without achieving inner control.”<sup>147</sup> In other words, he critiqued the cult of individualism that focused on self-expression and the cultivation of each person’s unique self. He traced this thinking to Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau who saw civilization as stultifying, and who thus looked with envy upon “primitive” peoples who were freer to develop their individual selves. The rise of modern industrial capitalism and its therapeutic ethos only exacerbated this emphasis on individualistic self-expression as the path to fulfillment. For Babbitt, this type of individualism was devoid of value, and it fed into the empty materialism of a consumerist society. Alternatively, Babbitt prioritized humankind and the spiritual welfare of the group over the individual’s prerogative for self-expression. He therefore called for individuals to restrict, rather than cultivate, their temperaments in order to discover their higher selves, which they shared in common with all of humanity.<sup>148</sup> The New Humanists took Matthew Arnold’s conception of high culture—“the best that has been thought and said”—as humanity’s cultural goal, and they castigated modernists’ celebration of the debased and the banal within low culture.<sup>149</sup> Above all, the New Humanists aspired to fortify the spiritual welfare of humankind against what they saw as the individualistic, materialistic, environmental-deterministic excesses of the times.

The twenty-two-year-old Allison Davis found much appealing in Babbitt’s philosophy, and likely in the man himself. Babbitt was famous for his energetic, pedantic, no-nonsense approach in the classroom. As J. David Hoeveler, Jr. narrates it:

[Babbitt’s] classroom lectures were daily exercises in Humanism. Babbitt entered the room with the familiar green Harvard book bag, whose contents he hastily unloaded on the desk. Then the discourse began. Stuart Sherman recalled the ensuing phenomenon:

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<sup>147</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), xxiii.

<sup>148</sup> Hoeveler, 40.

<sup>149</sup> See Irving Babbitt, “Matthew Arnold,” in *Spanish Character and Other Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), 48-65.



‘He deluged you with the wisdom of the world; his thoughts were unpacked and poured out so fast you couldn’t keep up with them...He was at you day after day like a battering ram, knocking down your illusions.’ To another student, ‘to hear him was to understand the modern world.’ Babbitt’s vast repertoire of facts, carefully chosen cases-in-point from the wisdom and folly of the past, so amazed the students that they made bets on the number of authors he would mention in the course of a lecture. The record, apparently, was seventy-five.<sup>150</sup>

The force of Babbitt’s personality and the profundity of his knowledge of great thinkers impressed many of his students. If nothing else, students had to recognize the depth and breadth of Babbitt’s humanist canon, as well as its bearing on contemporary issues.

Davis filtered Babbitt’s philosophy through his own experiences with race and class in America, and he found much of value. To be sure, Davis, like W. E. B. Du Bois before him, was suspicious of dualistic thinking. He observed with contempt how white thinkers erected dichotomies such as white vs. black, or Mongoloid vs. Negroid, to posit fundamental biological differences between the “races” of humankind. African Americans saw clearly that such dualism lacked intellectual merit and merely ratified the social subordination of black people. In this way, Davis was more attuned to the social construction of knowledge, and he shied away from the New Humanists’ attempts to establish a sharp dichotomy between man and nature.

Still, other New Humanist ideas resonated with Davis. The notion that human beings have some control over their destinies because they can exercise self-discipline matched with Davis’s experiences. As a black youth growing up in the age of Jim Crow, he learned very clearly to control himself and his behaviors, lest he face the savage violence exacted upon blacks for transgressing the racial code. His control here helped to keep him safe. Moreover, as part of a middle-class black family that pushed him to excel at school, Davis learned to channel his energies into scholastic excellence, and his success in gaining admittance to and graduating as

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<sup>150</sup> Hoeveler, 8-9.

valedictorian of Williams College, and then in entering Harvard for graduate school, proved to him that individuals did have some control over their own destinies. On a broader level, Davis learned from his family and his teachers at Dunbar that black people, although oppressed for centuries, did act in all sorts of ways to win social justice and to improve their lives, be it the abolition of slavery or the founding of the NAACP. So even if he accepted Darwinian evolution, Davis, like the New Humanists, perceived the environmental determinism within modern thought to be overdone, not to mention counterproductive to effecting change through concrete action. Striking this sort of balance between environmental and individual forces would in fact be a trademark of Davis's entire thought, and it helps explain why he entered into culture-and-personality theorizing, and how he was able to enrich the culture-of-poverty debates later in the century.

Davis was also drawn to the New Humanists' emphasis on the spiritual welfare of the group over the self-expression of the individual. For Davis, the group he had in mind was a very particular one: African Americans. His parents had taught him to see how the fate of all black people was linked together, and his parents modeled for him what race leadership looked like. Growing up in color- and class-conscious Washington, Davis came to despise the cult of individualism and materialism, which he believed undermined the group's interests. As his writings during the 1920s attest, Davis had little patience for black businessmen, lawyers, doctors, pastors, and other petit bourgeoisie who abandoned or even took advantage of the black masses in order to rise socially in the American capitalist tradition. Knowing that all black people's interests were aligned, and believing that his people's poor, oppressed ancestors and contemporaries had much spiritual wisdom to offer, Davis developed the New Humanists' insights into a unique literary style during the New Negro Renaissance. He, too, would be

critical of modernists' fixation on low culture, but his background taught him to see the "lowly" as also possessing a type of high culture in the Arnoldian sense.

Davis completed his master's degree in one year, graduating in 1925. Though he graduated "near the top of his class" with an advanced degree—an extreme rarity in those days—from the most prestigious university in the country, Davis once again had few job prospects in a university system governed by racial segregation.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, Harvard, like Williams before it, refused to help Davis find work, so he made his way back to the South in the fall of 1925 to teach at Hampton Institute, a black college in southeastern Virginia.<sup>152</sup> With his skills honed in some of the finest schools in the nation, and with his understanding of the race problem deepened, Davis stood poised to carve out a literary and teaching career, if in a place far from the intellectual mainstream. His years at Hampton, however, would eventually transform him in a way that he could not have anticipated.

## **Hampton Institute**

Davis began teaching at Hampton Institute in the fall of 1925, and he remained there until the spring of 1931.<sup>153</sup> Located on the southeastern coast of Virginia not far from the border of North Carolina, Hampton was still part of the Upper South, but it was not Washington, D.C. And it certainly was not the Northeast. Here Davis would encounter more nakedly the Jim Crow system, both in the town of Hampton and especially through his interactions with his students,

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<sup>151</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Studies of the African Diaspora: The Work and Reflections of St. Clair Drake," in *Against All Odds: Scholars Who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Benjamin P. Bowser and Louis Kushnick (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 90.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Michael R. Hillis, "Allison Davis and the Study of Race, Social Class, and Schooling," *Journal of Negro Education* 64 (Winter 1995): 34.

who came from all over the South. It was in these years that Davis would come to understand even better the plight of the black masses. He would apply his literary skills to what he learned about the lived experiences of ordinary African Americans, and he would cultivate a distinctive literary voice. Sterling Brown, who taught at Virginia Seminary from 1923 to 1926, once said that “I learned the Arts and Sciences at Williams and Harvard; I learned the Humanities at Lynchburg.”<sup>154</sup> The same might be said of Davis and Hampton.

Davis’s decision to migrate southward for academic work was a common one among black intellectuals of that time. Indeed, the only career option for many African-American academics – including, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois, E. Franklin Frazier, Horace Mann Bond, and Charles S. Johnson – was to take positions in black colleges such as Hampton Institute, Tuskegee Institute, Fisk University, Howard University, and Atlanta University.<sup>155</sup> Some of these schools, such as Hampton and Tuskegee, were more vocationally oriented, whereas Fisk, Howard, and Atlanta also specialized in training their students in the classics and the professions, thus mirroring the education at mainstream white universities. Here was a difference in practice that reflected the competing ideas black intellectuals such as Du Bois and Booker T. Washington held over the best approach to racial uplift.

By the 1920s, when Davis took his post at Hampton, these older debates had begun to take new form. As the slow trickle of black migration northward since the Civil War was transformed into a flood during World War I, the social, political, economic, and cultural foundations of black life changed. In 1900, over 90% of blacks lived in the South, but between 1915 and 1920 alone, several hundred thousand African Americans migrated northward to

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<sup>154</sup> Sterling A. Brown quoted in Graham Locke, “Br’er Sterling and the Blues,” 368.

<sup>155</sup> This is the trajectory of virtually every black intellectual of the era, including, Alain Locke, Rayford Logan, William Fontaine, Sterling A. Brown, Horace Mann Bond, and John Hope Franklin.

industrial centers such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York.<sup>156</sup> Pushed out of the South by segregation, violence, and a cotton crop devastated by the boll weevil, and pulled north by wartime job opportunities and greater freedom, African Americans initiated a massive demographic transition that would continue for the next several decades and that would result by mid-century in blacks being predominantly urban and Northern. These social changes would create new political power, as African Americans began electing black local representatives and eventually emerged as an important constituency of the Democratic Party during the 1930s.

Explicit protest accompanied the Great Migration and World War I. An important element of this centered on black college campuses in the South.<sup>157</sup> Booker T. Washington's vocational approach dominated most black colleges until his death in 1915, but with World War I and the Great Migration, the wheels of change were in motion. Du Bois captured the new spirit of protest among blacks, declaring "We are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land. *We return. We return from fighting. We return fighting.*"<sup>158</sup> Having served bravely in combat, African Americans seized a new opportunity to protest their disfranchisement and segregation. Moreover, having fought alongside the French and other Europeans who treated them more equally, many blacks became further emboldened to fight discrimination at home.<sup>159</sup> More than ever, too, they realized that this local fight was also a

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<sup>156</sup> Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 18-19.

<sup>157</sup> Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 17.

<sup>158</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "Returning Soldiers" (1919), in *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Viking, 1994), 5.

<sup>159</sup> See Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Mark Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008).

global one, as African Americans partook in the nationalistic spirit of self-determination sweeping the globe and gaining impetus from Woodrow Wilson's postwar rhetoric.<sup>160</sup>

In this fight, African Americans understood the centrality of higher education and professional training for equipping their race to gain access to skilled, middle-class jobs as well as to cultivate broad-minded race leaders. Yet philanthropy continued to focus on vocational schools and training in order to underwrite the continued social and economic subordination of African Americans.<sup>161</sup> Above all, black protesters rejected "the condescending belief that whites knew the best methods of Negro education" and insisted that "black youths must be trained according to principles endorsed by the black community."<sup>162</sup> These tensions exploded into outright protest across black colleges throughout the South. Such protest is partly explained by the changing profile of the average student at many of these black colleges. By the 1920s, many of the students had in fact come from the North as a product of the Great Migration. For more affluent Northern families who could afford to send their children to college, the schools in the South were often the best option given the dearth of universities opening their doors for African Americans in the North. Consequently, these students had high expectations for the type of education they would receive, and they carried with them the sense of protest that had pushed their families northward in the first place. Such students were less willing to tolerate white control of black education and black institutions.<sup>163</sup> Because protest in the white South was still far too dangerous, blacks waged their civil rights struggles on other terrain, namely in black institutions and colleges. Lawrence Levine emphasizes the importance of this point in

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<sup>160</sup> On Wilsonianism and anticolonial nationalism, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>161</sup> For a great overview of black education in the South, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935).

<sup>162</sup> Wolters, 18.

<sup>163</sup> William M. Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 95-96.

encouraging historians not to explain overt protests as merely products of internal changes within African Americans, but as reactions against changing external conditions that made protest – always latent – more manifest.<sup>164</sup>

Hampton Institute serves as a case study for this protest – one that, significantly, anticipated later civil rights and New Left protest in the 1950s and 1960s. Hampton, along with several other black colleges, was founded after the Civil War in 1868 through the efforts of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the American Missionary Association, and other organizations.<sup>165</sup> For the first twenty-five years, Hampton functioned primarily as a normal school to train teachers who could educate the masses.<sup>166</sup> This, of course, was a pressing goal for racial advancement, as slave owners had consciously labored to deny education and literacy to their slaves as a way to keep them ignorant and tractable. Yet for the next twenty-five years, from 1893 to 1917, Hampton came to reflect Booker T. Washington’s approach of vocational training and moral inculcation rather than higher education. Many called this approach the “Hampton Idea,” and Washington himself was trained at Hampton, later presiding over Tuskegee Institute where he implemented the same ideas.<sup>167</sup>

The 1920s in many ways represented a new low-point in race relations, and Virginia was at the center here. In 1924, the Virginia legislature passed the infamous Virginia Sterilization Law that targeted poor minorities and which the Supreme Court later upheld in *Buck v. Bell*

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<sup>164</sup> Lawrence Levine stresses this need to expand how we conceptualize protest. Historians have tended to miss even this overt resistance among blacks on college campuses in the 1920s because it did not occur in relation to mainstream white society. But he insists upon the narrowness of that definition of protest. He argues that historians have to be more sensitive to subtler forms of protest, such as migration and work pace, or more overt protest but within the safer terrain of black institutions, where it could be tolerated with sparking naked aggression and violence. See Lawrence W. Levine, “The Concept of the New Negro and the Realities of Black Culture,” in *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 86-106.

<sup>165</sup> Enoch P. Waters, *American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press* (Chicago: Path Press, 1987), 59.

<sup>166</sup> Wolters, 230.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

(1927). Also in 1924, Virginians passed the Racial Integrity Law, which repealed the fifteen-sixteenths rule whereby a person could be considered “white” even if he or she had a single great-grandparent who was “non-white.” After this law, any non-Caucasian blood at all would deny a person the privilege of whiteness in Virginia. In this way, the law finally matched up with the “one-drop rule” that at least theoretically governed social affairs. But legal sanction gave discrimination more force. For instance, the Racial Integrity Law also outlawed marriages between whites and nonwhites in Virginia and made it a felony to mislead authorities about one’s racial heritage. Additionally, the Massenberg Bill of 1926 wrote into law the segregation of places of public assembly, such as movie theaters and auditoriums, which had previously been segregated only by custom.<sup>168</sup> Vigilant to maintain their racial caste system and aware of the difficulty of doing so, white Virginians used the power of the state to prevent passing and to discourage interracial relations of all sorts.<sup>169</sup>

During such deteriorating race relations when segregation also spread throughout the country and proponents attempted to spread it across the globe, Hampton adapted to the tenor of the times and did not threaten the status quo.<sup>170</sup> In the 1920s, Hampton went so far as to segregate its own residential halls and dining cars, providing separate facilities for white visitors. This, of course, was a type of double segregation, as the institution already existed by law apart from white colleges. Now administrators condoned further segregation within an already segregated college. The result was that Hampton became “the pet of philanthropy,” growing an

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<sup>168</sup> Janken, 63-64.

<sup>169</sup> Jonathan Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2009), 237-40.

<sup>170</sup> On Jim Crow’s international flight, see Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 21-28. Some examples include the federal government’s spread of segregation to Haiti in its informal colonization of that country, the internationalization of white supremacy through the Ku Klux Klan spreading to places such as Western Canada and Auckland, New Zealand, and the cultural production and global dissemination of stereotypical images of African Americans as presented in DuBose Heyward’s novel *Porgy*, and the play *The Green Pastures*, for instance.



endowment that surpassed that of the other leading black colleges' combined monies.<sup>171</sup>

Hampton received, for example, \$50,000 per year from the Rockefeller Foundation, \$25,000 of which went directly to subsidizing the salaries of teachers such as Davis.<sup>172</sup>

Yet this concession to racial discrimination also came with a cost. Students grew visibly angry with Hampton's paternalism, its redoubling of segregation, and its inadequate educational training. Perceiving this discontent, the Institute's third white principal, James Edgar Gregg, tried to adapt to students' concerns during his administration from 1918 to 1929. Gregg hired more black faculty and administrators in this still white-dominated institution; he developed programs for black and African studies; and he slowly moved the school towards granting bachelor's degrees instead of offering only vocational training.<sup>173</sup> Yet these changes occurred slowly, and he complemented them with steps to appease white philanthropists and segregationists, such as segregating the campus and implementing rigorous standards of decorum in student behavior. For example, in 1919 Gregg issued the bulletin "General Order No. 2, Rules and Regulations" across campus, which stated that

Students must be in bed when the lights are out, no talking or whispering is allowed...Every student is expected to bathe at least twice a week...No student is allowed north of the line passing through the center of the Principal's house except when on school business...Students are forbidden to use tobacco or intoxicating liquors in any form...Rowing, sailing and bicycle riding on Sundays, except on school duty or by special permission, is forbidden.<sup>174</sup>

One of Davis's students at Hampton and one his future colleagues, St. Clair Drake, recalled how "Dancing was taboo and semi-military discipline was imposed on the men."<sup>175</sup> In particular, the

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<sup>171</sup> Wolters, 26.

<sup>172</sup> "Memorandum Regarding Hampton Institute," Oct. 10, 1923, folder 1626, box 174, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 232-34.

<sup>174</sup> Cited in Wolters, 235.

<sup>175</sup> Drake, "Studies of the African Diaspora," 88.

students “marched to lunch every day in military order and to church on Sunday morning. We had regular inspection of our rooms in which one of the officers with a white glove would come on Sunday and make sure that there was no dust.”<sup>176</sup> Students reacted negatively to such Puritanical paternalism, and they were also alienated by symbolic actions, including the trustees’ insistence on continuing to call Hampton an “institute” rather than a “college” in order to appease whites.

All of this fueled student protest throughout the 1920s. Drake described how, when he entered Hampton in 1927, “the students were in revolt” and “There was a general mood of protest, impatience with segregation, and willingness to change outdated practices all across the South.”<sup>177</sup> In the spring of 1925, for example, the Hampton choir walked off a stage in Washington where they were expected to sing black spirituals and plantation melodies to a segregated audience.<sup>178</sup> These students were infuriated by the unseemly submissiveness of the songs and the white audience’s affection for them.

Another incident was more prolonged, and Davis involved himself in it. On Saturday, October 8, 1927, campus administrators kept the lights on in the back of a movie screening, which many students perceived as yet another affront to their characters in implying that they could not act appropriately in a dark theater. Students protested by skipping class the following Monday. At this critical juncture, Davis “conferred with the students informally and helped them ‘get it together.’”<sup>179</sup> He was clearly supportive of their actions, as he too resented the paternalism of a black college that tellingly had no black full professor or black head of a

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<sup>176</sup> St. Clair Drake, quoted in George C. Bond, “A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake: An American Anthropologist,” *American Ethnologist* 15 (1988): 766.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>178</sup> Wolters, 249-50.

<sup>179</sup> Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 44.

department.<sup>180</sup> Eager to direct student resentment into productive ends, Davis helped students form a Student Protest Committee. The students, led by many of the best students on the campus, then presented Principal Gregg with a list of seventeen reasonable grievances about campus life. Gregg responded with fury. He refused to address the grievances and to excuse the protesters, and he ended up closing the school for over a month.<sup>181</sup> In addition, he placed hundreds of students on probation and suspended sixty-nine students—for the entire year if they were on the Student Protest Committee. Though crushing the strike, Gregg's actions only further alienated the student body and encouraged other types of resistance. One alumnus recalled what this resistance after the strike looked like: "Both boys and girls are in the habit of willfully breaking regulations in such ways as going from the grounds without excuse, attending movies without permission, staying away from church, failing to wear regulation uniforms, and neglecting drills."<sup>182</sup> Gregg eventually resigned in 1929 amid such continued opposition.<sup>183</sup>

Similar episodes of student struggle and protest at college occurred throughout the country. This protest was even more visible in less repressive environments such as at Fisk University and Atlanta University.<sup>184</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois demonstrated how extensive such resistance was by tracking protests beyond just black colleges in the South, such as those at the

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<sup>180</sup> Despite his frustration with the paternalism at Hampton, and despite his own involvement in helping organize student protest, Davis was still a paragon of professionalism and a master of winning white administrators' support. For example, the white Principal of Hampton in 1931, Arthur Howe, wrote a letter of recommendation for Davis, stating: "He is a bright man and writes readily and is scholarly in his pursuit of learning." Howe went on to call Davis "unusually fine," "upright," and "most deserving in all matters of character."<sup>180</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Arthur Howe to Edwin Embree, November 12, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>181</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 9, New Perspectives on Black Education (Summer 1978): 91.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 254-70.

<sup>184</sup> At Fisk, student rebellion won similar reforms as at Hampton, one of which was the hiring of Charles S. Johnson as a faculty member in the Sociology Department. This had far-reaching significance, for over the next two decades he would oversee the most sophisticated research program into southern black life in the country. Wayne J. Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 40-41.

University of Kansas, Lincoln University, Ohio University, and Shaw University. He published this in an article called “The Unrest Among Negro Students” in the August 1927 edition of the *Crisis*.<sup>185</sup> Notably, Davis published poetry in that same issue and was no doubt familiar with the scale of this protest. It is not surprising that at the most repressive and accommodationist institutions, such as Hampton and Tuskegee, where large numbers of blacks could gather and act without fear of white reprisals, this anger simmered and at times boiled over.

The reality, of course, is that most of the resistance was more subtle than overt, since as Gregg’s repression at Hampton revealed, administrators aggressively put down resistance. There were similar types of conflict at Tuskegee Institute, which Drake described as having “a close relation [with] Hampton Institute.”<sup>186</sup> The black sociologist Horace Cayton, in his autobiography *Long Old Road*, captured the sense of discontent among students at Tuskegee in these years. When he visited Tuskegee in the early 1930s as a faculty member, an eighteen-year-old student shunned the rigid “caste line between students and faculty” by attempting to dance with Cayton at a school event and later by attempting to have sexual relations with him privately.<sup>187</sup> When he refused the latter, she replied:

‘You’re just like the rest of the faculty,’ she said scornfully. ‘We aren’t children. I’m eighteen, and where I come from that’s a woman. Most of my girl friends that age are married and have children. They treat us like children here. We can’t live the way they tell us. There are a lot of teachers who have student girl friends. We’re human, flesh-and-blood human.’<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., “The Unrest Among Negro Students,” *Crisis* 34 (August 1927): 187-90, 208. Charles S. Johnson also published about student protest at black colleges in the pages of *Opportunity*. See, for example, Charles S. Johnson, “More Student Unrest,” *Opportunity* 3 (June 1925): 164. Johnson, characteristically, provides a more cautious support of the student protest than Du Bois, who strongly supported the students’ behaviors, especially at Fisk where he helped the protest succeed. Cautious about alienating white philanthropists, Johnson nevertheless prompted readers to take the protests seriously.

<sup>186</sup> Drake, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 89.

<sup>187</sup> Horace R. Cayton, *Long Old Road* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), 196.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

Cayton, from the Pacific Northwest, was himself unsettled by the caste system at Tuskegee in the Deep South. He quickly went back to Chicago, but not before coming to his “first personal awareness of the discontent of thousands of Southern Negroes, or anyway the first time I had ever heard it actively expressed.”<sup>189</sup>

Davis became “a sort of campus hero” for a small group of the best students at Hampton.<sup>190</sup> In addition to supporting their protests, students perceived him as having “larger horizons than Hampton.”<sup>191</sup> This appealed to those students engaged in the larger black freedom struggle, which they followed in *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* magazines, and which they furthered through participation in Hampton’s branch of Carter Woodson’s Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.<sup>192</sup> St. Clair Drake recalled that “Davis tried to stimulate young black students to write. He gave magnificent lectures on English literature, and some of us who were majoring in other fields took all of his courses that we could because he was a breath of fresh air at Hampton.”<sup>193</sup> Davis exposed his students to the latest critical literary theory, including the New Humanism, having students read Irving Babbitt’s *Rousseau and Romanticism*.<sup>194</sup> Students also formed a small writers club around Davis, and Davis even communicated with W. E. B. Du Bois at *The Crisis* to help some of them get published. For example, in February 1930 he asked Du Bois to publish one of his student’s poems, claiming that

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>190</sup> Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 44.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Drake, “Reflections on Anthropology,” 91.

<sup>193</sup> Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 44.

<sup>194</sup> Drake, quoted in Bond, 766.

his student could become a “distinguished poet,” but that he “needs encouragement to stimulate him just now.”<sup>195</sup>

St. Clair Drake was the most notable of Davis’s students at Hampton. The two of them eventually became close friends and colleagues within social anthropology. Drake called Davis “the person who most influenced me [at Hampton]” and who “moved me to want to study, understand, and change the world of Jim Crow.”<sup>196</sup> Davis, for his part, recalled that Drake was “both a brilliant student and a very hard worker” whom he found “by far the most able student there, during my six years’ teaching.”<sup>197</sup> But there were also other significant students. For instance, Enoch Waters, who later became a well-regarded African-American journalist and editor of the *Chicago Defender*, mentioned Davis as an important influence within the context of a vibrant academic life at Hampton:

There were about one thousand students, all in my age range. They came from about thirty states and several foreign countries in the Caribbean and Africa. There were, as well, five or six white students, the offsprings of members of the interracial faculty, and several American Indians. If efforts had been made by my school texts and all-white teachers in Philadelphia to persuade me that Negroes were intellectually inferior to whites, the black teachers at Hampton were living refutation. On a comparative basis there was no difference in the scholarship and competency of my white and black professors at Hampton. I was, of course, proud that the Negro faculty members were comparable in every respect. Off hand, I recall Nathaniel Dett, K. B. M. Crook, Allison Davis, and Stewart Whiting as standouts in my memory.<sup>198</sup>

This small group of talented students at Hampton sustained Davis while he was there.

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<sup>195</sup> Davis, Allison, 1902-1983. Letter from Allison Davis to W. E. B. Du Bois, February 17, 1930. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>196</sup> Drake, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 90, 86.

<sup>197</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, St. Clair Drake Fellowship File, Lloyd Warner to Edwin Embree, August 15, 1935, Box 409, Folder 1.

<sup>198</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 58-59.

Still, Drake recalled that Davis “seemed to brood a lot” in those days, and that he “didn’t interact act much with the student body” apart from his close circle of students.<sup>199</sup> Not surprisingly, Davis struggled with the cultural gap he experienced between his own background and that of Hampton’s students, who were predominantly “poor and poorly schooled rural blacks.”<sup>200</sup> He found that “teaching in the standard manner made no sense” for them and that he “didn’t know anything really to teach them since our backgrounds were so different.”<sup>201</sup> Still, he “wanted to do something to affect such students.”<sup>202</sup> Though he had been around lower-class blacks in Washington, even the worst-off African Americans there tended to live better than the rural blacks of the Deep South whom he now encountered. Davis was also now a mature man whose job it was to instruct these youth from very different backgrounds. For what may have been the first time, he had to consider seriously how his background and Ivy League education, which made him supremely one of Du Bois’s “Talented Tenth,” also made him thoroughly out of touch with the vast majority of American blacks. As a caring and serious teacher, Davis knew he had to begin with the students’ prior knowledge and backgrounds and then help them to master new knowledge. But what new knowledge would be useful to them? How would literary criticism help improve poor students’ lives? Rural black Southerners had to deal with the more pressing concerns of economic subordination and exploitation in the forms of sharecropping, tenant farming, and debt peonage. Furthermore, they had to exist in a caste system that underwrote their complete inferiority and enforced it, often savagely, with violence and intimidation.

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<sup>199</sup> Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 44.

<sup>200</sup> Allison Davis quoted in Turner, “Profile of Allison Davis,” 22.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

Over time, Davis's concerns about being relevant to the black community's needs prompted him to consider a career change from the arts to the social sciences. For now, though, Davis labored to contribute to African-American life not only through his teaching, but through his poetry and his prose. The flourishing of black culture at this time, known as the New Negro Renaissance, afforded him numerous opportunities to make his voice heard. His voice would be as distinct as his own life path had been, which had taken him at turns from Washington to Williams, and from Harvard to Hampton.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Harlem from Hampton**

*Here is a beautiful philosophy daringly clear, calmly cynical and yet with a final clinging to hope and high ideals.<sup>1</sup>*

--- W. E. B. Du Bois, on Allison Davis

In 1927, Davis published an award-winning essay entitled “In Glorious Company.” This essay demonstrated Davis’s literary gifts at the same time that it conveyed the central themes of his writing. “In Glorious Company” described the social scene of a train ride north in an almost anthropological way. He took stock of numerous black characters such as a gambler, a porter, a college student, a one-legged miner, an older genteel man, a prostitute, and an older revivalist woman – all cramped together in a segregated box car. Despite their vast social differences, Davis captured their sense of racial unity, epitomized in the sense of movement and hopefulness associated with trains. “To them, the mere fact of motion suggests new independence, and incites their trammelled spirits with unbounded enthusiasm.”<sup>2</sup> Trains represented the possibility of escape from the South that tormented them, and they embodied the hope for a better, freer life in the North, which they had all imagined in their dreams as a refuge from their difficult lives. Davis also conveyed the tragedy and recklessness of these hopes, however, knowing full well that life in the North was far from a refuge, but was a place where discrimination and oppression took similar forms. He wrote, “It is pitiable they should not yet have learned they have no fair country, and that oppression rides with them.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, in the end, he portrayed these black figures

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<sup>1</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, introduction to “Savage or Serene,” by Allison Davis, *Crisis* 36 (May 1929): 157.

<sup>2</sup> Allison Davis, “A Glorious Company,” in *Ebony and Topaz: A Collectanea*, ed. Charles S. Johnson (1927; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 156.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

not as naïve and ignorant, but as strong and almost heroic in the face of the tragic realities of their lives:

So it is with them all, escaping the weight of hardship and persecution by some exhilaration of the moment. In an hour now, all will be left at their lonely, country station, while the great engine burns its fiery trail across the black sky, driving on into other lands with happier children. But now they are still in a band and confident.

They have not gone this journey of physical hardship and spiritual cramping without the strength of hope and faith. This faith they will not lose in the newer lands to which they must eventually come, for it is revived daily by the barest victory over disease and poverty, and these will travel with them, to chasten.<sup>4</sup>

“In Glorious Company” conveyed the central themes of Davis’s literary style, which I accordingly call “Negro Stoicism,” during the New Negro Renaissance. I borrow the term from James Weldon Johnson, who coined it when referring to the parallel style of Davis’s friend Sterling Brown.<sup>5</sup> In the face of an unrelenting oppression and sense of tragedy, the black masses in Davis’s writing appeared as resilient, as strong, and as humble with a keen sense of irony. In other words, Davis portrayed ordinary blacks as “stoical” in their ability to endure hardship and oppression, much like the characters he had encountered during his formal education in such writers as Robert Frost. Adapting this quality to African Americans, Davis aimed to portray them as finally beautiful and admirable for their quiet persistence against the absurd. The central themes of Davis’s writing thus include a focus on ordinary blacks as subjects, a critical realist mode of representation, an underlying existentialist philosophy, and the social aim of garnering sympathy and respect for ordinary blacks.

This chapter explores these themes within Davis’s literary expression during the Renaissance, and it shows how they grew out of his positioning at Hampton, his larger social and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>5</sup> James Weldon Johnson said Sterling Brown infused his poetry with “that not much known characteristic, Negro stoicism.” See Johnson quoted in Joanne V. Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 28.

intellectual influences, and his political objective to foment racial solidarity. Davis complemented his literary writings with articles critiquing black intellectual discourse and black racial leadership. His critiques were often severe in tone, but they signaled the deepness of his convictions for achieving racial progress through radical forms of leadership and social intervention in the South. Though Davis left the arts for the social sciences before further developing his literary voice and having a greater impact on the Renaissance, his ideas did influence a number of younger black thinkers. Equally important, Davis's distinctive voice signaled his larger intellectual maturation, and his example deepens our understanding of the New Negro Renaissance more generally.

### **The New Negro Renaissance**

While students at black colleges throughout the country were protesting administrative paternalism, the nation's most influential black intellectuals were launching their own more visible protests. Harlem, the black ghetto in New York City, emerged as the capital of black culture in these years. Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican pan-Africanist who called for a Back-to-Africa movement and encouraged blacks to see that "black is beautiful," powerfully influenced the black masses with his message of racial pride and Black Nationalism. He did this in an era when many African Americans were attempting to integrate into white society by hiding their African heritage, even straightening their hair and dying their skin white.<sup>6</sup> But among African-American intellectuals, integrationism rather than separatism was the predominant sentiment

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

during the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> This integrationism took new form, however, in the Twenties, with the arts and letters emerging as the new terrain to demonstrate racial equality with whites. Various terms emerged to conceptualize this cultural experimentation, especially the “Harlem Renaissance” and the “New Negro Movement.” Befitting an era when Americans applied the adjective “new” to all parts of society, the “New Negro” captured the sense of novelty relating to African Americans’ social and cultural lives in urban centers such as Harlem.

The New Negro Renaissance, then, emerged as the crucial cultural movement through which black intellectuals debated issues central to especially urban, Northern, African-American life in the Twenties. Members of Du Bois’s “Talented Tenth” consciously orchestrated this movement. As David Levering Lewis notes,

The Harlem Renaissance was a somewhat forced phenomenon, a cultural nationalism of the parlor, institutionally encouraged and directed by leaders of the national civil rights establishment for the paramount purpose of improving race relations in a time of extreme national backlash, caused in large part by economic gains won by Afro-Americans during the Great War.<sup>8</sup>

In Lewis’s accounting, the Talented Tenth comprised approximately ten thousand affluent race leaders among a population numbering over ten million. Institutionally, the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League (NUL) spearheaded the effort with their respective organs, *Crisis* and *Opportunity*, playing central roles in publicizing black life and thought. Race leaders willfully excluded many aspects of the black experience that appealed to the black masses, such as Garveyism, the black church, and initially black popular culture such as jazz and the blues. These cultural forms smacked of emotionalism

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<sup>7</sup> Charles S. Johnson took a representative position on assimilation or integration rather than separatism. This position often came forth in criticisms of the Garvey movement. Most black intellectuals in the 1920s saw Garveyism as unrealistic, eerily similar to white supremacist thought (indeed, Garvey collaborated with some white supremacists in his Back-to-Africa project), and dangerous in whipping up the masses in support of an impracticable project. See, for instance, Charles S. Johnson, “On Garvey and the ‘Garvey Movement,’” *Opportunity* 6 (January 1928): 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, “Introduction,” in *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, xv.

and a lack of civility for many early Renaissance leaders who labored to portray the more dignified, progressive side of black life—the relative absence of which whites had used as a metric of racial inequality. Since “the roads to the ballot box, the union hall, the decent neighborhood and the office were blocked,” Renaissance leaders turned to the arts and letters to demonstrate black equality.<sup>9</sup> In other words, African-American leaders focused on the politics of culture, consciously aiming to gain social power by replacing racist images of the “Old Negro,” who was backward and simplistic, with that of the “New Negro,” who was modern and sophisticated.<sup>10</sup>

The Renaissance, though, evolved over time. Lewis identifies three key stages to the movement. The first stage, from 1917 to 1923, involved much collaboration with and encouragement from white Greenwich Village radicals clustering around organs such as the *Seven Arts* and the *Liberator*. These white cultural and political radicals rebelled against Victorianism and the narrow Anglo-Saxonism dominating American society and culture.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, the wartime and postwar period was one of entrenched scientific and popular racism, widespread anti-immigrant sentiment, and far-reaching anti-radicalism and the suppression of dissent. So intellectuals such as Randolph Bourne espoused the idea of a “trans-national” America where it was precisely the diversity of America’s peoples and immigrants that could make it great and modern. In the Twenties, many American radicals looked upon African Americans with new interest, seeing in their oppression and their African roots a vibrancy

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<sup>9</sup> Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, xx.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, “Introduction,” in *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938*, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 1-3.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed and classic treatment of this rebellion, see Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time*, new ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). See also, Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000).

lacking amid the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant business culture of the Twenties. So these radicals turned to black culture and encouraged black artistic experimentation as a way to remake American culture, which they saw as a prerequisite for accepting it. African Americans, for their part, labored to demonstrate their equality through artistic experimentation in order to gain acceptance *to* that culture.<sup>12</sup>

The second and third phases represented the maturation of the New Negro Renaissance. During the second phase, from 1924 to 1926, the leaders of the NAACP and the NUL guided the movement and brought new black artists to the fore. Leaders such as Du Bois and Charles S. Johnson actively recruited black artists and writers, creating literary rewards and publication forums promoting their work. Yet even as this phase began, the third phase, reaching its fullest expression from 1926 to 1935, was under way. This phase “was marked by rebellion against the Civil Rights Establishment on the part of many of the artists and writers whom the establishment had assembled and promoted.”<sup>13</sup> Here a younger generation of African Americans, led by figures such as Langston Hughes, rejected the “race chauvinism” of establishment figures such as Du Bois who sought to use art only to promote the race’s interests, declaring even that “all art is propaganda.”<sup>14</sup> The younger generation wanted to experiment with the realities of black life and culture among the masses and to use their art to capture the wider human experience, not merely aping white artists’ standards. This generational division marked the final years of the Renaissance, which ended in the 1930s amid the Depression’s devastating impact upon African Americans.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis, *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, xx-xxv.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>14</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Criteria for Negro Art,” in *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 103. See also, Langston Hughes, “Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” in *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 91-95.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, xxi-xli.

Allison Davis began contributing to the Renaissance just as the second phase transitioned into the third. His advanced training in English literature at Harvard and Williams College made him exceptional even among the Talented Tenth of African Americans, and it positioned him as well as anyone to contribute high quality literary works to the Renaissance. From his teaching post at Hampton Institute, this is precisely what he began to do, hoping initially to make a career for himself as a poet and a writer.<sup>16</sup> Charles S. Johnson, the black Chicago School sociologist who temporarily left sociology to head the NUL during the Renaissance, actively recruited Davis – as he did so many other African Americans – to participate in the movement. One of the main recruitment mechanisms was the annual literary competition held by *Opportunity* magazine, beginning in 1925 and formed shortly after the *Crisis* magazine’s similar contest.<sup>17</sup> These competitions held public esteem partly because Du Bois and Johnson selected high profile judges such as Sinclair Lewis, H.G. Wells, Robert Frost, Van Wyck Brooks, and James Weldon Johnson.<sup>18</sup> The recipients gained national attention through publication in the sponsoring journals and the annual awards banquets. In 1927, Davis won one of *Opportunity*’s awards for “In Glorious Company,” which Johnson published in the collectanea, *Ebony and Topaz*. This prestigious award placed Davis in the company of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, E. Franklin Frazier, and other Renaissance luminaries, but his submission also reflected the distinctive voice that Davis had forged through his literary upbringing and social experiences.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> His son, Gordon Davis, testified to this early goal. This also explains his early advanced degree in English literature. See Joan Oleck, "Allison Davis: 1902-1983," *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol.12, ed. Shirelle Phelps (Detroit: Gale Research, 1997), 38-39.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick J. Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow* (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), 21.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, “Contest Awards,” *Opportunity* 4 (May 1926): 156-57.

<sup>19</sup> William M. Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 77.

## Negro Stoicism

After having impressed Du Bois with “In Glorious Company,” Davis published several literary pieces with the *Crisis* from 1927 to 1929.<sup>20</sup> With publications in the main organ of the NAACP, Davis reached a wide audience, and he likely became familiar to literate African Americans nationally. His publication in the NUL’s *Opportunity* magazine similarly placed him within the Renaissance mainstream.<sup>21</sup> This visibility at the time makes all the stranger Davis’s relative neglect in the historical record regarding the Renaissance.<sup>22</sup>

Through these prominent organs, Davis published numerous essays and poems, all of which elaborated key themes expressed in “In Glorious Company.” In a somber poem called “To Those Dead and Gone,” Davis paid homage to the unsung millions of blacks who suffered

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<sup>20</sup> As Davis’s letters to Du Bois testify, however, Davis was often annoyed with the slow pace with which Du Bois reviewed his work. See, for instance: Davis, Allison, 1902-1983. Letter from Allison Davis to W. E. B. Du Bois, June 27, 1927. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>21</sup> Allison Davis, “Fighters,” *Opportunity* 6 (June 1928): 175.

<sup>22</sup> On Davis’s neglect in the historical record, note, for instance, his absence in Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, eds., *Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), which includes brief biographies of hundreds of the most significant contributors. The foremost scholar of the Renaissance, David Levering Lewis, also fails to mention Davis at all in his comprehensive and standard account of the Renaissance, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. In his excellent study of the movement, George Hutchinson mentions Davis only once, and only in the context of one of his critical prose essays, “Our Negro Intellectuals.” See George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 168. Hutchinson refers to Davis as an anthropologist, but he was not yet an anthropologist when he wrote that article. In general, this is revealing of the neglect of Davis’s literary voice during the Renaissance, even though his contributions here were admittedly minor in comparison with his later achievements in social science.

Daryl Michael Scott and Alice O’Connor are two of the few scholars to recognize Davis as an important figure of the movement, comparable to the more well-known E. Franklin Frazier. See Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 65; and Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), Ch. 2-3. Note also Davis’s inclusion in the reader: Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds, *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Scholars beginning in the 1960s and 1970s began recovering lost black voices from the Renaissance and other eras. Allison Davis is a figure still deserving and in need of recovery here.



and died under slavery and after, insisting that they “still enrich” and bestow wisdom upon the race through their quiet dignity and tragic battle with oppression.<sup>23</sup> In another poem entitled “Gospel for Those Who Must,” he captured the virtues of two working-class blacks whom he identified as “Fighters”: a fisherman and a washerwoman.<sup>24</sup>

Unbroken  
By the salt spume of the sea.  
Tight-lipped against the whispering fears  
    of age,  
He holds her laughing.

In his keen eyes the gleam of one who  
    knows  
He must endure all the shifting winds, and  
    hate  
Of deep-embittered sons of slaving race,  
Must outreach  
The hunger of insatiate women,  
And broken nets at sea.

Her brave face  
Softens with a smile.  
And light of youth’s long hopes and  
    passion,  
Sunk away;—

But she has seasoned in her proper time  
And grown to mellow laughter.  
Strong.<sup>25</sup>

Never shrinking from the difficulties these people faced – a life of toil and racism – Davis managed to capture that struggle and yet portray these figures as resilient, dignified, and possessed of “stoical strength.”<sup>26</sup> The hardships never led to despair and stasis. Life took its toll,

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<sup>23</sup> Allison Davis, “To Those Dead and Gone,” *Crisis* 34 (November 1927): 303.

<sup>24</sup> Allison Davis, “Gospel for Those Who Must,” *Crisis* 35 (July 1928): 232. This poem is divided into two parts: “The Leader” and “Fighters.” Davis published the second half of this poem, “Fighters,” in *Opportunity* magazine the month before. See Allison Davis, “Fighters,” *Opportunity* 6 (June 1928): 175.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>26</sup> Allison Davis, “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals’” (1928), in *The New Negro: Readings on Race*, 249.

but these figures responded with a heroic willingness to persevere, sustaining one another physically and emotionally. “He holds her laughing” captured this mutual support, and it conveyed how laughter meant not pure joy but the carving out of meaning through the struggle against hardship and oppression. Though whites often interpreted this laughter as a sign of blacks’ contentment, it was rooted in an acknowledgment of the absurdity and irony of their suffering, coupled with their dogged desire to carry on anyway.

Others of Davis’s essays were more strictly philosophical and less focused on the African-American experience in particular. His first essay in *Crisis*, entitled “On Misgivings,” was such a piece. Here Davis celebrated “misgivings” – those rare moments of uncertainty and apprehension when people reflected upon the realities of their lives’ finitude and purposelessness. He discussed how most people drift through life attempting to avoid at all cost these misgivings and their existential angst:

He clings to his raft which is actual and palpable, even though he knows it can carry him nowhere. Merely to rest, while one eddies or idly drifts; no bold cutting loose from moorings and plunging into the open sea, where the way is uncertain and perilous—but shoreward! He cannot face the possibility of there being something uncertain, mysterious in life, which would make him ever restless, uneasy, incomplete. To cover such misgivings, he grasps every apparent fact as an anodyne.<sup>27</sup>

Davis, like later existentialists, found this shrinking from the realities of human existence to be a type of cowardice, and one that sheltered people from the real beauty of life, which could only be found in those “transient and inconstant” moments of misgiving.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Davis’s philosophy reflected a type of existentialist thought before it ever went by that name, but which grew naturally out of the African-American experience with oppression.<sup>29</sup> When he wrote that

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<sup>27</sup> Allison Davis, “On Misgivings,” *Crisis* 34 (August 1927): 192.

<sup>28</sup> Davis, “On Misgivings,” 192.

<sup>29</sup> For more on American as well as African-American existentialism, see George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

Southern blacks “have no fair country, and that oppression rides with them,” Davis was giving voice to this oppression, and to his own experiences regarding the tragic nature of living as a black man in a racist society.<sup>30</sup>

The genealogy of Davis’s literary style and philosophical mode stem largely from his social experiences as a black man in a racist society, and from his formal literary training at Williams and Harvard. Like the famous Western writers he studied, Davis’s literature is best understood as a form of critical realism. This approach represented a Victorian mode of literary expression and an underlying Victorian cultural commitment.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, Davis was modern in many ways, including his conception of epistemology. He understood the relativity of truth, and he rejected Victorian dualistic thinking. Regarding literary expression, however, Davis’s aesthetic realism was a Victorian method of literary representation, and one which modernists rejected as only further obfuscating more authentic portrayals of the human experience. Moreover, the didactic mission behind Davis’s literature was Victorian, for he used his art to humanize his subjects in the hopes of cultivating racial solidarity and effecting social change. Modernists found such didacticism naïve, and they aimed merely to represent basic truths within the flux of human experience. Nevertheless, Davis also shared affinities with modernist artists and was in some ways a transitional figure. In particular, Davis overlapped with many modernists in his focus on the “lowly” as his subject matter, and in his desire to develop authentic representations of the lowly. Modernists simply disagreed over methods. While Davis sometimes appreciated their aesthetic innovations, he followed the New Humanists in often

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<sup>30</sup> Davis, “A Glorious Company,” 156.

<sup>31</sup> For a concise overview of Victorianism as a culture, see Daniel Walker Howe, “American Victorianism as a Culture” *American Quarterly* 27 (December 1975): 507-32.

stridently criticizing the particular representations that black modernists' produced in the name of authenticity.

If Davis's social background and formal literary training were central to his critical realism, it was the vibrant intellectual discourse within the New Negro Renaissance that gave his literary pursuits meaning and form. On the one hand, Davis observed the authoritative voices of the civil rights "establishment," including leaders such as Du Bois, Alain Locke, Jessie Fauset, Eric Walrond, Walter White, and Charles S. Johnson. They tended to see culture as hierarchical, with Western standards as the most esteemed. Accordingly, these instigators of the Renaissance sought black art that could demonstrate African Americans' equal abilities to produce first-rate art according to these standards.

The black establishment figures discerned a huge importance in the politics of representation. They understood the high stakes. In a society saturated with racist representations of blacks as inferior and uncivilized—all of which whites used to justify black subordination—race leaders consciously aimed to undermine those racist representations and to portray black equality and civility. Historians have thus labeled this project one of "race vindication."<sup>32</sup> African-American intellectuals worked to vindicate their race from stereotypical representations in many ways. Du Bois in the *Crisis* and Johnson in *Opportunity* tracked the social successes of African Americans, and they explained any black backwardness as products of oppression and discrimination rather than as racial traits. Arthur Schomburg in the Negro Society for Historical Research and Carter Woodson in the *Journal of Negro History* catalogued the many achievements of African and African-American peoples throughout their rich history. It followed logically that these mainly older-generation race leaders saw art during the

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<sup>32</sup> V. P. Franklin, *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths: Autobiography and the Making of the African-American Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 15-16.

Renaissance as serving the same purpose. Du Bois captured this sentiment in his essay, “The Criteria of Negro Art,” where he declared that “all art is propaganda for racial advance.”<sup>33</sup> The younger generation of blacks would later criticize this work as “race chauvinism” because of its sometimes inflated portrayal of African-American achievements, but it grew out of a very real need to combat pervasive racism in cultural representations.<sup>34</sup>

For a younger generation of black artists that included Davis and Sterling Brown, propagandistic Victorian art failed to satisfy, though they shared the broad goal of “race vindication.” For one thing, Davis and Brown knew that they were not departing from the Western tradition in their realist art. While establishment blacks such as Jessie Fauset labored to portray only the most successful and lightest-skinned elements of the black elite as evidence of a thriving and capable black people, younger artists built from Western traditions focused on portraying the lowly in realistic ways.<sup>35</sup> Davis’s inclusion of a prostitute, a gambler, and a “revivalist sister” in his essay “In Glorious Company” was one example of how younger artists refused to shrink from a realistic depiction of black life.<sup>36</sup> David Levering Lewis explains how the portrayal of this subject matter was “in mischievous defiance of the Talented Tenth literary canon” for allegedly providing white racists with fodder for proving black inferiority.<sup>37</sup> But for Davis and other younger artists, failure to represent the lowly was not only dishonest; it was also counter to their mission of revealing the most marginalized folks and endowing them with sympathy and dignity. Moreover, because they built from a long Western tradition of portraying the lowly—Brown stated how “major authors everywhere have dealt and are dealing with the

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<sup>33</sup> Du Bois, “Criteria for Negro Art,” 103.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the generational divide among black intellectuals, see James O. Young, *Black Writers of the Thirties* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1973).

<sup>35</sup> Jessie Fauset’s novel, *There Is Confusion* (1924) was one of the first novels of the Harlem Renaissance. Like her later novel, *Plum Bum* (1929), it focused on the black elite and issue of passing.

<sup>36</sup> Davis, “A Glorious Company,” 156.

<sup>37</sup> Lewis, *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 624.

lowly”—they could not be criticized for failing to represent the highest achievements in Western culture.<sup>38</sup>

Langston Hughes published an essay in the *Nation* in June of 1926, entitled “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” that captured the sentiment and approach of many of the younger generation, which included Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, Sterling Brown, and Allison Davis. As arguably the best and certainly the most famous black poet, Hughes led the revolt against the civil rights establishment after having been less controversial in earlier years.<sup>39</sup> He insisted on black art that could get at the universal human experience, which he believed was only possible through an emphasis on the particular realities of black people’s lives. He argued that “this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible.”<sup>40</sup> Since he saw black bourgeois culture as merely a weak reflection of white culture, he looked to the lives of the “low-down folks” to provide rich source material for great art.<sup>41</sup> He famously concluded, “We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.”<sup>42</sup> Authenticity was thus the black modernists’ goal, not race propaganda. Hughes and other black modernist artists were innovative in taking seriously popular culture forms such as jazz, the blues, and religious revivalism, and in incorporating them

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<sup>38</sup> Sterling A. Brown, “Our Literary Audience,” (1930), in *The New Negro: Readings on Race*, 387.

<sup>39</sup> His earlier poems, such as the award-winning “The Weary Blues” and “America,” were met with wide acclaim by the civil rights establishment.

<sup>40</sup> Langston Hughes, “Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” (1926) in *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 91.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

into a modernist aesthetic. While Davis shared Hughes's frustration with propagandistic art and his interest in authentic portrayals of the lowly, he was more sensitive to the politics of representation and came to see much of the art produced by the younger generation as problematic.

During the 1920s, Davis read through a wide range of literary production from the younger black artists. In 1923, fellow M Streeter Jean Toomer published *Cane*, the first major novel of the Renaissance. Toomer rooted this novel in the local context of agrarian Georgia, where he had spent several weeks researching.<sup>43</sup> As a result the book was realistic and revelatory of ordinary black life in the South. Zora Neale Hurston accomplished the same thing in her short story *Drenched in Light* (1924), and in her one-act play *Color Struck* (1925). Jamaican Claude McKay helped initiate the Renaissance with his realistic portrait of Harlem in *Harlem Shadows* (1922). David Levering Lewis calls McKay's writing "searingly realistic" in "presenting the world of beach bums, studs, women of easy virtue, and frugal Pullman porters—and no white people or distinguished leaders of the race at all."<sup>44</sup> Finally, Wallace Thurman was a leader in organizing black modernist artists, forming the radical but short-lived magazine *Fire!!* in 1926 and attempting to form another magazine called *Harlem*. His main goal was to allow young black artists the space to experiment with racial realism and to revolt "against the patronizing attitudes his elders assumed toward him" and "against their editorial astigmatism and their intolerance of new points of view."<sup>45</sup> In "Cordelia the Crude," he broke with establishment decorum and provoked controversy by centering the story on a black prostitute.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Lewis, *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 300-301.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>45</sup> Wallace Thurman, "Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life," in *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 630.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis, *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 624.

Though Davis was impressed with some of the work of Renaissance artists, he was intensely critical of much of it. On its successes, he wrote:

At times the poets achieved something beautiful and significant in spite of their material and creed. Mr. McKay's poem, "Harlem Shadows" touches on nobility and a higher imaginative view than most American realistic poetry ever reaches. The title poem of Mr. Hughes's *The Weary Blues* created a representative symbol for the frustration and inertia into which Negro life is penned. There were poems in McKay, Cullen, and Hughes which gave evidence of a higher understanding of Negro life.<sup>47</sup>

Overall, however, Davis thought "their material and creed" narrowed their vision and corrupted their art. He rebuked their tendency "to capitalize the sensational and sordid in Negro life, notably in Harlem, by making it appear that Negro life is distinctive for its flaming 'color,' its crude and primitive emotion."<sup>48</sup> He explained how "These young writers hit upon two means of injecting primitivistic color in their work; one, the use of the Harlem cabaret and night life, and the other, a return to the African jungles."<sup>49</sup> He denied the authenticity and lamented the stereotypical results of these representations.

Davis, however, blamed more than only the black artists for the production of this type of art. He exposed the wider power dynamics at play in pointing out how "our young writers do not lack white support" for primitivistic art.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Davis realized that most black artists depended upon white financial support to sustain their artistic endeavors, and that this unequal relationship allowed white patrons to exert control over their art. It followed logically that much of the art reflected primitivistic tropes, since many white Americans of the 1920s looked to African Americans "to bring fresh and primitive forces to a jaded age."<sup>51</sup> As a result of these constraints, when Davis looked out at the actual production of most Renaissance artists such as

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<sup>47</sup> Davis, "Our Negro 'Intellectuals,'" 248.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and others, he saw art that did not dignify the masses but degraded them. “The total effect of the whole movement was that Negroes are sincerely bestial,” he argued.<sup>52</sup>

In Davis’s critique of the sordidness of much of the younger generation’s art, he overlapped with Du Bois, Jessie Fauset, Walter White, and other members of the civil rights establishment. With a keen sense of the politics of representation, he also perceived how white racists could use portrayals of blacks as primitive and bestial to buttress racial inequality. For this reason, his criticisms of modernist Renaissance writers drew support from many African Americans of the older generation. For instance, one reader of the *Crisis* praised Davis’s essay, “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals,’” agreeing with Davis that the modernist artists “have steadily been conveying a most harmful and incorrect impression of the ‘New Negro’ to many persons who are sincerely desirous of helping us.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the positive reception of Davis’s criticisms was evident when that essay won him second place in the *Crisis*’s August 1928 awards competition.<sup>54</sup>

Still, Davis was a modern writer who contested not the subject matter of the lowly, but the particular representations young artists were giving them. Here he shared the modern black concern with vindicating the race, but he focused on those ordinary black folks whom he saw as the targets of unfair attacks by both whites and some upper-class blacks. Davis believed that most Renaissance artists hurt the race by eschewing realistic portrayals of African Americans for sensationalized ones. Rather than emphasizing cabarets and jungles, which were so “foreign to the Negro’s imagination,” Davis chose to represent African Americans’ daily struggles, which

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<sup>52</sup> Davis, “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals,’” 248.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel, Victor. Letter from Victor Daniel to Editor of the *Crisis*, July 24, 1928. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>54</sup> Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Allison Davis, September 5, 1928. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

comprised their main lived realities.<sup>55</sup> Portraits of these experiences, he believed, would convey that “the qualities of fortitude, irony, and a relative absence of self-pity are the most important influences in the lives of Negroes.”<sup>56</sup> These qualities, he insisted, “are the secret strength of that part of us which is one with human nature. Our poets and writers of fiction have failed to interpret this broader human nature in Negroes.”<sup>57</sup> By depicting these images of the black experience, Davis believed that he could help to vindicate the race, create respect for the black masses, and foment racial solidarity. These were the social aims underpinning all of his literary efforts. Like Hughes and other young black artists, then, Davis sought to represent the black masses and the universal themes derived from the uniqueness of their experiences of oppression and struggle, but he felt that most Renaissance artists ultimately failed to reach those high ideals.

Davis’s literary approach mirrored closely that of his good friend Sterling Brown, who is now considered one of the finest Renaissance artists. This similarity is evident in their poetry, essays, and social criticism.<sup>58</sup> To be sure, Brown’s work stood out even in comparison with Davis’s due to his sophisticated treatment of black dialect, which he saw as reflective of an integrated black culture that was equal with white culture. Brown’s portrayal, moreover, of a black folk tradition and his espousal of cultural relativism made him unique and particularly significant.<sup>59</sup> Still, the degree of consistency is remarkable, and it in fact grew out of their close friendship and intellectual collaboration at Williams and beyond. Brown’s poetry reflected the

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<sup>55</sup> Davis, “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals,’” 248.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, the remarkable similarity between Davis’s poem, “Fighters” and Brown’s poem “Strong Men.” Both embody the same critical realism and emphasize the fortitude, humility, heroic nature of the ordinary toiling black person. Allison Davis, “Fighters,” *Opportunity* 6 (June 1928): 175; Sterling A. Brown, “Strong Men,” *Opportunity* 8 (September 1930): 265.

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps only Zora Neale Hurston was Brown’s equal in depicting an integrated and culturally relative black folk culture. Her training in cultural anthropology under Franz Boas along with her coming of age in the rural South (Florida) helped make her a particularly astute observer of black folk culture. See, for example, her ethnographic study of a Florida community, *Mules and Men* (1935).

same critical realism, the same black “stoicism,” and the same social aim of endowing ordinary blacks with virtuous qualities that could enable them to serve as models for the whole race. Had Davis continued his career within English, his achievements may very well have rivaled Brown’s. Though Brown’s literary achievements are now widely appreciated, that appreciation was not widely held until another generation of scholars discovered him and his extensive body of work in the 1970s. Given that particular reception of Brown’s work, it is less surprising that Davis’s contributions have yet to gain much acknowledgment.

One of Brown’s important critical essays, “Our Literary Audience,” published in *Opportunity* in February of 1930, highlights further Davis’s and Brown’s similarity in thought. Here Brown first criticized the establishment figures’ narrow and propagandistic conception of art, referring to them as the “NAACP School of Fiction.”<sup>60</sup> He called for the realistic representation of the black masses as the best raw material for creating great art. He reasoned that “Propaganda, however legitimate, can speak no louder than the truth. Such a cause as ours needs no dressing up. The honest, unvarnished truth, presented as it is, is plea enough for us, in the unbiased courts of mankind...Let the truth speak.”<sup>61</sup> In an even more sophisticated way than Hughes or any other Renaissance artist, Brown made the case for treating the lowly black experience in a realistic way. He argued that “rushing away from [the lowly] surely isn’t the way to change them.”<sup>62</sup> But even more, he insisted that “there is more to lowliness than ‘lowness.’ If we have eyes to see, and willingness to see,” he continued, “we might be able to find in Mamba, an astute heroism, in Hagar a heartbreaking courage, in Porgy, a nobility, and in E.C.L. Adams’ Scrip and Tad, a shrewd, philosophical irony. And all of these qualities we need,

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<sup>60</sup> Brown, “Steady and Unaccusing,” 355-56.

<sup>61</sup> Brown, “Our Literary Audience,” 386.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 389.

just now, to see in our group.<sup>63</sup> Electing to represent the ordinary Southern black instead of the ordinary urban black in Harlem as Hughes did, Brown succeeded in restoring dialect to black poetry in a way that was not stereotypical but was revealing of a unique and integrated black culture. The publication of his book of poetry *Southern Road* (1932) marked one of the most stunning achievements of the New Negro Renaissance.<sup>64</sup>

The consistency between the writing of Sterling Brown and of Allison Davis underscores the importance of social experiences in shaping a thinker's ideas. Like Davis, Brown grew up in an affluent middle-class family in Washington, D.C., eventually also attending Dunbar High School and winning the same valedictory scholarship to Williams College, where he, too, studied English literature. Also like Davis, Brown then won a scholarship to take an MA in literature from Harvard before heading to the South to teach at a black college in Virginia.<sup>65</sup> Both men were thus lighter-skinned, middle-class literati who vocally criticized the older generation of black intellectuals, and who did so not within the northern urban centers where the movement thrived, but from the intellectually-backward rural South. Such geographical positioning helped to sensitize them to the irrelevance of much of the Renaissance for ordinary black people, and it informed their mission to humanize the "low-down folks" through identifying their stoical virtues. Alternatively, such criticism may also have been important in deflecting attacks that Davis and Brown were themselves "race traitors" who abandoned their race through their very privilege and opportunity. Stern criticism of older race leaders was thus one way to make their arguments heard and to carve out a position within the black intellectual community. Their

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Alain Locke recognized Brown's singular achievement with *Southern Road*. See Alain Locke, "Sterling Brown: The New Negro Folk-Poet," in *Varieties of the Black Experience at Harvard: An Anthology*, eds. Werner Sollors, Thomas A. Underwood, and Caldwell Titcomb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 70-76.

<sup>65</sup> Tidwell and Tracy, *After Winter*, xxiii.

social position and strategy matched those of most of the younger generation of black intellectuals, and so their critiques of the older generation must be seen within the context of a much longer tradition of intergenerational conflict among black intellectuals. Many of Davis's generation, in fact, would later be subject to the same criticism that they comprised a docile black middle class—a criticism issued by a younger generation of radicals who came of age during the 1960s civil-rights and Black Power movements.

### **The Black Bourgeoisie**

While Davis was highly critical of Renaissance artists for portraying black people in primitivistic ways, he reserved his harshest criticism for the black upper class, or “bourgeoisie.” Here he referred not to “those producers—scientists, writers, composers, scholars—who are making the Negro’s contribution to the civilization of America,” but to “the mass of lawyers, doctors, school-teachers, real estate sharpers, business men and society women whose contribution is limited to fur coats, Packards, armchair solutions to the race problem, football classics and fraternity dances.”<sup>66</sup> In a poem in the *Crisis* entitled “The Second Generation,” for instance, he savaged black physicians and ministers.<sup>67</sup> His treatment of each group of professionals had two parts: one rooted in the high ideals of the profession, the other a brutal denunciation of the realities of some of these black professionals’ practice. He lambasted physicians, declaring: “You find real pleasure in your work—taking liberties when you examine women, and joking about it later. You prosper by prescribing dope to the slum Negroes for medicine, and taking their money with no serious effort to help them. When you have made

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<sup>66</sup> Allison Davis, “The Negro Deserts His People,” *Plain Talk* 4 (January 1929): 49.

<sup>67</sup> Allison Davis, “The Second Generation,” *Crisis* 35 (March 1928): 87.

your ‘pile’, you will move as far away from the Negro section as you can go.<sup>68</sup> Turning to ministers, he wrote:

You make your living by talking through a service about God, and rejoice equally to get a marriage or a funeral. Have you convinced yourself yet that this whole business of a church and confident speaking to God, with you leading, is not a madman’s game? And aren’t they fools to be paying you a salary to speak to God for them, when your thoughts are always of a pretty wife and a larger church?<sup>69</sup>

In each passage Davis exposes the self-serving and exploitative nature of black professionals. Though each profession held out the possibility to help the lower class – doctors providing medicine and ministers providing guidance – the practitioners instead used the professions as tools for social mobility and for abandoning the very people who needed help the most.

Davis expanded his social criticism of the black bourgeoisie in his formal essays. His most important and influential such piece is entitled “The Negro Deserts His People.”<sup>70</sup> Written around 1927 while Davis was a professor at Hampton, the article was published in 1929 in *Plain Talk*, a black magazine housed in Washington, D.C. This work represented Davis’s most original, passionate, and sustained analysis of black intellectual discourse to date, and it had a significant impact on other young intellectuals of his day.<sup>71</sup> Reflecting his experiences with student rebellion and administrative paternalism at Hampton, the article attacked school and college administrators in the South. He criticized them for kowtowing to “white state officials” and running the schools like businesses to maximize profit rather than successfully instructing black youth. He lamented the tragedy “of a hopeful and energetic youth in the hands of these

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Davis, “The Negro Deserts His People,” 49-54.

<sup>71</sup> St. Clair Drake, for example, explained how influential this article was in informing his thought and that of other black intellectuals, such as Horace Mann Bond, in an interview with Wayne Urban in 1987. See Wayne J. Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 229.

‘educators.’”<sup>72</sup> Turning to black lawyers, he argued that their primary aim was to frighten “the common Negro” with “the bugaboo of the law” and force him into “paying out his last cent.”<sup>73</sup> The black real estate operator was the worst of all for conspiring with white employers to make “Negroes pay the highest prices for the least desirable property, thereby forcing their living wage still farther down.”<sup>74</sup> If Davis perceived Renaissance artists as often irresponsible in their portrayals of black life, at times exploiting primitivistic tropes for personal fame and commercial success, he saw the black bourgeoisie as nakedly exploitative.

In the black bourgeoisie, then, Davis perceived the ultimate failure of leadership. Rather than discovering within the lower classes the great “tradition of sorrow and noble struggle,” the bourgeoisie aped white cultural mores and were embarrassed by their black brothers and sisters.<sup>75</sup> Rather than using their social privilege to help the impoverished masses, the bourgeoisie either deserted them or exploited them for further social gain. Davis explained how “Upper-class Negroes...close their minds to the tragedy of the common Negro in the South in the past and today. To them it is a nightmare.”<sup>76</sup> For the black upper class, he continued:

Black skin is anathema and white, the *summum bonum*. The Negro’s faith in the mystic superiority of light skin would be a delightful bit of irony, if it were not so farcically stupid and insane. We are color-mad, duped by a phantasm conjured up by egomaniac whites. Our complete acceptance of the white man’s pathological admiration of his skin color entirely unfits us to believe in our own manhood and equality. Black and white, white and black—we are slaves to a myth. Our upper class has set up more social inequalities based upon shades of color than the most ingenious Klansmen could devise.<sup>77</sup>

Having internalized racist color distinctions and a capitalistic model of success, the black bourgeoisie erected social barriers between itself and the lower classes – barriers that Davis had

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<sup>72</sup> Davis, “The Negro Deserts His People,” 50.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

viewed clearly during his time in Washington, D.C. One of the most pathetic aspects of these divisions, Davis perceived, was that even the most successful bourgeoisie remained socially subordinate in a white society that treated all blacks as second-class citizens.

The reception of Davis's criticisms of the black bourgeoisie was mixed. On the one hand, other young, like-minded black intellectuals found his criticisms incisive and even inspiring.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, many older-generation blacks, including especially professional men, found Davis's attacks outrageous. W. E. B. Du Bois had to deal with attacks by such men after publishing Davis's poem, "The Second Generation," in the *Crisis*. For instance, one reader called it an "abhorning [sic]...condemnation of the twelve million struggling, suffering, abused and defenceless [sic] people."<sup>79</sup> Another called it a "damnation," declaring: "God help the souls under black skins who have so little faith in themselves, and have no faith in their fellows who are likewise covered."<sup>80</sup> One could not really be neutral about Davis's position. Sterling Brown defended Davis and made clear the wide reception of his ideas when he explained how Davis's essay, "The Negro Deserts His People," provoked controversy. Brown wrote: "We resent what doesn't flatter us. One young man, Allison Davis, who spoke courageously and capably his honest observation about our life has been the target of second rate attacks ever since."<sup>81</sup> Du Bois, for his part, attempted to mollify criticism of Davis and to promote an atmosphere of open

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<sup>78</sup> Urban, *Black Scholar*, 229.

<sup>79</sup> Banks, W. Randolph. Letter from W. Randolph Banks to Editor of the *Crisis*, March 1, 1928. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>80</sup> Berry, S. Paul. Letter from S. Paul Berry to Editor of the *Crisis*, March 9, 1928. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>81</sup> Brown, "Our Literary Audience," 389.



debate, responding to one critic: “I wonder if you expect every writer in THE CRISIS and in other periodicals to say nothing but that with which you agree?”<sup>82</sup>

The origins of Davis’s animus against the black upper class were diverse. For one, it developed logically out of his sympathy for the black lower class, which he believed the black bourgeoisie was not doing enough to help. Much of it was personal for him. Davis surely developed these ideas early on while growing up in one of the most color- and class-conscious black communities in the country in Washington, where he despised the airs put on by those around him. Having imbibed his father’s sense of racial unity and responsibility for all black people, he found much to frustrate him in Washington, where color and class cliques divided the black community socially and spatially.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, being denied a career in the North and having to endure the paternalism and provinciality of Hampton, Davis became even more frustrated with the “bourgeoisie” who were able to live in the North and seemed content in their relative affluence.

Davis’s literary influences in college and beyond also helped him develop his ideas. As discussed in the previous chapter, the New Humanist critique of individualism and materialism heavily influenced Davis’s perspective, and the black upper class represented those African Americans most tied to consumerism. Literary influences at Williams also likely shaped Davis’s perspective. For instance, George Dutton, one of Davis’s professors at Williams, had Davis read Sinclair Lewis, whose famous novel *Babbitt* (1922)—ironically, named after Irving Babbitt, whom most American critics savaged, but whom Davis found insightful—distilled a larger American cultural trend in attacking the materialism and consumerism of the American

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<sup>82</sup> Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to W. Randolph Banks, April 14, 1928. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>83</sup> See Chapter One.

bourgeoisie.<sup>84</sup> The protagonist in the story, George F. Babbitt, is a businessman who succeeds according to the gospel of materialism, but who ultimately realizes the emptiness of his life. Writers in the Twenties took up the phrase “babbitttry” to criticize the empty materialism of America’s business ethos.<sup>85</sup>

Davis’s philosophical essay “On Misgivings” positioned him squarely within this larger American critique of consumer culture. The essay demonstrated his longing to pierce the surface of reality and live deeply “in the spirit” that united all human beings, in the tradition of the New Humanism.<sup>86</sup> Davis revealed frustration with “practicality” and “all the din and tumult of our iron-vaulted cities” where politicians and scientists spew their “jargon of twentieth-century ‘progress.’”<sup>87</sup> In an era obsessed with the “new,” Davis reminded readers of all the “departed empires and civilizations, and the long centuries of men, which have appeared and flitted away.”<sup>88</sup> Davis therefore saw modern life as full of distractions that only hindered people from realizing the final transience and futility of life, which was a prerequisite for grasping life’s real truth and beauty.

So as Davis criticized materialism and consumerism, he echoed the modern writers of the period. Modernist writing reached new heights in the Twenties when modernist cultural trends merged with a larger “revolt against Americanism.”<sup>89</sup> As the leading American writers rebelled against Victorianism, they also castigated the narrow WASP Americanism dominating parts of the country and resulting in immigration restriction, the rise of the Second Ku Klux Klan, and a

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<sup>84</sup> Brown, “A Son’s Return,” 328.

<sup>85</sup> For example, see E. Franklin Frazier, “Racial Self-Expression,” *Ebony and Topaz*, 121.

<sup>86</sup> See also Allison Davis, “Savage or Serene,” *Crisis* 36 (May 1929): 157, 173. This is another philosophical piece very similar to “On Misgivings.” Du Bois introduced it, writing “Here is a beautiful philosophy daringly clear, calmly cynical and yet with a final clinging to hope and high ideals. It is an essay worth study and deep thought.”

<sup>87</sup> Davis, “On Misgivings,” 192.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> See Fred H. Matthews, “The Revolt against Americanism: Cultural Pluralism and Cultural Relativism as an Ideology of Liberation,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 1 (Spring 1970): 4-31.

thriving eugenics movement.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, they rejected the conservatism of a civilization dominated by big business and rampant consumerism. As a result, “Lost-Generation” writers such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, and others fled to Europe to live in a more cosmopolitan atmosphere.<sup>91</sup> Yet these artists were really searching for new organic communities through which to revitalize American society. Horace Kallen looked to America’s ethnic diversity and its new immigrants as a source of cultural renewal. The Southern Agrarians looked to the Old South as a basis for a viable tradition.<sup>92</sup> William Carlos Williams and D. H. Lawrence looked to Native Americans for a genuine culture.<sup>93</sup> Irving Babbitt looked to the Western literary canon as a source of inspiration and guidance. And, of course, many others, including Davis, looked to African Americans for cultural vibrancy during the Renaissance.

To a significant degree, Davis developed his critique of the black bourgeoisie in dialogue with black intellectual discourse and through his shared social position with the younger generation of blacks. He was, after all, speaking *about* the black community *to* the black community. Many of the younger Renaissance artists, then, especially those from humbler backgrounds, criticized the black upper class along the same lines as Davis did. In the pages of *Opportunity*, Langston Hughes famously indicted the black elite in Washington, D.C. for their

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<sup>90</sup> See Daniel Joseph Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism,” *American Quarterly* 39 (Spring 1987): 7-26.

<sup>91</sup> See Malcolm Cowley, *Exile’s Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (1934; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1951).

<sup>92</sup> See Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>93</sup> Matthews, “Revolt against Americanism,” 14-15.

snobbishness and materialism.<sup>94</sup> Claude McKay delivered a similarly stunning assault on the black bourgeoisie in the novel *Banjo* (1929).

The most important influences informing Davis's class analyses, though, were the young radicals who at various points clustered around Howard University. St. Clair Drake recalled how Davis respected these figures and sought to emulate their innovative investigations into class and the black experience.<sup>95</sup> E. Franklin Frazier was the most important figure here, and he too was forced to contribute to the Renaissance from provincial black colleges in the South. He published a significant essay entitled "La Noire Bourgeoisie" in V. F. Calverton's leftist *Modern Quarterly* in 1928, titling the piece in French to divert attention from its radicalism.<sup>96</sup> In that essay, Frazier explained the conflicting economic interests within a stratified black community. Even though whites perceived a homogeneous black community, Frazier discussed how significant social and economic differences existed. The black bourgeoisie, for Frazier, had fully invested in American bourgeois ideals because it benefitted from the economic order. He described examples such as "What Society is Wearing" columns in newspapers alongside attention to parties, homes, and jewelry of the elite.<sup>97</sup> Rather than allying in mutual racial interest by forming cooperatives and labor organizing, blacks aped capitalist mores and labored to rise above others within the black community.<sup>98</sup>

Davis's criticisms of the black bourgeoisie were thus part of the larger left wing of the New Negro Renaissance. When he wrote that the contributions of black "lawyers, doctors,

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<sup>94</sup> Langston Hughes, "Our Wonderful Society: Washington," *Opportunity* 6 (August 1927): 226. Indeed, this essay was so provocative that Charles S. Johnson sought to mitigate its controversy by including a companion piece that countered Hughes's interpretation. See Brenda Ray Moryck, "I, Too, Have Lived in Washington," *Opportunity* 6 (August 1927): 228-29, 243.

<sup>95</sup> St. Clair Drake, quoted in George C. Bond, "A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake: An American Anthropologist," *American Ethnologist* 15 (1988): 768.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony M. Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 151.

<sup>97</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, "La Bourgeoisie Noire," in *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 179.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-80.

school-teachers, real estate sharpers, business men and society women” were “limited to fur coats, Packards, armchair solutions to the race problem, football classics and fraternity dances,” he reflected the concerns and sentiments of a younger generation of black thinkers who placed class analyses alongside racial ones to devastating effect.<sup>99</sup> Among that group, Frazier was the most openly radical, but all of them showed ties to socialism. Even the word “bourgeoisie,” which they mockingly employed, stemmed from Karl Marx’s use of the term to refer to the capitalists who exploited the working-class masses in a capitalist economy. Davis thus shared with other black left-wingers a view of class conflict within the black community that pitted the bourgeoisie against the “masses,” even though black social stratification was truncated relative to the more differentiated white society. Consequently, Davis would be among the radical few to call for direct action, especially in the South, as the prescription for real race leadership.<sup>100</sup>

## **Race Solidarity**

Given his assessment of the social divisions within the black community and the failures of black leadership, Davis developed his own recommendations for race leadership. These included frank group criticism, substantive cultural and material production, and above all, direct action in the South. Though he emphasized the importance of elite leaders in directing the masses, he nevertheless called for race solidarity and close interaction between the leaders and the masses. He had learned through his own interactions with lower-class blacks at Hampton that black leaders had much to learn from the more oppressed masses.

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<sup>99</sup> Davis, “The Negro Deserts His People,” 49.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 180.

First, Davis believed that leaders needed to be frank critics. Instead of hiding from or inflating certain realities of black life, which the civil rights establishment and “race chauvinists” aimed to do, the real leader must not shrink from realities but apply “real and high principles” and “give perspective to the so-called ‘men of action.’”<sup>101</sup> “The genuinely qualified critics [sic] of Negro life,” he continued, “will fix upon the inner strength of Negro character as illustrated in the last three hundred years, and, discounting the trivial and irrelevant, will reinterpret these persistent characteristics for the new Negro to whom he will be as an eye.”<sup>102</sup> Davis, of course, tried to embody this type of leadership in his writing. He openly and frankly criticized Renaissance artists, the civil rights establishment, and the black bourgeoisie.

Also essential to Davis’s conception of productive criticism, however, were fairness and thoughtful judgment. Davis’s ideal critic had “perspective and balance” and was prone to “reflection and contemplation” when assessing others.<sup>103</sup> For this reason, he particularly disliked George Schuyler and the other “little Menckenes” who, in a manner parodying the acerbic American satirist Henry Louis Mencken, brutally and shamelessly satirized black intellectuals.<sup>104</sup> For example, Schuyler’s famous article, “The Negro-Art Hokum,” ridiculed Renaissance artists for positing that African Americans offered any distinctive contribution to American art, even stating “the Aframerican is merely a lampblack Anglo-Saxon.”<sup>105</sup> In an even more biting article, Schuyler sarcastically argued that black people’s greatest contribution to America was to make whites feel better about themselves.<sup>106</sup> Davis interpreted Schuyler as lacking “all standards

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<sup>101</sup> Davis, “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals,’” 249.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> George Schuyler, “The Negro-Art Hokum,” in *Harlem Renaissance Reader*, 97. This article was originally published in the *Nation* in 1926, prompting Langston Hughes to reply with his famous and important article, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.”

<sup>106</sup> George S. Schuyler, “Our Greatest Gift to America,” *Ebony and Topaz*, 122-24.

in his frivolous and universal cynicism” and in “his indiscriminate jeering at all efforts to ameliorate white animosity and injustice.”<sup>107</sup> Despite their shared critiques of the black bourgeoisie and black artists’ primitive tropes, Davis nevertheless found Schuyler to lack discerning judgment and to unfairly and unproductively excoriate all black leaders.

In addition to frank, informed, and searching criticism, Davis thought another type of effective black leadership was the production of “creative scholarship, art or business—a contribution of the Negro’s best to American civilization.”<sup>108</sup> As he labored to do in his own literature, he believed that art could help to conduce respect for ordinary blacks as well as to demonstrate African Americans’ equal abilities to create art. In social science, he cited first-rate studies such as W.E.B. Du Bois’s social-structural analysis of the black community in Philadelphia, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), and Charles S. Johnson’s sociological study of the Chicago race riot of 1919, *The Negro in Chicago* (1922), to show how black social scientists could produce empirical studies that exposed and explained racial inequalities. Even in owning and operating businesses, often a purview of the black bourgeoisie, Davis found potential for effective black leadership. Though he rejected conspicuous consumption, he found black rather than white control over the means of production to be a good thing. Chicago in the 1920s was one outstanding example here, where African Americans exercised large commercial powers within the black belt of the city’s Southside.<sup>109</sup>

Above all, however, Davis believed that real black leadership needed to target the needs of the majority of African Americans who lived in the South. He called for “the training and directing of the masses through education, social service, agricultural and industrial guidance,

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<sup>107</sup> Davis, “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals,’” 249.

<sup>108</sup> Davis, “The Negro Deserts His People,” 51.

<sup>109</sup> Christopher Robert Reed, *The Rise of Chicago’s Black Metropolis, 1920-1929* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), Ch. 3.

and the encouragement of a positivistic, rather than a religiously fatalistic, attitude toward their situation.”<sup>110</sup> In this way, Davis mirrored Du Bois’s top-down conception of social change in his call for black leaders to “act as a leaven throughout the whole mass.”<sup>111</sup> Yet Davis diverged sharply from Du Bois and the civil rights establishment in his call for direct action “*in the South*.”<sup>112</sup> He continued: “It is all very well to grow indignant and eloquent in the relative safety of Washington and New York, but it is a matter of moral and physical courage to live an energetic and self-respecting life in Virginia or Mississippi or Florida or Georgia or anywhere in that area where ten million Negroes *must* live.”<sup>113</sup> Here he criticized the Renaissance leaders and artists who thought that through art alone they could better the plight of African Americans in any significant way. Though he saw value in the NAACP’s legalistic approach to social change and its publicizing of lynchings, he captured how ineffectual these efforts were for the black masses confined to the South. Though he also saw value in scholarship detailing black history and accomplishments, such as that by Carter Woodson and Arthur Schomburg, he criticized this approach as tantamount to:

Attempting to cure a wound from the top. The Negro has been bred for centuries to fear the white man’s power and hatred. He must now *see in action* Negroes who do not fear the white man and who are successful without sycophancy. It is almost irrelevant to preach race pride and equal rights from the center of New York or on flying trips to Southern cities. It is irrelevant now to *preach* race equality anywhere. The Negro masses want to see the upper class live it in the South. Otherwise, they know that the upper class is as afraid of the white man as they are.<sup>114</sup>

Once again, Davis’s own experiences teaching and living in Hampton sensitized him to the futility of much black action and discourse in the North. Only by living honestly and

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<sup>110</sup> Davis, “The Negro Deserts His People,” 51.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.



courageously in the South, he argued, could black leaders hope to guide the black masses to a better life. These ideas would become common wisdom among civil rights activists in the 1930s and especially into the postwar period, when they found widest acceptance within the mass movement against Jim Crow as led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and others.<sup>115</sup>

Davis's model of black leadership thus refocused attention from whites to blacks. Instead of trying to show white people that blacks were equal to them through art, scholarship, and business, more black leaders needed to worry about gaining the support and directing the energies of the black masses. Despite his socialist proclivities, Davis nevertheless believed that African Americans had a common racial interest that transcended competing class interests. The black elite, after all, remained only a *petit bourgeoisie* in relation to white society. If blacks were to recognize their mutual discrimination "by the government and big business," then they would see that erecting barriers across class lines actually weakened all African Americans' class status.<sup>116</sup> Because the black bourgeoisie could not compete equally with whites, it relied upon the black masses materially for business patronage, but also psychologically for a sense of common humanity. Indeed, he argued that "Every man, black, white, purple or green, must exercise his faculties with some degree of fullness if he is to feel any sense of repayment for living. The hard fact is that the upper-class Negro can develop his abilities only in Negro life, because he is cut off from the white world."<sup>117</sup>

Davis's emphasis on race over class solidarity put him at odds with some other black radicals at the time. Black socialists such as Abram Harris, for instance, castigated the cultivation of race consciousness by race-based organizations like the NAACP and the NUL

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<sup>115</sup> For an account of early civil rights activism in Mississippi, see Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

during the New Negro Renaissance. Harris saw race consciousness as a false identity that was rooted in economic exploitation, and he believed that its persistence obstructed the development of interracial class consciousness and labor organization.<sup>118</sup> Harry Haywood and other black communists similarly placed class over race, though by the late 1920s they ascribed to the “black belt thesis,” which held that Southern blacks comprised an oppressed “nation within a nation” that maintained a unique and important folk culture.<sup>119</sup> Davis shared with these radicals an understanding of capitalism as central to racial identity, and he was sympathetic to the idea of interracial labor organizing for social change. He believed, however, that African Americans – all African Americans, not just Southern peasant blacks, as the Communists maintained – possessed a valuable “stoical” tradition that was a source of strength. Moreover, he had observed the strength of racism in American society, so he advocated racial solidarity as a practical means to achieve social gains in that context.

Davis’s ideas on race leadership, furthermore, placed him in dialogue with other major black voices at the time. He criticized, for example, Booker T. Washington’s economic approach to racial uplift.<sup>120</sup> Rather than producing a class of blacks that could prove its virtue to whites and slowly assimilate to white society, it produced a bourgeoisie that remained subordinate to the white middle class through racism and discrimination. Even more, rather than serving as a leaven and model for other blacks, the black bourgeoisie “became comfortable and safe” and provided no leadership for the black masses, forsaking them out of the futile hopes of

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<sup>118</sup> Abram Harris, “Economic Foundations of American Race Division,” *Social Forces* 5 (1927): 470, 478.

<sup>119</sup> Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>120</sup> For more on early Black Nationalism, see Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1986), 5-10.

assimilating to white society.<sup>121</sup> Davis thus argued that a fight for “political democracy” was crucial for uniting black people together in common interest and for contesting the racial discrimination that both divided the black community and prevented black social and economic advance.<sup>122</sup> Only racial solidarity would empower the black community materially and spiritually, and only after this empowerment would African Americans have the strength necessary to break down the barriers of racial caste. Here Davis’s ideas merged with those of more radical Black Nationalists such as Marcus Garvey. Davis, however, differed from Garvey and later radicals such as Malcolm X who advocated a strict separation between the races. Davis ultimately desired an egalitarian American society where racial lines would break down. Moreover, he saw the need to ally with and “consult the best spirits among white men” as a means to this end, even as he remained suspicious of white people.<sup>123</sup> He believed, however, that given the current state of race relations, blacks needed to ally with one another in racial solidarity to advance as a group.<sup>124</sup>

Allison Davis carved out a radical political project during the Renaissance. He used literature to create sympathy for the masses and to dramatize their oppression as well as their virtues, which he justified as the basis for racial solidarity. Along with his friend Sterling Brown, he crafted a genre of “Negro Stoicism” that worked toward this end. At the same time,

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<sup>121</sup> Davis, “The Negro Deserts His People,” 54.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>124</sup> Notably, Davis continued to issue these calls for racial solidarity throughout his life. One example of this is evident in a speech he gave in Nashville, TN on July 5, 1945. See “Chicagoan Urges Negro Racial Unity,” *Chicago Sun*, July 6, 1945. His brother, John Aubrey Davis, would follow him in this strategy, helping found the New Negro Alliance in 1933, which encouraged racial solidarity and economic empowerment through “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns. This program of racial solidarity would place both Davises in conflict with some of the younger radicals, including Ralph Bunche and Abram Harris, who encouraged interracial labor organizing, not racial solidarity.

in his literature and short essays he excoriated black bourgeois leaders for “deserting” their race and futilely attempting to assimilate to white society. He insisted that any hopes for racial uplift relied upon African Americans allying together and supporting one another economically, politically, and spiritually. The most privileged blacks, he believed, thus needed to serve as true leaders of the race by living among the masses, by sharing knowledge and skills, and also by collaborating with ordinary blacks who held within them the virtues of the race and the hopes for racial progress.

Though Davis and other young black radicals who espoused similar ideas often failed to live them out, spending much of their time and energy writing and publishing for other elite intellectuals, they still articulated powerful ideas and sentiments that would resonate through the twentieth century in figures as diverse as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X.<sup>125</sup> That Davis developed these ideas in dialogue with Renaissance discourse and published them in major Renaissance organs demonstrates the presence of an important radical part of a movement that is often portrayed as only interested in liberal reformism and artistic independence.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the case of Allison Davis shows how ordinary African Americans, in this case poor Southern blacks at Hampton Institute, shaped Renaissance discourse in a way that illustrates the bottom-up aspect of a movement that is frequently seen as top-down. Finally, Davis’s example further reinforces how the Renaissance was a national and international movement that transcended the confines of Harlem.<sup>127</sup> In Davis’s case, Hampton proved fertile ground through which to carve out a distinctive, radical Renaissance voice.

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<sup>125</sup> Young, *Black Writers of the Thirties*, 63.

<sup>126</sup> Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, xx; Lewis, “Introduction,” in *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, xxi-xli.

<sup>127</sup> For some early accounts de-centering Harlem and explaining the radical nature of the Renaissance, see Arthur P. Davis and Michael Peplow’s *New Negro Renaissance: An Anthology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston,

By the late 1920s, however, Davis decided to change the terrain on which he would wage his battle against racial injustice. He moved into the arena of mainstream social science, allying with sympathetic white liberals to push empirical research in more racially progressive directions. His rich understanding of race and class, forged through intellectual debate and through his diverse social experiences, would allow him to portray the structures perpetuating racial inequality far more fully than anyone among his white social-science peers.

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1975); and Tony Martin's *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Dover, MA: Majority Press, 1983). For more recent work in this vein, see William Maxwell's *New Negro, Old Left* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Davarian Baldwin's *Chicago's New Negroes* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); David Canton's *Raymond Pace Alexander: New Negro Lawyer in Philadelphia* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); and Erin Chapman's *Prove It On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

### **Chapter 3**

## **The Making of a Social Anthropologist**

*The social sciences have tended to accept the dogmas of the society as if they were established truths... The chief aim [of social science] is to see what is going on in our society objectively as a scientist should see; a second, and even more important aim, is to use this scientific knowledge so as to organize the society in which we live more effectively for the fullest social and economic life of the individual within it.<sup>1</sup>*

--- Allison Davis

By the late 1920s, Allison Davis was looking for a way to “become more relevant to Afro-American needs.”<sup>2</sup> Like many other black intellectuals of his day, Davis turned from a career in the arts during the New Negro Renaissance to one in the social sciences during the Great Depression. This was a professional and intellectual transition that mirrored that of American intellectuals generally. If the “Twenties” cultural milieu was individualistic, literary, cosmopolitan, and aloof, the “Thirties” milieu was socialistic, realistic, local, and committed.<sup>3</sup> Though such a distinction can be overstated, different intellectual styles and goals did accompany the very real changes in economic and social life stemming from the Great Depression. For African Americans, who comprised the group always most victimized by economic downturns, the situation was dire. White patronage for artistic expression dissipated, and for some, art suddenly seemed trivial and in the face of incomprehensible material

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<sup>1</sup> Allison Davis, “The Study of Society,” pages 1-2, Allison Davis Papers, Box 30, Folder 13, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>2</sup> St. Clair Drake, “Studies of the African Diaspora: The Work and Reflections of St. Clair Drake,” in *Against All Odds: Scholars Who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Benjamin P. Bowser and Louis Kushnick (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 90.

<sup>3</sup> For a classic formulation of this cultural transition, see Warren I. Susman, “The Culture of the Thirties,” in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 150-183.

suffering.<sup>4</sup> As the New Negro Renaissance ground to a halt, black intellectuals looked for a new arena in which to fight for racial equality, and they felt a new responsibility for the welfare of the black masses reeling from the Depression.<sup>5</sup>

The social sciences emerged as an important terrain. Since the nineteenth century, black intellectuals had recognized the devastating power of science to legitimate and perpetuate racism, but they were largely helpless to counteract it because they were typically barred from access to higher education and graduate training. By the 1920s and 1930s, however, some of these barriers had begun to break down. Between 1926 and 1936, there were as many black college graduates as there had been between 1826 and 1926.<sup>6</sup> At the graduate level, only 17 blacks had earned doctorates as of 1925, but by 1939 that number was at 109, with many more on the horizon.<sup>7</sup> These developments were crucial in transforming scientific knowledge. Black social scientists undermined scientific racism and demonstrated the centrality of the environment over heredity in shaping racial differences. Precisely because of their oppression and the discrimination they faced, black intellectuals were better able to discern the structural, environmental causes of racial inequality that circumscribed their social advance. Beginning especially with W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), black intellectuals developed stunning critiques of scientific racism by exposing the socially constructed nature of worldviews.<sup>8</sup> In much the same way during this period, women combated scientific sexism, and

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<sup>4</sup> William M. Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 104-105.

<sup>5</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 9, New Perspectives on Black Education (Summer 1978): 92.

<sup>6</sup> Charles S. Johnson, *The Negro College Graduate* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Banks, *Black Intellectuals*, 93.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *Black Philosopher, White Academy: The Career of William Fontaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 31.

Jews fought scientific racism.<sup>9</sup> African Americans, women, and Jews thus allied with liberal WASP intellectuals and comprised an early “American liberal intelligentsia” that fought for equality by exposing the environmental causes of inequality.<sup>10</sup> The nature of social science as an enterprise subject to change and open to new evidence allowed for individuals from marginalized groups to transform knowledge, and this is one major reason blacks turned to social science in the early 1930s.

The transition from literature to social science, though, was not as fundamental as it may at first appear. Indeed, in the early to mid-twentieth century, many social scientists perceived literary expression as linked closely with scientific research, and in fact many social scientists experimented with both.<sup>11</sup> For those young black intellectuals such as Davis who transitioned from literature during the New Negro Renaissance to social science during the Great Depression, the vehicle may have changed, but the goal of fighting for racial equality and vindicating the race did not. Moreover, even the nature of their literary and social-scientific production was sometimes strikingly similar. The social realism of Davis, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, and others of the third phase of the Renaissance, for example, mirrored closely the empirical realism within social science. Above all, what may usefully be called a “modernist sensibility”

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<sup>9</sup> On women fighting scientific sexism, see Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> David A. Hollinger, “Ethnic Diversity, Cosmopolitanism, and the Emergence of the American Liberal Intelligentsia,” in his *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 56-73.

<sup>11</sup> A quick glance at the pages of *Opportunity* or *Crisis* in the 1920s and 1930s reveals the extent to which literary expression was allied with scientific research. Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict and Edward Sapir are two prominent examples of social scientists who pursued literary and scientific projects. See Richard Handler, “Vigorous Male and Aspiring Female: Poetry, Personality, and Culture in Edward Sapir and Ruth Benedict,” in *Malinowski, Rivers, Benedict and Others: Essays on Culture and Personality*, vol. 4 of *History of Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 127-155; Richard Handler, “Ruth Benedict and the Modernist Sensibility,” in *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text*, ed. Marc Manganaro (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 163-180; Richard Handler, “The Dainty Man and the Hungry Man: Literature and Anthropology in the Work of Edward Sapir,” in *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*, vol. 1 of *History of Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 208-232.



united the disparate efforts of Davis and other young black intellectuals in their career change. As Dorothy Ross explains, at the heart of this sensibility was “a new understanding of the subjectivity of knowledge,” namely “the recognition that no foundation for knowledge or value exists outside the meanings that human beings construct for their own purposes.”<sup>12</sup> Many modernist intellectuals who turned to social science, therefore, did so to “reconstruct the bases of knowledge and value.”<sup>13</sup> In particular, they worked to demonstrate the centrality of the social environment in shaping human potential in order to create a more just society.

Davis’s modernist sensibility and its attendant environmentalism were at the heart of his career in social science. Davis’s formal education in anthropology from 1931 to 1933 involved disparate efforts in African ethnology, social biology, and, above all, social anthropology at Harvard and the London School of Economics. These first few years in social science were central to Davis’s intellectual development and his career trajectory. During this time he forged long-term connections with leading social scientists across the world and with influential foundation officers who were instrumental to his professional success. In these years he also gained a theoretical orientation and empirical foundation in social anthropology that would ground all of his later efforts within social science.

## **Back to Harvard**

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<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Ross, “Modernism Reconsidered,” in *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences, 1870-1930*, ed. Dorothy Ross (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Impressed by the stoical qualities of the Southern blacks he encountered at Hampton and elsewhere, Davis initially aimed to study “the origins of folk-forms among American Negroes.”<sup>14</sup> Unlike some other black intellectuals such as E. Franklin Frazier, he saw an understanding of Africa as a prerequisite for understanding the culture of American blacks. By 1929 he was communicating with the world’s leading social and cultural anthropologists in order to secure support for training in Europe and possibly for fieldwork in Africa. As St. Clair Drake made clear, Davis’s choice of anthropology made sense given that it was “the new field...countering the ‘intellectual’ stream of biological determinism.”<sup>15</sup> According to Drake, Davis believed that the black scholar’s task was three-fold: 1) to make a general theoretical contribution to a discipline, 2) to become an expert in a particular subfield, and 3) “to select a problem that contributed to racial advancement.”<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, it bears noting that Davis’s decision to enter professional anthropology was an exceedingly rare one for African Americans at the time. Only a handful of blacks studied or practiced anthropology in the interwar period. There are three major reasons why. First, blacks knew the racist past and present of anthropological practice, which whites used to support notions of black biological inferiority and to underwrite segregation and racial discrimination. Second, even when blacks saw the progressive trends within the anthropology of Franz Boas and others, anthropology as a scholarly inquiry seemed too broad and less immediately relevant than other fields such as sociology, economics, and political science, which dealt with contemporary issues of racial inequality and could be used to help craft more effective social policy. Finally,

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<sup>14</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis, Application for Rosenwald Fellowship, Dec. 6, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>15</sup> St. Clair Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship: W. Allison Davis and *Deep South*,” in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1974), 45.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

there existed no real professional opportunities for black anthropologists. Only the three leading black colleges—Fisk, Howard, and Atlanta—offered any anthropology courses at all, and then only occasionally and through visiting professorships. Because white universities barred blacks from faculty positions, black anthropologists had no career prospects. For that and other reasons, those African Americans who did apply to graduate programs in anthropology were often rejected. In selecting and succeeding in professional anthropology, Allison Davis was a preeminent black pioneer in the discipline.<sup>17</sup>

In his applications, Davis elected not to target American universities because they had few specialists in African anthropology, unlike those European nations with African colonies who had a vested interest in the field. Through articulate and informed letters, Davis won the support of Dietrich Westermann of the University of Berlin and Bronislaw Malinowski of the London School of Economics (LSE).<sup>18</sup> He eventually found, however, that a year of graduate study in anthropology at Harvard would be useful in reaching his objective of studying abroad and securing the needed funding for that study, so he applied for and won a Social Science Research Council grant to subsidize a year at Harvard.<sup>19</sup> He was one of the twenty Southern Fellows selected in 1931 amid over two hundred applicants.<sup>20</sup> Yet again, Davis remained squarely in the “talented tenth.”

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<sup>17</sup> St. Clair Drake, “Anthropology and the Black Experience,” *Black Scholar* 11 (September/October 1980): 2-31; Drake, “Reflections on Anthropology,” 85-109.

<sup>18</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Letters of Support for Davis Application for Rosenwald Fellowship, Dec. 6, 1931, Fisk Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Fellows of the Social Science Research Council, 1925-1951* (New York, 1951), 86.

<sup>20</sup> *The Social Science Research Council: Seventh Annual Report, 1930-1931* (New York: 1931), 49. For more information regarding the nature of the Southern Fellows program, initiated in 1930, see *The Social Science Research Council: Fifth Annual Report, 1928-1929* (New York: 1929), 28. The SSRC, for its part, was organized in 1923.

In the fall of 1931, Davis returned to familiar Cambridge, Massachusetts, but this time he traveled with his new wife. Allison Davis and Alice Elizabeth Stubbs married on June 21, 1929, thus cementing an intimate relationship that would be extremely rewarding to Davis both personally and professionally, and which would last until her passing thirty-seven years later.<sup>21</sup> Stubbs was from “an upper-middle-class Delaware family headed by her prominent physician father.”<sup>22</sup> In 1926, Stubbs graduated from Mount Holyoke, located ninety miles west of Boston in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Mount Holyoke, a women’s college founded in 1837, was conspicuous for its rigorous academic and professional, instead of domestic, training. It comprised the first of a group of seven women’s colleges—what became known as “the Seven Sisters”—that rivaled the predominantly male Ivy League.<sup>23</sup> Here Stubbs gained a first-rate education that enabled her to attend Radcliffe College in 1931 upon the Davises move to Cambridge. Radcliffe was a women’s school chartered in 1894 that was distinct from but deeply intertwined with Harvard. Indeed, the college shared the same faculty as Harvard and some of the same facilities, including the Harvard Annex.<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Stubbs Davis was thus able to study social anthropology along with her husband. She, too, specialized in African anthropology under the tutelage of resident expert Earnest A. Hooton, writing a paper, for example, entitled “Rites of Passage among the Ashanti” in March of 1932.<sup>25</sup> Here she followed another pioneering

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<sup>21</sup> Allison Davis to George Allen Mason, March 28, 1974, Allison Davis Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>22</sup> Dallas L. Browne, “Across Class and Culture: Allison Davis and His Works,” in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, eds. Ira E. Harrison and Faye Harrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 173.

<sup>23</sup> Mount Holyoke. “A Detailed History.” Maintained by the Mount Holyoke Department of History. Accessed July 6, 2013. <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/about/history/detailed>.

<sup>24</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Introduction: Rewriting Harvard’s History,” in *Yards and Gates: Gender in Harvard and Radcliffe History*, ed. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3. In 1943, Harvard merged men’s and women’s classroom instruction, but not until 1963 did Harvard grant Harvard degrees to Radcliffe students.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth S. Davis, “Rites of Passage among the Ashanti,” Box 1, Folder 7, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

black woman named Caroline Bond Day. Earning a Master's in 1930, Day studied race-mixing among 346 families, eventually publishing *A Study of Some Negro-White Families in the United States* (1932) through Harvard's Peabody Museum.<sup>26</sup>

Harvard was in the process of developing one of the nation's finest graduate programs in anthropology. This was a process that required considerable financial resources. As cultural/social anthropology professionalized and differentiated itself from sociology, its main claim to specialized knowledge stemmed not just from its generally non-Western subject matter, but also its new requirement of fieldwork. Whereas doctoral students could still write dissertations based upon library sources in the 1920s, by the 1930s Ph.D.s typically required at least several months of fieldwork. Supporting fieldwork financially, however, was prohibitively difficult for most universities due to the large traveling and living expenses each graduate student would incur. This guaranteed that only a few universities would be able to train doctoral students in cultural/social anthropology in the 1930s.<sup>27</sup> Harvard emerged as one of these through the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, which provided Harvard's Anthropology Department with crucial financial support from 1926 to 1938, including a five-year grant of \$75,000 in 1931.<sup>28</sup> By 1933, the Department was training thirty-five Harvard students and ten Radcliffe students for the Ph.D. in anthropology.<sup>29</sup> Many of these students, of course, specialized in one of

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<sup>26</sup> Werner Sollors, Caldwell Titcomb, and Thomas A. Underwood, eds., *Blacks at Harvard: A Documentary History of African-American Experience at Harvard and Radcliffe* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 181-87.

<sup>27</sup> Columbia, Chicago, Harvard, and Berkeley were the dominant centers here.

<sup>28</sup> *The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report, 1931* (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1931), 250-51. The Rockefeller Foundation led the way in funding anthropology worldwide. Notably, it also gave \$250,000 to the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, which was headed in London and looked to by Davis for research support in Africa. For more on how Harvard used its Rockefeller funds, see "Report Upon the Utilization of the Rockefeller Grant for Research to the Division of Anthropology of Harvard University," July 14, 1933, folder 339, box 4045, Series 200-U.S., subseries S-Social Sciences, Record Group 1.1-Projects, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

<sup>29</sup> Earnest A. Hooton to Dr. Edmund E. Day, June 29, 1934, folder 339, box 4045, Series 200-U.S., subseries S-Social Sciences, Record Group 1.1-Projects, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

the other three branches of anthropology: linguistics, archeology, and physical or biological anthropology.

The Rockefeller Foundation's new interest in developing anthropology programs at Harvard and elsewhere stemmed from the rise of cultural/social anthropology in the discipline. The vice president of the Foundation in 1926, Edwin Embree, who would in 1928 become President of the Rosenwald Fund, showed a particular interest in funding the study of what he and others perceived to be "vanishing," isolated, non-Western cultures disappearing across the globe due to colonialism and Western global expansion.<sup>30</sup> The idea was that these traditional, sometimes ancient civilizations would soon cease to exist, so through "salvage ethnography" anthropologists could serve the crucial scientific function of documenting these cultures before they vanished.

As these factors coalesced to make Harvard an important center of cultural/social anthropology, Allison Davis took advantage of the opportunities before him. Elizabeth Davis's formal training is unfortunately less clear, but it is safe to conclude that her general anthropological education was comparable to her husband's. Allison Davis took an intensive year of coursework, completing two semesters of African Ethnology with Walter Cline and the famous taxonomist E. A. Hooton, two semesters of Physical Anthropology, two semesters of European archaeology, one semester of Primitive Religion, and one semester of American Family with Lloyd Warner, where he focused on the African-American family.<sup>31</sup> Here Davis

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<sup>30</sup> Mildred Warner, "Will You Come to Australia?" in "W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist," by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. W. Lloyd Warner Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, page 1.4, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>31</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis's Harvard University Transcript, Box 406, Folder 5. On Davis's focus on the African-American family in the American Family course, see Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, Davis to Embree,

began to imbibe the structural theory that would characterize his mature social thought. In one of the African Ethnology courses, for example, he wrote a paper on African songs that argued for the communal nature of the production and performance of African cultural forms.<sup>32</sup> While not dismissing the spontaneity and individual adaptation of the songs, he nonetheless stressed how both ran along familiar cultural lines. Here Davis clearly summoned his close reading of African-American culture in the 1920s to emphasize the significance of the cultural “whole” in understanding the discrete cultural form. Similarly, Davis wrote a paper analyzing the functional role that witch-doctors played among the Bantu in Africa. He explained how the witch-doctor was “essentially an organizer of social and religious controls. He stabilized the rule of the chief or king, socially and politically, by giving it the support of supernatural sanctions. He organized the controls on crime and roguery, around the fear of social condemnation, and of the supernatural.”<sup>33</sup> Davis would continue to develop this structural-functionalist thought throughout his graduate training.

By far the most significant training that Davis received at Harvard was from Lloyd Warner. In addition to the American Family course, Davis learned from Warner through fieldwork experience and practical training in Newburyport, Massachusetts, which was the site of Warner’s massive community study. Davis met regularly with Warner and the large team of researchers, and in this way he learned Warner’s distinct brand of social anthropology through

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November 30, 1931, 1932-42, Box 406, Folder 5. Hooton was one of the world’s leading taxonomists of race. His *Up From The Ape* (1931) became a popular eugenicist tract.

<sup>32</sup> Allison Davis, “The Communal Composition of Songs In South and South-East Africa, with Remarks upon the Ritual Status of Songs,” circa 1932, Allison Davis Papers, Box 13, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>33</sup> Allison Davis, “Witchcraft, Rain-Making, and Divination in South Africa,” circa 1932, Allison Davis Papers, Box 13, Folder 14, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

hands-on experience.<sup>34</sup> For his part, Davis conducted research on the very small black community in Newburyport, although his contributions were never acknowledged.<sup>35</sup>

Warner's social anthropology was innovative, and it was the most important part of Davis's training in anthropology. Warner had first studied anthropology at Berkeley under Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie, who were two of Franz Boas's previous students, but Warner's real intellectual influence was A. R. Radcliffe-Brown.<sup>36</sup> Radcliffe-Brown was born in England in 1881, and he trained in anthropology under W. H. R. Rivers at Cambridge. He conducted extensive fieldwork in the Andaman Islands from 1906 to 1908 and in Western Australia from 1910 to 1912. He published some of this research in *The Andaman Islanders* in 1922, which established him as a leader in social anthropology and a pioneering theorist of structural-functionalism. Above all, Radcliffe-Brown was interested in the nature of human behavior and how it was determined by the social structure, including kinship, the economy, politics, religion, and so forth. He theorized that all of human society was integrated, and that each part of society functioned together to maintain social stability.<sup>37</sup> Unlike the cultural evolutionism of the Englishman E. B. Tylor and the historical diffusionism of the German Franz Boas, Radcliffe-Brown was not interested in the unique or the particular, or in explaining how cultures developed over time. Radcliffe-Brown was interested in patterns of behavior as

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<sup>34</sup> Burleigh Gardner, "Yankee City: 1930-35," in "W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist," by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. W. Lloyd Warner Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, page 6.7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>35</sup> St. Clair Drake wrote of Davis's involvement: "Davis had briefly worked with Warner in Newburyport, Massachusetts (Yankee City), in the small black section of town. Davis's manuscript, which should have been part of the Yankee City series, was never published." The reasons for exclusion are not clear, but Drake implies racism in the decision. Apparently, Newburyport only had about eighty black residents, so Warner also may not have deemed that population consequential enough. St. Clair Drake, "Studies of the African Diaspora," 92.

<sup>36</sup> Mildred Warner, "Early Life and Berkeley Student Days," in "W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist," by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. W. Lloyd Warner Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>37</sup> Drake, "Anthropology and the Black Experience," 20.



organized and directed by the social structure, and he sought to compare different societies in order to make generalizations, or even laws, about the origins of human behavior. He was also heavily influenced by Durkheim and French sociology. Above all, he followed Durkheim in examining social stability even in times of rapid change, as well as in positing a clear dichotomy between “modern” and “primitive” societies, where class and kinship, respectively, served as the foundational social structures.<sup>38</sup>

Before arriving at Harvard in 1929, Warner had spent two years studying the Murngin aborigines in Australia under the tutelage of Radcliffe-Brown. The book he published on that research, *A Black Civilization* (1937), revealed Radcliffe-Brown’s deep influence. Warner’s combination of British social anthropology and French sociology made his brand of anthropology distinct within the United States. Robert Lowie captured this distinctive quality in his introduction to the book. Lowie observed how it showcased “deviations...from the norm of monographs printed in this country.”<sup>39</sup> To be sure, Warner shared the holism and integrationism of American anthropologists in his “attempt to correlate specific aspects of Murngin culture with one another.” Warner’s “sociological philosophy,” however, made his treatise distinct “in organization and the statement of problems, in fact, in the very nature of the problems themselves.”<sup>40</sup> He continued, “Altogether, American anthropology has in the past been preponderantly molded by British and German influences, and except on one or two writers sociology as a distinct discipline has been without discernible effect. The advent of a French—

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<sup>38</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls (1893; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1984), 61, 83-86; Robert J. Havighurst, “Australia: Radcliffe-Brown and the Murngin Research: 1926-28,” in “W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist,” by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. W. Lloyd. Warner Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Lowie, Introduction to *A Black Civilization: A Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, by W. Lloyd Warner (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), xvii.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

and, at that a sociological—flavor is thus not without piquancy.”<sup>41</sup> Warner, along with Radcliffe-Brown, who was a visiting professor at the University of Chicago from 1931 to 1937, thus helped to bring a sociological approach to an American anthropology long dominated by the historical and evolutionary approaches of the Germans and the British.

If Warner’s theoretical approach was distinctive within the United States, so too was his next subject matter. After completing the Murngin research, Warner turned to the investigation of modern, rather than “primitive,” societies. The application of anthropological methods to modern society was strikingly new, since both cultural and social anthropologists of that era studied “primitive,” non-Western societies. Indeed, many thought the anthropological method of participant observation was only suitable for studying cultural “others,” where the anthropologist could retain the requisite objectivity. Warner saw it differently. He insisted on the transferability of his social anthropological methods to the modern scene.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, from the outset he made clear that the ultimate purpose of his research on the Murngin peoples was not merely to understand a particular “vanishing” culture, but to gain insight into the “general principles” upon which all societies were organized.<sup>43</sup> He wrote: “my fundamental purpose in studying primitive man was to get to know modern man better; that some day I proposed to investigate...the social life of a modern man with the hope of ultimately placing the researching in a larger framework of comparison which would include the other societies of the world.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> To be sure, Warner was not entirely alone here. Clark Wissler, for example, who was one of Franz Boas’s early students, also emphasized the applicability of anthropological methods to modern society. John S. Gilkeson, Jr., “The Domestication of the ‘Culture’ in Interwar America, 1919-1941,” in *The Estate of Social Knowledge*, eds. JoAnne Brown and David K. van Keuren, 153-174 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 158-59.

<sup>43</sup> Warner, *Black Civilization*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 3-4.

Having completed his research on a “primitive” society in 1929, he was eager to move on to a modern one.

Once at Harvard, Warner quickly began turning his research goals into practical projects. In 1930, he selected the town of Newburyport as the site for his first and most intricate community study, and it was through participation in this project that Davis learned Warner’s social anthropology. Warner chose Newburyport because it was close to Harvard, because its middling size made it manageable, and because its largely Anglo-Saxon demographic was relatively stable.<sup>45</sup> As with so many other community studies in this era, including Robert and Helen Lynd’s study of Muncie, Indiana, which they called “Middletown,” Warner elected to use a pseudonym for the community—“Yankee City”—for two reasons. He aimed to protect the identities of the research subjects, and to suggest the larger representativeness of his study. In particular, Warner believed that to understand the social organization of Newburyport was to understand the makeup of all sorts of other predominantly Anglo-Saxon towns throughout New England, if not beyond.

The Yankee City project was a massive undertaking. Scores of researchers conducted the primary research and wrote up the preliminary findings between 1930 and 1938. Through “participation, observation, and extensive interviews,” the researchers gathered voluminous data about the people and institutions of Newburyport.<sup>46</sup> In addition to garnering funds from Harvard’s Committee on Industrial Physiology and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial,

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<sup>45</sup> Burleigh Gardner, “Warner, Harvard, and the Rockefeller Foundation,” in “W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist,” by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. W. Lloyd Warner Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, pages 4.5-4.6, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>46</sup> Mary R. Gardner, Burleigh Gardner, and Allison Davis, “The Natchez Research,” in “W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist,” by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. W. Lloyd Warner Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, page 7.1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

the project gained financial support from the federal government through the Works Progress Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the Depression context was central to making the project possible because it not only kept prices down, but it also allowed Warner to benefit from federal work programs initiated by President Franklin Roosevelt to put people to work. Federally supported researchers, secretaries, and clerks helped to compile the copious data, which Warner and his associates spent the next couple of decades organizing and writing up into various monographs.<sup>48</sup>

Warner organized the voluminous data through a few major “leading ideas.”<sup>49</sup> One was his functionalist, social anthropological approach that assumed the “interconnectedness” and “mutual dependence” of all parts of the community.<sup>50</sup> Another was Radcliffe-Brown’s structural emphasis on the “variety of structure—i.e., the family, the extended kin, the associations and age grading” and its centrality in shaping human behavior and ranking individuals into superordinate and subordinate social positions.<sup>51</sup> The final major idea was that societies have “a fundamental structure or structures which integrate and give characteristic form to the rest of the society.”<sup>52</sup> In the case of a modern society, he followed Durkheim in seeing the economic system, or class system, as the fundamental structure within Newburyport.

Yet Warner’s interests and empirical investigations into Yankee City, as well as his interest in distancing himself from communism, prompted him to revise his conception of

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<sup>47</sup> Burleigh Gardner, “Yankee City: 1930-35,” in “W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist,” by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. W. Lloyd Warner Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, page 6.12, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>48</sup> *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (1941); *The Status System of a Modern Community* (1942); *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (1945), *The Social System of the Modern Factory* (1947); *The Living and the Dead* (1959).

<sup>49</sup> Warner and Lunt, *Social Life of a Modern Community*, 35.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

class.<sup>53</sup> Warner was interested in what he called “social class.” Warner and his students defined social class as:

the largest group of people whose members have intimate access to one another. A class is composed of families and social cliques. The interrelationships between these families and cliques, in such informal activities as visiting, dances, receptions, teas, and larger informal affairs, constitute the structure of a social class. A person is a member of that social class with which most of his participations, of this intimate kind, occur.<sup>54</sup>

Warner argued that a person’s social class, or social participation group, was tied to a variety of factors including material ones such as occupation and wealth, as well as ideational ones such as prestige, family heritage, behavior, and associated symbols. His definition thus combined the sociological concepts of class and status in a way that would provoke major criticism among sociologists. In Warner’s hands, the economic, or Marxist, dimensions of class were often subsumed under the social aspects, which resulted in conceptual confusion and in a retreat from economic analysis as paramount. Still, Warner’s aim was partly to revise the economic-determinism within Marxism to show how social and cultural forces also played a role in determining a person’s class position. Warner divided social class into six groupings: lower-lower, upper-lower, lower-middle, upper-middle, lower-upper, and upper-upper.<sup>55</sup> Above all, Warner’s Yankee City project examined how Newburyport was stratified by social class and how that stratification fundamentally shaped the behaviors, personalities, and patterns of thought of all residents. Warner subsequently spent much of his efforts tracking residents’ movement

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<sup>53</sup> St. Clair Drake recalled how Warner and other major social scientists went to lengths to distinguish their theories from communist ones, even when there was little logical difference. He wrote: “When I went to the University of Chicago I found William Ogburn insisting that there was no resemblance between his culture lag theory and Marxian observations about changes in the social superstructure that were responding to changes in the base. Professor Warner points out in one of his Yankee City volumes that the idea of social class having any relations to the means of production is irrelevant in the United States.” Drake, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 93.

<sup>54</sup> Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), 59.

<sup>55</sup> For more on Warner’s methodological approach, see W. Lloyd Warner, “Social Anthropology and the Modern Community,” *American Journal of Sociology* 46 (May 1941): 785-96.

across class lines to discern the rigidity of social-class distinctions and to measure the possibilities for social mobility.

Always interested in comparing different societies to understand the general principles of social organization, Warner eagerly sought to initiate other community studies. One idea was for a study of County Clare in Ireland, and the other was for a project in the Deep South. Though Warner presumed the significance of social class within modern American communities, he also perceived variation among the fundamental organizing structures across societies. For example, he saw East Africa as dominated by age-grading, India as primarily organized by caste, and Polynesia as principally controlled by status.<sup>56</sup> His interest in a project in the Deep South stemmed partly from his belief that the racial division there might create novel organizing structures, and hence that it would be useful as a point of comparison. In 1932, however, he had not yet worked out how to carry out such a project.

Davis, for his part, was not yet interested in carrying out a study in the Deep South. After a year of training at Harvard, Davis remained resolved to pursue studies of African ethnology at the LSE and the University of Berlin under Malinowski and Dietrich Westermann, respectively, and then to conduct fieldwork in Africa through the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures.<sup>57</sup> He planned to use this expertise to later “give courses in African history and contemporary cultures” at Hampton or other black colleges.<sup>58</sup> He found it ironic and problematic that no black person was formally qualified to teach that subject, with the result that most black students who were confined to black colleges could never take such a course. Obviously

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 788.

<sup>57</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to George R. Arthur, 1932, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>58</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis, official essay for Rosenwald fellowship, Dec. 6, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

influenced by the Afro-centrism of the New Negro Renaissance in which Du Bois, Garvey, Arthur Schomburg, and others emphasized the ties of all black persons to contemporary and historic Africa, Davis wanted to formally study these ties, gain scientific authority on the subject, and then transmit that knowledge to black students and white scholars as part of a larger project to combat scientific racism.<sup>59</sup>

Davis also planned to use African expertise to further his own research plans regarding African Americans. In applying for a Rosenwald fellowship for study abroad in 1932, he wrote: “After my formal study shall have been completed, I plan to do field work in contemporary Negro folk-life, in certain isolated sections of the lower South...with a view toward a more scientific and complete interpretation of its origin and present state, than has yet been made. I have already in mind certain remote communities where studies of this kind would prove fruitful.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, he was “already beginning to trace in the authentic accounts of slavery in America, written in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the relative influences of African and American forms in the growth of Negro folk-life in this country.”<sup>61</sup> This sense of a rich and sophisticated African-American folk life with deep roots in African society and culture grew out of the “Negro stoical” tradition he and Sterling Brown developed in the 1920s, which took seriously the cultural attributes and virtues of ordinary Southern blacks. Had Davis continued down this path of research, he could have informed the later debate on African “survivals” that

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<sup>59</sup> St. Clair Drake wrote about how Du Bois and others “were major sources of information in black communities about African affairs and prominent personalities. They kept Africa very much before us.” See Drake, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 88. For more on this subject, see St. Clair Drake, “Negro America and the Africa Interest” in *The American Negro Reference Book*, ed. John P. Davis (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 662-705.

<sup>60</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis, official essay for Rosenwald fellowship, Dec. 6, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>61</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis, official essay for Rosenwald fellowship, Dec. 6, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

raged between Melville Herskovits, E. Franklin Frazier, and others in the late 1930s. Too often that debate centered on “Africanisms,” or isolated cultural forms originating in Africa, rather than on a rich cultural tradition that was sophisticated, diffuse, and adaptable.<sup>62</sup>

Interested in Africa above all for its ability to inform debates on African Americans, Davis put together a remarkably strong application for a Rosenwald Fellowship. He secured laudatory letters of support from faculty at Williams, President Arthur Howe of Hampton Institute, Thomas Jesse Jones of the Phelps Stokes Fund, Will Alexander of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Malinowski, Westermann, Alain Locke, and several Harvard faculty. Attesting to Davis’s success at Harvard, Professor Walter Cline called him “the best student” in his African Ethnology course.<sup>63</sup> Earnest A. Hooton, furthermore, credited Davis as “the most brilliant and able colored student we have ever had,” concluding that “Here at last is a Negro who can make most of his white fellow students ‘take his dust.’”<sup>64</sup> Alain Locke, the impresario of the New Negro Renaissance, a professor of philosophy at Howard, and a Harvard Ph.D., rounded out Davis’s application by linking his earlier literary accomplishments with his social-science objectives. Locke wrote: “The money expended in my judgment will b [sic] amply repaid by the equipment of a young man capable for the first time to interpret the Negro point of view in this important field of cultural anthropology; for it requires something of a humanist as well as a scientist to make the proper combination. Mr. Davis’s grounding in the humanities at

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<sup>62</sup> Lorenzo Dow Turner would later prove convincingly the continued social and cultural ties of at least some African Americans to Africa by demonstrating the clearly African traditions of the Gullah people in coastal South Carolina. See Lorenzo Dow Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

<sup>63</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Walter Cline, letter of support for Allison Davis’s Rosenwald fellowship application, December 6, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>64</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, E. A. Hooton to Edwin Embree, February 8, 1932, Box 406, Folder 5.



Williams and Harvard make for this unique combination.”<sup>65</sup> Lloyd Warner also proved central for Davis’s success. Warner spoke highly of Davis to Edwin Embree, whom Warner knew well through his ties to the Rockefeller Foundation and the Rosenwald Fund. Davis thus began corresponding with Embree in order to strengthen his application.<sup>66</sup> This was the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship that would be instrumental in Davis’s professional success. Demonstrating once again his ability to impress diverse and powerful people with his intellect, strength of purpose, and affability, Davis secured the fellowship and left with his wife for London in the fall of 1932.

### **The London School of Economics**

Allison and Elizabeth Davis arrived in London in September 1932 and were both quickly accepted as doctoral candidates in anthropology at the LSE.<sup>67</sup> The School was founded in 1895 by Fabian Socialists, particularly Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw, who believed in a gradual and reformist—as opposed to revolutionary—turn to government control of private property. In 1900, the LSE joined the University of London, though its leftist milieu persisted up through the Davises’ time there.<sup>68</sup> London itself, of course, was the cultural capital of the world and home to organized radicalism of all sorts, which had only deepened during these early years of the Great Depression. Ralph Bunche, the African-American leftist and later

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<sup>65</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Alain Locke, letter of support for Allison Davis’s Rosenwald fellowship application, December 7, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>66</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, November 30, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>67</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to George R. Arthur, October 8, 1932, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>68</sup> Hortense Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), 36.

diplomat who was a good friend of Davis's, headed to study at the LSE with Malinowski in 1936, and he interacted with a group of radicals including Jomo Kenyatta, C. L. R. James, and Paul Robeson. In fact, Bunche's radical associations almost lost him his chance to do fieldwork in Africa, as the British government was closely monitoring the activities of his friends.<sup>69</sup> Though the Davises avoided such controversy, Allison reported to St. Clair Drake that he "had entered a whole new world."<sup>70</sup> Drake recalled: "He said that he was reading Marx, as well as social anthropology, and that he liked what Lancelot Hogben, a non-dogmatic Marxist, had to say."<sup>71</sup> These were exciting times for the Davises, though they prioritized their anthropological studies above all, believing in the long-term payoff of training, research, and teaching in the cutting-edge field of social anthropology. Indeed, Davis influenced Drake to begin reading in anthropology as well, later enlisting him directly in fieldwork.<sup>72</sup>

Allison Davis's initial hope was to complete his Ph.D. at the LSE, though with the two-year residency requirement for the degree he knew this would only be possible with another year of financial support. Unfortunately, this never came, and the Davises struggled financially to simply make it through the one year abroad. Upon early arrival in London, Allison Davis wrote to George Arthur of the Rosenwald Fund for an advance on his \$2,000 fellowship grant, which was paid out in smaller increments. He needed this advance to secure an apartment, since landlords seemed to overcharge students and demand substantial upfront deposits.<sup>73</sup> Later on,

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<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 180-81.

<sup>70</sup> Drake, "In the Mirror of Black Scholarship," 45.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Drake, "Reflections on Anthropology," 92.

<sup>73</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to George R. Arthur, October 8, 1932, Box 406, Folder 5.

Davis wrote of his inability to “spend the reading period in Paris” to study race-mixing because of his financial constraints.<sup>74</sup>

Davis’s study with Westermann in Berlin in the spring of 1933 was cut short as well. Hitler installed himself as chancellor of Germany in January 1933, and within the next few months he took dictatorial control of the country, arresting Communists, dissolving trade unions, and Nazifying the press and the universities.<sup>75</sup> Davis recalled: “I was a student in Berlin when Hitler came to power...I saw the Nazis burn the books, throw the liberal youth and teachers in jail, and close the University of Berlin to all minority groups. I saw the Brown Shirts attacking the students, the professors, and the anti-Nazis, all in the name of patriotism.”<sup>76</sup> Making the matter more personal, Davis observed how one of his good friends in Berlin, a Jew named Rudi, was ordered to sever his relations with his Aryan girlfriend, though the two refused and risked their lives by continuing to date in secret.<sup>77</sup> Having witnessed Nazi persecution firsthand and seen the devastating effects of a racism that was global in nature, Davis fled back to London.<sup>78</sup>

Despite his and his wife’s financial and travel struggles, the Davises’ time at the LSE was an intellectually formative one. Here they studied in one of the most renowned social-science centers in the world, which included faculty such as anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski and C. G. Seligman, sociologists Edvard Westermarck and Morris Ginsberg, political scientist

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<sup>74</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to George R. Arthur, November 21, 1932, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>75</sup> David M. Kennedy, *The American People in the Great Depression: Freedom from Fear*, Part One (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 383-84.

<sup>76</sup> Allison Davis, “Commencement Address, University of Chicago, 1975,” Allison Davis Papers, Box 62, Folder 19, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

<sup>77</sup> Allison Davis, Allison Davis Papers, Box 66, Folder 4, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>78</sup> Davis’s flight from Nazi Germany coincided with that of many German, Jewish intellectuals. The consequences of this intellectual “sea change” to the U.S. and elsewhere in Europe were profound. See H. Stuart Hughes, *The Sea Change: The Migration of Social Thought, 1930-1965* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

Harold Laski, and social biologist Lancelot Hogben.<sup>79</sup> The Davises' home department of anthropology was at this time focused on and limited to the field of social anthropology.<sup>80</sup> This differed from the four-field model that dominated the American curriculum and that included linguistics, archeology, and physical anthropology, as well as social/cultural anthropology.

The distinction between social and cultural anthropology was an important one. Cultural anthropology was largely an American field in the 1930s, as Franz Boas was the major figure in its establishment. His students took authoritative roles in the discipline throughout the country.<sup>81</sup> Especially through his students, cultural anthropology examined cultures as holistic, integrated entities in which particular values, customs, and symbolic meanings united groups of people.<sup>82</sup> In other words, the Boasian approach was ideational, analyzing the linkages between values and cultural behavior, and it was "particularistic" in conceiving of each culture as distinct, owing to its singular process of historical development.<sup>83</sup> Social anthropology, however, as suggested earlier, was much more of a British approach, though Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis would bring it to the American scene. Social anthropology was more scientific than historical. It resembled comparative sociology, and in fact it sometimes went by that name. The field shared the structural emphasis of the Boasians, and it similarly relied upon participant observation as its main avenue to empirical knowledge. Social anthropology, however, focused on the organization and functioning of social structures within particular communities, rather than on values and meaning. Social anthropologists of this era thus tended to understand individual

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<sup>79</sup> Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, 36.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> These included, for example, Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie at Berkeley, Edward Sapir at the University of Chicago and then Yale, Clark Wissler at Yale, and Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict at Columbia (off and on, because their sex limited their opportunities, despite their brilliance and achievements).

<sup>82</sup> Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) was the definitive statement of this generation of cultural anthropologists.

<sup>83</sup> Jerry D. Moore, *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists*, Third Edition (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2009), 117.

behavior as a product of “predetermined sets of behavior” within regulative social structures, as opposed to cultural anthropologists who saw behavior as the manifestation of people’s beliefs and values.<sup>84</sup> While cultural anthropology examined each culture as unique, social anthropology was committed to finding commonalities across cultural lines in order to find general laws of human behavior that could accurately predict how a particular person would act or think in a particular situation. Davis’s interest in Africa led him to the LSE, and at that institution he only further reinforced his training in the field of social rather than cultural anthropology.

Of course, British social anthropology was not unified into a singular approach. It was divided between the functionalism of Bronislaw Malinowski and the structural-functionalism of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, described above. Malinowski’s approach predominated at the LSE. As probably the world’s foremost social anthropologist, Malinowski attracted Davis’s attention back in the 1920s when he was considering his career change to anthropology. Although Radcliffe-Brown’s approach would exert a greater influence on Davis through his association with Lloyd Warner, Malinowski still shaped Davis’s thinking as well. Malinowski was a Pole who became the LSE’s Chair of Anthropology in 1925.<sup>85</sup> From 1914 to 1918, he was professionally pioneering in conducting extensive fieldwork in, rather than doing library research on, New Guinea and North Melanesia. Here he gained the material that would provide the basis of many important books and that would establish his reputation in the field.<sup>86</sup> Most important of all was his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). This book emphasized trade, but he analyzed it as more than merely an economic transaction, embedding it within the larger cultural and social

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<sup>84</sup> Moore, *Visions of Culture*, 117.

<sup>85</sup> Sir James G. Frazer, Preface to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, by Bronislaw Malinowski (1922; repr., New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1961), vii-xiv.

<sup>86</sup> These books include *Myth in Primitive Society* (1926), *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (1926), *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927), and *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929).

institutions and patterns of behavior. His emphasis was on the “totality of all social, cultural and psychological aspects of the community, for they are so interwoven that not one can be understood without taking into consideration all the others.”<sup>87</sup> The same approach characterized his other works, such as *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929), where he looked at sex “in its widest meaning” as “rather a sociological and cultural force than a mere bodily relation between two individuals.”<sup>88</sup> As someone interested in better understanding the structure and function of Jim Crow, Davis found Malinowski’s functionalism appealing.

Hortense Powdermaker, an American student of Malinowski’s in the late 1920s, summed up Malinowski’s theories and personality. She recalled that:

he had great vitality and was deeply involved with life—the minutiae and the general, whether in the Trobriand Islands or in London. He was also a man of paradoxes: kind and helpful as well as cruel and sarcastic. Keen perception and sharp wit helped make his barbs effective. Belligerence characterized many arguments with his peers. Then, too, he delighted in shocking people, particularly those he considered bourgeois and conventional. He boasted about his ability to swear in seven languages and sometimes demonstrated his fluency in inappropriate situations. The showing off characteristic of a ‘bad boy’ irritated some of his students and colleagues and amused others. It was my impression that his relationships with women were easier than those with men.<sup>89</sup>

No evidence in acknowledgments to books or extant personal writings suggests that Allison or Elizabeth Davis had a close relationship with Malinowski, but Malinowski’s theoretical approach did influence them. As described above, Malinowski’s social anthropology was holistic and integrated, seeing all parts of a society as interrelated. Powdermaker reminds us how “strikingly new” this functional approach to anthropology was.<sup>90</sup> Many contemporary practitioners continued to espouse E. B. Tylor’s cultural evolutionism, which depicted culture as hierarchical with Europeans at the top, and which understood “civilization” as having evolved unilinearly out

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<sup>87</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922; repr., New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1961), xvi.

<sup>88</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages* (New York: Eugenics Publishing Company, 1929), xxiii.

<sup>89</sup> Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, 35.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

of Egypt.<sup>91</sup> Malinowski, however, eschewed this approach and posited a cultural relativism that treated each culture as logical, integrated, and organized practically to meet people's biological and social needs. He taught that "no rigid disdiction [*sic*] is possible as to the methods of studying [*sic*] 'simple' and 'advanced' cultures; the term 'savage' is applied equally to the citizen of London and of Timbuctoo, of Chicago and of any small village in Ashanti or Papua."<sup>92</sup> The Davises perceived the radicalism of relativizing culture, and they found in anthropology a way to attack the alleged cultural backwardness of African Americans. Anthropological methods thus allowed them to treat modern American society as "other" and to make radical environmentalist critiques of caste and class inequalities, yet still retain the authority and "objectivity" of science.

Powdermaker did, however, contest the "anti-historical" aspects of Malinowski's thought.<sup>93</sup> Malinowski explained social institutions as developing not chaotically out of contingent processes of history, but rather logically and organically out of people's natural needs. This emphasis on needs was in fact a primary difference between functionalism and structural-functionalism. Structural-functionalists theorized that social institutions functioned according to the dictates of the society as a whole, and not in relation to the needs of individuals. The conservative potential that Malinowski's functional theory held for naturalizing the status quo would later provoke harsh criticism among scholars, but the theory had decidedly liberal roots and provided immense social insight.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, as Powdermaker reminded us, "There

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<sup>91</sup> For example, Powdermaker mentions Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry of University College. Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, 37.

<sup>92</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Bronislaw Malinowski, letter of support for Allison Davis's Rosenwald fellowship application, December 7, 1931, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>93</sup> Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, 38.

<sup>94</sup> On criticisms of British social anthropology, see George W. Stocking, Jr., "Radcliffe-Brown and British Social Anthropology," in *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology*, vol. 2 of *History of Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 131-32.

is, of course, no reason for a functional point of view to be unhistorical.”<sup>95</sup> The fact that the Davises found in functional theory a powerful tool for fomenting racial change testifies to the liberal potential of the theory.

As for Elizabeth Davis, her formal training is less clear, but it is safe to conclude that her general anthropological education, at least, was comparable to her husband’s. In the future, she would serve as an instrumental member of several of her husband’s research teams, but the patriarchal academy marginalized her contributions. She never completed her Ph.D., and after having a child in 1939 and again in 1941, she increasingly focused on rearing the family’s children. Nevertheless, she continued to underpin her husband’s professional success through formal and informal research support, and through bearing a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities. Regrettably, Elizabeth Stubbs Davis continues to be ignored within the history of anthropology, despite important attempts to recover examples of early black anthropologists.<sup>96</sup> It speaks volumes about gender dynamics in the academy that even St. Clair Drake, a close associate of Allison Davis and a co-contributor to the Deep South project, failed to include Elizabeth in his list of the handful of black anthropologists before World War II.<sup>97</sup>

### **Lancelot Hogben and Social Biology**

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<sup>95</sup> Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, 38.

<sup>96</sup> Ira E. Harrison and Faye Harrison, eds., *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

<sup>97</sup> Drake, “Reflections on Anthropology,” 94-95. Besides himself and Allison Davis, Drake’s list of pre-World War II black anthropologists included Zora Neale Hurston, Caroline Bond Day, Mark Hanna Watkins, and Katherine Dunham. Notably, this list included two women with only limited formal training and later practice in anthropology. Elizabeth Davis more than met these qualifications, yet Drake still omitted her, likely because he submerged her contributions under those of her husband’s, effectively rendering her professionally invisible.



As for Allison Davis, the social biologist Lancelot Hogben emerged as his biggest intellectual influence at the LSE. Hogben was a public intellectual who used the biological sciences to undermine eugenics and emphasize the role of environment over heredity in shaping human potential.<sup>98</sup> He must have impressed Davis. Hogben consistently put his beliefs into actions, calling his philosophy “scientific humanism.” In a passage about Alfred Russell Wallace published in 1918, Hogben revealed the nature of his own philosophy:

He was great because he added to the scientific knowledge of his time; but greater, because he was inflamed with a lofty idealism that sought to place the possibilities of science at the service of mankind. He was great because he strove in the struggle with the forces of nature; but greater, because he was capable of appreciating that deeper need to subordinate science to the spirit of universal goodwill. He was great because his wonderful mentality penetrated the mists of ignorance and battled with superstition; but greater, because he took his part side by side with all good men and women who are engaged in the struggle that will never end, till there is expressed in the structure of society the right of every human being to the good things of life, and a responsible share in the control of his or her own destiny.<sup>99</sup>

The requirements of “objectivity” in American social science, especially for African Americans studying race, prevented Davis from making such public declarations. Yet Hogben’s scientific humanism mirrored Davis’s own philosophy of using science for progressive ends – above all, to undermine racial segregation, discrimination, and inequality at a moment when people were using science to support such arrangements.

From early in life, Hogben demonstrated a willingness to put his beliefs into action. A pacifist who joined the Society of Friends and a socialist who joined the Fabians, Hogben conscientiously objected to World War I and endured imprisonment for it. He elected to sew mailbags in solitary confinement rather than support any aspect of a war he judged abhorrent and

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<sup>98</sup> Hogben was trained in the field of zoology.

<sup>99</sup> Lancelot Hogben, quoted in the Introduction to *Lancelot Hogben: Scientific Humanist*, edited by Adrian and Anne Hogben (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Merlin Press, 1998), x-xi.

imperialistic.<sup>100</sup> He paid the price for that decision. After five months of imprisonment at Wormwood Scrubs Prison, where guards punished inmates with water torture, Hogben was freed in 1917 because his health had deteriorated so severely.<sup>101</sup> He spent the better part of the following year recovering mentally and physically from his imprisonment.

Hogben faced other moral challenges while employed at the University of Cape Town in the late 1920s. In a way paralleling the racial situation in Virginia at that time, where Davis spent much of the decade, South Africa began instituting the outlines of apartheid. Hogben recalled the introduction of

seven native bills. One of these made marriage, and even intercourse, between a European and a native a criminal offence. Another tightened up the pass-system which restricted free movement of the native beyond the reserves, and imposed a period of forced labour on natives found squatting, in effect wandering, on land belonging to our kith and kin, an ex-European farmer. The most drastic of all provisions of the new legislation abolished the Cape native franchise and withdrew from the native anywhere in the Union the right of free assembly.<sup>102</sup>

As “the relation between white and non-white intruded on every aspect of existence,” Hogben again faced difficult choices.<sup>103</sup> The community and the University pressured him to conform to apartheid strictures. Yet while the University of Cape Town was beginning to bar black students, Hogben elected to spurn the rules of the burgeoning apartheid system, continuing to accept blacks into his class. Moreover, he held open houses on Saturday nights and invited Cape Town’s intelligentsia and various radicals to carry on socially.<sup>104</sup> Even more dramatically, Hogben and his wife, Enid, who was also a socialist and a feminist, risked their very lives to save a black man from lynching by stashing him in the trunk of their car and transporting him to

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<sup>100</sup> Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 229.

<sup>101</sup> Gary Werskey, *The Visible College: The Collective Biography of British Scientific Socialists of the 1930s* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), 65.

<sup>102</sup> Hogben, *Lancelot Hogben*, 114.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>104</sup> Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism*, 230.

safety.<sup>105</sup> Here was a man with the type of philosophical outlook – socialist, anti-racist, scientific humanist – and the set of personal attributes – activist, morally courageous – that matched Davis’s own.

Hogben fled South Africa in 1930 and joined the LSE as the Chair of Social Biology. This was a unique and powerful position. No one at the LSE had held that particular Chair before or since Hogben, and no other professorship in the field of “social biology” existed in all of England at the time. The position emerged as a compromise between the social-research emphasis of the LSE and the biological emphasis of the Rockefeller Foundation, which had been paying out a grant to the LSE since 1925.<sup>106</sup> The prestige and financial endowment of a chairmanship at the University of London gave Hogben the power necessary to wage an effective scientific battle against racism. Such a battle was precisely what Harold Laski, the LSE political scientist who helped recruit Hogben for the position, had wanted. Laski took seriously the power of the Eugenics Society, which was then “anti-socialist and a stronghold of racial prejudice,” and as Hogben recalled, “He sensed that my appointment would insure that the new chair would not be a platform for racist propaganda of that sort. He was right. My inaugural lecture was a blistering attack on the scientific credentials of dogmas then sponsored by the Eugenics Society.”<sup>107</sup>

The strength of the racialist eugenicist science that Hogben opposed was formidable. It was not a given that environmentalist positions would displace hereditarian ones. Science could be and was being used to further both racist and anti-racist interests. In many ways, moreover, the 1920s represented the very height of scientific racism, when scientists enshrined racial

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<sup>105</sup> Hogben, *Lancelot Hogben*, 114-15.

<sup>106</sup> Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism*, 230.

<sup>107</sup> Hogben, *Lancelot Hogben*, 121.

prejudices into scientific truths. Psychology, physical anthropology, and biology were all pervaded with scientific racism. Psychologists Edward L. Thorndike of Columbia and Carl Brigham of Princeton, for example, were hugely influential in pioneering mental tests that scientifically “proved” the superiority of Nordic peoples and inferiority of other groups.<sup>108</sup> Physical anthropologists continued measuring crania as an empirical guide to human ability.<sup>109</sup> Biologists, whose disciplinary purview was nature rather than nurture, consistently emphasized biology over the environment and assumed the role of the former when there was uncertainty.<sup>110</sup> All of this scientific racism grew out of and helped fuel the nativism and white supremacy that underlay immigration restriction, the popularity of eugenics, and the terrorization of blacks in the U.S.

Developments on the horizon, including the prolonged economic depression and Hitler’s attempted extermination of the Jews, would later fuel an immense shift in social thought towards innate racial equality. Throughout the 1930s, though, that shift was far from complete, even within social science. To be sure, change was afoot. Cultural anthropologists were leading the way in scientifically demonstrating the power of the environment in determining a group’s abilities. The Boasians, for example, spread the “culture concept” to sociologists in the 1920s, as was especially apparent in the Chicago School of Sociology, and also to a network of other scholars.<sup>111</sup> Social psychologist Otto Klineberg was one of the most important such scholars. His two books, *Negro Intelligence and Selective Migration* (1935) and *Race Differences* (1935),

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<sup>108</sup> Anthony M. Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 46.

<sup>109</sup> Allison Davis himself engaged in this type of science in order to subvert it. At the LSE, he “received the permission of sir [sic] Arthur Keith, the leading authority on fossil man and craniology, to begin a series [of measurements] on African crania, under his direction, at the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons.” Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to George R. Arthur, October 8, 1932, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>110</sup> Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism*, 231-35.

<sup>111</sup> George W. Stockings, Jr., “The Scientific Reaction Against Cultural Anthropology, 1917-1920” in *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 300-306.

demonstrated that the IQs of individuals of different races varied according to education, region, and socioeconomic background. He found, for instance, that Northern blacks had higher IQs than Southern whites – a finding that cast profound doubt on the ability of the tests to reflect hereditary differences. Still, such research did not immediately produce an anti-racist consensus, especially outside of the U.S. where Boasian cultural anthropology was less influential. A large part of the problem was the sub-disciplinary division of labor that vested physical anthropologists with the authority to speak about matters of race.<sup>112</sup> Cultural anthropologists spoke with authority on culture, not race, which most contemporaries understood to be biological. The hereditarian biases in biology and physical anthropology thus continued to underwrite ideas of biological racial difference throughout the 1930s.

This was the scientific context in which Hogben engineered his environmentalist assault on eugenics. Believing that the “rationalisation of race prejudice by appeal to biological principles was then plausible only because human genetics was so immature,” Hogben undertook a number of studies to demonstrate the power of the environment in shaping human potential.<sup>113</sup> Anticipating Davis’s later work, one such study focused on IQ differences. He argued that such differences were dependent much more on the environment than was conventionally assumed, finding the genetic component to be only about 50 percent instead of 80 to 95 percent.<sup>114</sup> Hogben also argued that biologists continued to overemphasize heredity because they misunderstood how Mendelian genetics revised Darwin’s conception of heredity. Davis explained that

Darwin and his followers believed that traits were blended, and that they involved ‘every structure of the organism in every possible direction.’ Mendel discovered that traits are

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<sup>112</sup> Barkan, “Mobilizing Scientists Against Nazi Racism,” 185.

<sup>113</sup> Hogben, *Lancelot Hogben*, 121.

<sup>114</sup> Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism*, 231.

segregated and not blended, and that, as a result, certain combinations of hereditary factors will not appear in all offspring, and some will not appear in any. In view of the intricate operation of such disparate factors in inheritance, we need a much more detailed knowledge of genetic mechanisms before we may be justified in relating any specific behavior to inherited characters.<sup>115</sup>

Additionally, Hogben stressed the greater variability within races than between them, while also emphasizing the important social inequalities among groups that contemporaries too often used as evidence of biological differences.<sup>116</sup> In books such as *Genetic Principles in Medicine and Social Science* (1931) and *Nature and Nurture* (1935), prestigious lectures such as the William Withering Lectures for the Birmingham Medical Faculty, and a wide array of articles in newspapers and popular magazines, Hogben helped cast doubt on racist eugenics.<sup>117</sup>

Impressed by the man and energized by the environmentalist science he was conducting, Davis began working closely with Hogben. Davis wrote that “He has me come to his home every week for private instruction since he gives no courses. He is the leading English geneticist.”<sup>118</sup> Hogben, for his part, held “a very high opinion of his [Davis’s] capability, originality and industry,” and he no doubt perceived Davis as a worthy ally in the fight against racism.<sup>119</sup> They worked together while Davis was abroad, and Hogben directed Davis’s studies on race-mixing and blood groups. The result of this collaboration was Davis’s first professional social-science article, “The Distribution of Blood Groups and Its Bearing on the Concept of

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<sup>115</sup> Allison Davis, “The Socialization of the American Negro Child and Adolescent,” *Journal of Negro Education* 8, special issue on “The Present and Future Position of the Negro in the American Social Order” (July 1939): 266.

<sup>116</sup> Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism*, 235; Werskey, *The Visible College*, 107-109.

<sup>117</sup> Hogben, *Lancelot Hogben*, 122.

<sup>118</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to George R. Arthur, October 8, 1932, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>119</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Lancelot Hogben, Letter of Support for Allison Davis’s 1939 Rosenwald Fellowship Application, Box 406, Folder 5.

Race” in *Sociological Review* in 1935.<sup>120</sup> This was an esoteric and highly specialized article, but its main argument was clear: “Within the human species...where there has been widespread interbreeding over a tremendous period of time, genetic segregation of physical or mental characters will not operate so as to distinguish large groups of people in any important biological respects.”<sup>121</sup> Davis critiqued various taxonomical approaches and their problematic conceptions of “race,” using modern genetics to expose the extensive variation in isoagglutination levels within the blood types of each race, and pointing to the significance of environmental factors such as ocean barriers, “mountain ranges,” and “social prohibitions” in explaining potential similarities among groups.<sup>122</sup> Davis thus took advantage of science’s inherent openness to new empirical evidence to launch an environmentalist assault on hereditarianism.

By the end of his two years of graduate school in the social sciences, Davis had gained formative anthropological and social-biological training. His resolve to further environmentalist science and undermine scientific racism united his disparate pursuits from African ethnology to social anthropology to genetic biology. Diverted from his initial goal of studying at length in Berlin and doing fieldwork in Africa, Davis nevertheless found another opportunity to work at the cutting edge of social anthropology and even to reach his long-term goal of studying Afro-America more quickly. This opportunity would take him and his comparably-trained wife into the heart of the Deep South to study the social structure of a black community.

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<sup>120</sup> Allison Davis, “The Distribution of Blood Groups and Its Bearing on the Concept of Race,” *Sociological Review* 27 (January 1935): 19-34; Part II in the next issue 28 (April 1935): 183-200. The article was also reprinted in Lancelot Hogben, *Political Arithmetic: A Symposium of Population Studies* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1938), 503-531; and it was discussed in Julian Huxley, *We Europeans: A Survey of Racial Problems* (London: J. Cape, 1935), 128, 130-33.

<sup>121</sup> This summary of the thesis of his blood groups article comes from a later article of his: Davis, “The Socialization of the American Negro Child and Adolescent,” 266.

<sup>122</sup> Davis, “The Distribution of Blood Groups,” 200.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Natchez and Deep South**

*You can't really smash the [Jim Crow] system if you don't understand how it works.*<sup>1</sup>

--- Allison Davis

In the early 1930s, Americans and people from across the globe fixed their eyes upon the Deep South. As St. Clair Drake recalled, the South “was so much in the news because of Scottsboro, Huey Long, sharecropper rebellions, Klan outrages, and the fact that the Communists spoke of it as the locale of a ‘Black Nation’ that was justified in struggling for ‘self-determination.’”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the case of the Scottsboro Boys in 1931 especially focused attention on the region and the specter of communism there.<sup>3</sup> The case involved the trial of nine African-American boys, ranging between roughly thirteen and nineteen years old, who were accused of gang-raping two white women on a train in Alabama. Though the defendants were immediately found guilty without any evidence of wrongdoing (aside from the white women’s word, which was almost always enough in such cases), the International Labor Defense of the Communist Party USA rushed to the defense of the boys and won an appeal.<sup>4</sup> The CPUSA had in fact been active in the South since the 1920s, but the Party remained small and generally ineffectual in garnering black support.<sup>5</sup> The Communists’ vigorous public support of the Scottsboro Boys,

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<sup>1</sup> Allison Davis, quoted in St. Clair Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship: W. Allison Davis and *Deep South*,” in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1974), 47.

<sup>2</sup> St. Clair Drake, “Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience,” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 9, New Perspectives on Black Education (Summer 1978): 93.

<sup>3</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 109. The Angelo Herndon case of 1932 was another important and highly publicized case.

<sup>4</sup> See James E. Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois frequently wrote about the Communists and their efforts relating to African Americans. Like most African Americans, he was suspicious and critical of the Communists for wanting to use blacks for their own class ends. The hostility between the NAACP and the CPUSA only increased amid the controversy of the Scottsboro Boys case, where the NAACP hesitated to defend the boys while still uncertain of their innocence, not



however, as well as their educative and material help during the Depression, inspired a significant number of African Americans to join the CPUSA.<sup>6</sup> Many more blacks used the Party for their own ends without officially joining. At the same time, leftists of all stripes began to link racism with capitalism and economic exploitation. In effect, they made racism a problem, transforming it from an isolated, domestic issue rooted in Southern culture to a fundamental structural one that was an international embarrassment for an allegedly progressive democracy. That mobs “smashed the windows of the U.S. Embassy in Hamburg, Germany, in protest at the treatment of the Scottsboro Boys” was a testament to the newly international nature of America’s race problem.<sup>7</sup>

As leftists made racism an economic and international problem, they spawned renewed interest in studying the South. Drake remembered that “There was a general acknowledgement that little was really known in the North about the Deep South and the potential for other Scottsboro cases.”<sup>8</sup> As a result, the foundations began supporting research in that region, partly out of the desire to counter the leftists’ portrayals of American race relations. Yale’s Institute of Human Relations gained foundation support to conduct anthropological and psychological studies of race in the Deep South, led by Hortense Powdermaker and John Dollard.<sup>9</sup> Horace

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wanting to undermine their credibility, while the CPUSA rushed to their defense. See, for example, W. E. B. DuBois, “Postscript,” *Crisis* 38 (September 1931): 313-15, 318, 320. Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 70.

<sup>6</sup> To be sure, the number of official members remained quite small, but as Robin D.G. Kelley reminds us, the Party’s actual influence transcended official membership. For even a few blacks to join the Party in a southern environment that threatened lynching for such an association speaks volumes. The thousands of blacks who were influenced by the Party and who subsequently used the Party for their own ends, including education and securing basic necessities, do not appear in official records. See Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> St. Clair Drake, “Studies of the African Diaspora: The Work and Reflections of St. Clair Drake,” in *Against All Odds: Scholars Who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Benjamin P. Bowser and Louis Kushnick (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 89.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>9</sup> These research efforts resulted in two monographs: Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York: The Viking Press, 1939); and John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937; repr., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949).

Mann Bond secured funding for his study of schools in the Deep South through the Rosenwald Fund's "Explorer" program.<sup>10</sup> Lloyd Warner, for his part, was also struck by the racial situation in the South, and he perceived the opportunity to further his comparative research agenda. Observing the fundamental social divide between blacks and whites, he conceptualized that the Deep South was organized by caste as much as class. So a comparison between Newburyport and a community in the Deep South would be illuminating. Accordingly, Warner reached out to the Julius Rosenwald Fund and to the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation through Harvard's Committee on Industrial Physiology, and he, too, secured research funding.

As Warner's research interests in the Deep South coalesced with the interests of the foundations and the American reading public, the impetus for a community study in the Deep South gained new legs. With a general theoretical and methodological model in place, with financial support available to finance fieldwork, and with a potentially large audience for the study, all that remained was the selection of the right research team. This was no simple decision given the dictates of the Jim Crow system. How would a white researcher gain access to the thoughts and behaviors of black residents who were naturally suspicious of whites? How could a black researcher even associate with whites in a professional capacity when the racial code demanded the social subordination of blacks? Moreover, how could any particular researcher gain access to the lives of both men and women, and to the activities of the various social classes? Convinced that he needed a diverse team for the Southern project, Warner first enlisted Burleigh Gardner and his wife, Mary Gardner—both of whom were graduate students in anthropology at Harvard—as the white researchers. Warner then appealed to Allison Davis to bring his wife and join the Gardners in the project.

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<sup>10</sup> Wayne J. Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 64-67.

With some trepidation, the Davises accepted Warner's offer. They were excited to participate in a study that was of historic import, both for its subject matter and for the novelty of its theoretical approach. But they also understood the risks they faced as highly educated black intellectuals purporting to study the South. Nevertheless, they embraced the challenge, and they left the safer confines of London and Massachusetts to live in Natchez as participant observers from 1933 to 1935. The product of their efforts, *Deep South* (1941), was an important part of the larger environmentalist revolution in American social thought. It explained how the social systems of "caste and class" shaped the social positions and behaviors of Natchez residents, as well as their ideologies regarding race and class differences. In revealing the socially constructed and hence mutable nature of social stratification, Davis aimed to reconstruct social knowledge about inequality in order to achieve social justice.

### **Living and Researching in Natchez**

Early in 1933, Lloyd Warner and Paul Lunt ventured into the Deep South to select a suitable community to study. Their contacts with the Rockefeller Foundation were crucial. The Foundation put them in dialogue with John McLaughlin and Howard Odum of the University of North Carolina, who then plotted out regional maps for them and put them in communication with sympathetic men in Mississippi.<sup>11</sup> They eventually settled on the town of Natchez, which ran along the Mississippi River in the southwestern corner of the state. The researchers studied both the urban center of Natchez, which was a trading center for the region and had a population of 10,000 – half of whom were black – and the surrounding rural counties, which were

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<sup>11</sup> Lloyd Warner to Edmund Day, Sept. 11, 1933, folder 339, box 4045, Series 200-U.S., subseries S-Social Sciences, Record Group 1.1-Projects, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

dominated by big plantations and were 80% black. The Davises and Gardners dubbed the former “Old City” and the latter “Old County.” Warner and Lunt had perceived the general attitude of Natchez residents to be more receptive than that of most Southerners to a social investigation, and they found a willing partner in the town’s mayor, who was a Yale Law School graduate.<sup>12</sup>

After stopping in Nashville, Allison and Elizabeth Davis made their way to Mississippi in October. Their entrance into the town, however, had to be carefully orchestrated, since Southerners were extremely leery of outsiders who might “agitate” on the race issue. White anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker recalled her reception in Indianola, Mississippi the year before as she attempted to gain community cooperation for an anthropological study there: “They were suspicious of a Yankee and did not want their ‘niggers’ studied by anyone. Their questions, the expressions on their faces, and the tone of their voices indicated both fear and hostility.”<sup>13</sup> For an educated black couple such as the Davises, their greeting would have been even more hostile. The Rockefeller Foundation thus put Allison Davis in touch with Will W. Alexander of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, who had worked with Powdermaker the year before and had learned from the experience.<sup>14</sup> Understanding the centrality of making alliances with influential local whites, Alexander furnished Davis with sympathetic local and state contacts that helped ease his entry into Natchez.<sup>15</sup> Still, the Davises had to slip

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<sup>12</sup> Mary R. Gardner, Burleigh Gardner, and Allison Davis, “The Natchez Research,” in “W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist,” by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. WLWP, Box 5, Folder 1, page 7.6, SCRC UCL.

<sup>13</sup> Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, 139.

<sup>14</sup> Will W. Alexander to Allison Davis, Oct. 11, 1933, Allison Davis Papers, Box 27, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>15</sup> Will W. Alexander to Allison Davis, Oct. 19, 1933, Allison Davis Papers, Box 27, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

“inconspicuously” into town and take up residence with a local doctor in the black part of the city.<sup>16</sup>

The rigid segregation and racial subordination of the Deep South framed every aspect of the Davises’ experiences in Natchez. Socially, they had to conform to strictures that demanded their full subordination and deference to white people. This meant that even among their friends and fellow researchers, the Gardners, they could not interact publicly as equals. Mary Gardner and Elizabeth Davis, for example, were unable to meet either professionally or socially. “Their encounters were limited to an occasional chance meeting at the chain grocery store in the center of town. There they exchanged only a polite, restrained greeting.”<sup>17</sup> This type of deference to Jim Crow was exceedingly difficult for the proud and accomplished Davises to perform. Indeed, Davis was “very depressed in those days,” and he could not force himself to work on an autobiographical novel he had begun while abroad in Britain.<sup>18</sup> For relief from the ritualized subjugation, “from time to time they left Natchez to spend a few days with friends in the more metropolitan climate of Baton Rouge or New Orleans.”<sup>19</sup> Horace Mann Bond and his wife were two such friends with whom they could commiserate.<sup>20</sup>

Although the Davises were familiar with racial segregation and discrimination, they experienced the Deep South as a foreign world. They called their travels southward an “expedition into the ‘wilds’ of the Southern United States.”<sup>21</sup> It was truly a racial nightmare for them, for it was not merely inconvenient and uncomfortable; it was extremely dangerous. Davis,

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<sup>16</sup> Gardner, Gardner, and Davis, “The Natchez Research,” 7.8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 7.9.

<sup>18</sup> Allison Davis, letter to Dorothy Beale Davis, February 17, 1982. In the possession of Allison S. Davis, Jr.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Horace Mann Bond to Allison Davis, Oct. 5, 1934. Davis, Allison, 1934., 1935. Horace Mann Bond Papers (MS 411). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>21</sup> Gardner, Gardner, and Davis, “The Natchez Research,” 7.2.

in fact, carried a gun with him in his car at all times.<sup>22</sup> They knew all too well that a transgression of the racial code, or simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time, could mean their lives. Such was the naked aggression that undergirded Jim Crow and belied white Southerners' claims to peace and harmony among the races in the South. One of Davis's first conversations with a white man in Natchez revealed this dominant trope of racial harmony: "Oh, yeah, you gonna like Natchez. We don't have no trouble here. I tell you, I don't believe there's a town anywhere below the Mason-Dixon line where Negroes have as good a chance as they do right here in Natchez. We ain't never had no lynching nor matters of that kind here, naw man!"<sup>23</sup> Soon after this conversation, Davis learned of an incident that exposed the utter fallaciousness of this statement. Shortly before the researchers had arrived, in fact, white residents in a neighboring county had attempted to lynch a black man accused of raping a white woman. Though he narrowly escaped a mob lynching, the black man was nevertheless tried, convicted, and hanged within a few days in a "legal lynching."<sup>24</sup> All of this occurred despite a dearth of evidence and considerable doubt among white residents that there had actually been a rape. Such was the danger permeating every experience the Davises had in the South. In subjecting himself and his wife to this danger, Allison Davis must at least have taken solace in the fact that he was living out his prescription for real black leadership. He was embodying moral courage and taking concrete action in the South to foment change.<sup>25</sup>

Jim Crow was also a constant impediment to the research process. To be sure, the cover stories maintaining that the Gardners were studying the social history of Natchez and that the

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<sup>22</sup> Joan Oleck, "Allison Davis: 1902-1983," *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol.12, ed. Shirelle Phelps (Detroit: Gale Research, 1997), 40.

<sup>23</sup> Allison Davis quoting a man named Isaac in his field notebook on October 22, 1933, Allison Davis Papers, Box 27, Folder 10, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>24</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, 26-27.

<sup>25</sup> See Allison Davis, "The Negro Deserts His People," *Plain Talk* 4 (January 1929): 49-54.

Davises were examining the black church and black religion drew attention away from the social-structural study and eased residents' suspicions of the researchers.<sup>26</sup> The racial code, however, still made it difficult for Allison Davis and Burleigh Gardner to collaborate. Though Gardner informed the leading residents that he and Davis were working together on research for Harvard, "It was explained to them, and generally understood by others, that Allison was working for Burleigh: this was the only acceptable relationship between a white man and a Negro."<sup>27</sup> This created problems because Gardner's office was in the home that he rented in Natchez.

[Because] it was also his home, he could not meet with Allison here for the important exchange of ideas and observations. To do so would be to meet as colleagues, and such a relationship between a white and a Negro was prohibited. It was not enough to say that Allison was working for Burleigh; each of them was expected to behave strictly according to his caste role. They therefore devised a devious way of meeting. One or the other would telephone to make an appointment. Allison would then wait on a specified street corner in town, Burleigh would drive by to pick him up, and they would ride out into the country, to a back road where they could sit and talk together without attracting attention. In spite of this supposed subterfuge, however, Burleigh learned by chance that both the chief of police and the sheriff were informed of each meeting. Still, no disapproval was expressed, and nothing was done to intervene.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to obstructing the research process, social strictures made the professional relationship between Gardner and Davis suspect to the point that the sheriff kept tabs on the two men. Painfully aware of the constant risk to their research findings, "they sent copies of all interviews, observations, etc., to Warner at frequent intervals. Allison, too, sent reports to Warner regularly but less often. Frequent mailings by a Negro, especially an educated Negro, would have aroused suspicion in the middle-aged, middle-class white postal clerk."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gardner, Gardner, and Davis, "The Natchez Research," 7.12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 7.8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 7.9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 7.9-7.10.

Although “the whole Negro-white research” was “delicate and filled with dynamite,” the research project managed to proceed without significant problems.<sup>30</sup> The Davises and Gardners principally used Warner’s method of participant observation to gather empirical data. They visited courthouses, churches, social gatherings, fraternal lodges, bars, and other establishments to talk with people and observe the proceedings. They conducted extensive informal interviews with individuals, which yielded over 5,000 pages of research notes.<sup>31</sup> In the Foreword to *Deep South*, the researchers explained:

After about six months of residence, they appeared to be accepted as full-fledged members of their caste and class groups, and dropped their initial roles of researchers. Their observations of group behavior were therefore made in the actual societal context, in situations where they participated as members of the community, within the limits of their caste and class roles. The interviews also were obtained in this normal context, and except where matters of fact, such as factory or plantation management were concerned, few questions were asked. Every effort was made to adapt the principles of ‘free associative’ interviewing to imitate social situations, so that the talk of the individual or group would not be guided by the fieldworkers, but would follow the normal course of talk in that part of the society.<sup>32</sup>

The researchers combined their records from observations and interviews with statistical data on the town and with newspaper records on social gatherings. And despite the difficulty in getting together, Allison Davis and Burleigh Gardner met regularly to discuss their observations and “to see every Negro-white relationship from both sides of the society, so as to avoid a limited ‘white view’ or a limited ‘Negro view.’”<sup>33</sup>

Like every other American town, Natchez was stratified by class and gender as well as race in a way that created further obstacles to ethnographic work. Although they said precious little about the gender dynamics of research, the enlistment of women researchers was no doubt

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<sup>30</sup> Lloyd Warner to Edmund Day, Sept. 11, 1933, folder 339, box 4045, Series 200-U.S., subseries S-Social Sciences, Record Group 1.1-Projects, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

<sup>31</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, ix.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, viii-ix.



essential in extracting meaningful information from both sexes. Regarding Elizabeth Davis, they did acknowledge that “we are indebted to her in countless ways, but especially for her skillful interviewing of the colored women in Old City and its plantation environment. The data concerning the Negro class system and miscegenation, as well as their interpretation, are in large part her contribution.”<sup>34</sup> Mary Gardner, for her part, was crucial in gaining access to lower-class whites through her ability to study them within the women’s domain of social work.<sup>35</sup>

The researchers were more forthcoming regarding class barriers. From early on, residents came to associate both the Davises and the Gardners with the upper classes in their respective racial groups, thus limiting their chief participation to “the upper and upper-middle classes.”<sup>36</sup> The problem was that their association with the upper classes made it difficult to secure reliable information from lower-class residents, who viewed them with suspicion. That suspicion not only made lower-class residents less forthcoming in interviews, but it also prevented the researchers from gaining access to lower-class social gatherings and institutions. As mentioned above, the Gardners partially overcame this class division within the white community by having Mary Gardner volunteer in a social-work capacity to administer relief – emanating from Washington via the Federal Emergency Relief Act – to poor whites.<sup>37</sup> This put her in contact with lower-class residents on a regular basis, though not in the same way as the upper classes. The Davises helped overcome this by soliciting St. Clair Drake, Davis’s former student at Hampton, to pose as a poor black and infiltrate “the bars, juke-houses, shouting churches, and general lower-class areas” in 1935.<sup>38</sup> His findings on the black lower class were

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>35</sup> Gardner, Gardner, and Davis, “The Natchez Research,” 7.17.

<sup>36</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, viii.

<sup>37</sup> Gardner, Gardner, and Davis, “The Natchez Research,” 7.17.

<sup>38</sup> Drake, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 92.

consequently more in line with the general methods of participant observation. Despite these efforts, their study would retain a middle- and upper-class bias, as reviewers of the manuscript such as Charles S. Johnson perceived.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, no research situation could be perfect, and in the end this biracial, dual-sex, and seemingly multi-class five-person research team was exceptionally well-equipped to analyze the entire community of Natchez. The novelty of this research design warrants special attention. Faye Harrison and Ira Harrison explain how “Anthropology’s racial division of labor has historically assigned most analysts of color to the study of their own or similar cultures, while whites have been expected to cross racial lines to study dominated peoples, who for the most part are peoples of color.”<sup>40</sup> The fact that Davis not only participated in, but actually *led*, this biracial study of the entire community of Natchez made him an anomaly. Indeed, he “went against the grain of research convention” more than any other black pioneer within anthropology.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, the research design for the Deep South project was not reproduced by other anthropologists, and the importance and novelty of the methodology has not been appreciated within mainstream anthropology.

Theoretically, the researchers followed Warner’s holistic, integrated, structural-functional approach to studying modern communities as conceived in Newburyport. The difference in Natchez, however, was the stark racial system dividing blacks and whites. As Warner received research reports from Allison Davis and Burleigh Gardner, he and Davis conceptualized the “caste and class” model, and the fieldworkers began organizing their mounds of information

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<sup>39</sup> Charles S. Johnson, “Report on the Manuscript of Deep South,” University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 145, Folder 7, page 3, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>40</sup> Faye V. Harrison and Ira E. Harrison, “Introduction: Anthropology, African Americans, and the Emancipation of a Subjugated Knowledge,” in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, eds. Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

through that framework.<sup>42</sup> In 1936, Warner formally introduced this concept to the academic world in a brief four-page article entitled “American Caste and Class” in the *American Journal of Sociology*.<sup>43</sup> Here he explained how two fundamental structures organized Southern society. One was the social-class structure as apparent in Newburyport and elsewhere, but the other was a “caste” system that divided whites and blacks into superordinate and subordinate groups, respectively. In some ways, these systems were “antithetical,” for the class system was fluid and provided mechanisms for social mobility, whereas the caste system was permanent and allowed for no change in caste status.<sup>44</sup> Still, Warner argued that caste and class had nevertheless accommodated one another in Southern society.

Allison Davis and Lloyd Warner later elaborated on the nature of American caste in an important anthology edited by Edgar T. Thompson called *Race Relations and the Race Problem* (1939). They drew from recent scholarship on East Indian caste by such writers as Emile Senart, Celestin Bougle, and Herbert Risley, but they relied most on Senart’s *Caste in India* (1930).<sup>45</sup>

They concluded:

one can say that where caste is supposed to be found in its most ideal form, India, it is not a rigidly organized, highly formalistic system with invariant rules of behavior but a variety of social systems which tend to recognize rules of endogamy, of descent, and of certain restrictions of relations which help preserve a not too rigidly organized rank order of relations. It must also be recognized that constant change is the rule rather than the exception.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Lloyd Warner to Allison Davis, March 18, 1934, Allison Davis Papers, Box 27, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>43</sup> W. Lloyd Warner, “American Caste and Class,” *American Journal of Sociology* 42 (September 1936): 234-37. Briefly before this publication, Warner mentioned the caste concept in another article. See W. Lloyd Warner, “Formal Education and the Social Structure,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 9 (May 1936): 524-31.

<sup>44</sup> Warner, “American Caste and Class,” 234.

<sup>45</sup> W. Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis, “A Comparative Study of American Caste,” in *Race Relations and the Race Problem: A Definition and an Analysis*, ed. Edgar T. Thompson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1939), 229. See Emile Senart, *Caste in India: The Facts and the System*, trans. E. Denison Ross (London: Methuen, 1930); Herbert Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Ethnographic Glossary* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891); and Celestin Bougle, *Essais sur le régime des castes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1935).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-32.

From the beginning, then, Warner and Davis understood caste not as a static and timeless social system, but rather as a system under constant change. For this reason, they were able to find significant parallels between America's racial hierarchy and that within India, where it "is supposed to be found in its most ideal form."<sup>47</sup>

Warner and Davis then defined what they meant by caste in the American context. They emphasized how American and Indian caste were not "exactly the same," but rather were "the same kind of social phenomena."<sup>48</sup> They defined caste as "a rank order of superior-superordinate orders with inferior-subordinate orders which practice endogamy, prevent vertical mobility, and unequally distribute the desirable and undesirable social symbols."<sup>49</sup> They perceived endogamy, or the practice of marrying only within the in-group, as the centerpiece of the caste system, which in the South was enforced by public opinion and usually the law. Whereas exogamy, or the practice of marrying outside of the in-group, was an important mechanism of social mobility in the class system, no such mechanism existed to escape one's inherited caste status. The practice of endogamy between whites and blacks coincided with permanent symbols such as skin color and type of hair to ensure the permanence of the racial division.<sup>50</sup> All of this combined with educational and legal inequalities, political disfranchisement, and an elaborate code of social deference to create a whole "self-perpetuating" system of racial stratification which Davis and Warner labeled "caste."<sup>51</sup>

### ***Deep South***

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 231-32.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>50</sup> Warner, "American Caste and Class," 234.

<sup>51</sup> Warner and Davis, "A Comparative Study of American Caste," 236.

Though the fieldworkers had completed the research by 1935, the monograph that would emerge from the study would not be published until 1941. In the intervening years, the researchers had to sift through their voluminous data and draft a document that was comprehensive, integrated, and succinct. They struggled with this, and the University of Chicago Press insisted upon significant revisions both organizationally and theoretically in response to Charles S. Johnson's in-depth comments, and in response to fears of potentially libelous lawsuits.<sup>52</sup> The authors' revisions no doubt strengthened the final product and made "caste" a more dynamic theory, but it also took a long time. This difficult task of revision was made more cumbersome in light of the other financial and academic concerns that the authors faced. Davis in particular needed money to support himself and his wife, so he took up a post at Dillard University in New Orleans in 1935.<sup>53</sup> Dillard saddled Davis with a heavy teaching load, and only help from the Julius Rosenwald Fund – in the form of paying St. Clair Drake to organize the findings and reduce the monograph by one-third – made publication possible by 1941.<sup>54</sup> Davis, too, had many additional projects in these six years, including an acculturation project at Dillard, a study of caste and personality for the American Youth Commission, a research memo for Gunnar Myrdal, as well as doctoral work at the University of Chicago. Though the intervening six years would shape the reception of the book, *Deep South* was fundamentally a product of Warnerian social anthropology and its structural-functionalist orientation as conceived in the early 1930s.

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<sup>52</sup> G. J. Laing to W. Lloyd Warner, Oct. 19, 1939; The University of Chicago Press to Howard H. Moore, Dec. 17, 1940; Charles S. Johnson, "Report on Manuscript of *Deep South*," 1939, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 145, Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>53</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, St. Clair Drake Fellowship File, Lloyd Warner to Edwin Embree, May 18, 1936, Box 409, Folder 1.

<sup>54</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, St. Clair Drake Fellowship File, Lloyd Warner to Edwin Embree, August 15, 1935, Box 409, Folder 1.

*Deep South* was both the preeminent case study of the “caste and class” school and much more. Because of its ultimate significance in conveying Davis’s early social-scientific thought, in embodying the caste-and-class school at its most sophisticated, and in transmitting those ideas to a wide audience, the book warrants an in-depth exegesis. The first part of the book closely followed Warner’s original formulation of caste and class. Those two concepts represented the twin structural concepts that the Davises and the Gardners perceived as organizing social relations in the South and ranking individuals into subordinate and superordinate groups. The authors began with caste, arguing that it was “the fundamental division in the social organization.”<sup>55</sup> They insisted that caste was “no mere conceptual device for analyzing Negro-white relations.”<sup>56</sup> Rather, it was “a vigorous reality” that was empirically verifiable.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, they knew critics would dismiss caste as an a priori assumption, so they showcased the years of empirical research proving the reality of caste.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, they labored to reveal the dynamism of caste and its variations in terms of social class, age, occupation, sex, skin pigmentation, and urban or rural context. Their point, fundamentally, was to demonstrate the utility of the concept for explaining the social *controls* individuals face and the adjustments individuals make in response to those controls. Theirs was not a portrait of a static and monolithic system. They depicted an adaptable system that could be modified in numerous ways but was still at base organized and formidable. In addition to allowing people to better

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<sup>55</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, 15.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Allison Davis, “Notes on Article on Caste for Duke Symposium,” Jan. 5, 1939, Allison Davis Papers, Box 31, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

understand the nature of Southern society, they believed that the concept of caste made the study of society more scientific and empirically approachable.<sup>59</sup>

The book's second chapter distilled this structural-functionalist explanation of caste. The authors reiterated the centrality of endogamy for perpetuating the system, but they also revealed the complex reality of interracial sex and how it could and did exist within the larger caste system. They likewise explained the general ideology of black inferiority, as well as particular beliefs about blacks as "unsocialized" and "childlike," which grew out of the caste system and functioned to preserve it.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, they described rituals of behavior such as deference, spatial separation, extralegal punishment of blacks, and other caste realities in the same way. They did all of this by juxtaposing their explanations with long quotes from residents that illuminated and breathed life into their interpretations. The final portrait was thus of individuals existing within a sophisticated system that organized life and stratified society.<sup>61</sup>

The authors then proceeded to discuss the social-class system overlaying the caste system. Mirroring the treatment of social classes in Warner's Newburyport project, the authors—mainly Burleigh Gardner, who wrote this section—described social classes as essentially "participation groups."<sup>62</sup> The researchers were interested in social interaction, or who associated with whom. On the micro level, they observed a constellation of social "cliques," comprised of between two and thirty individuals who interacted closely with one another.<sup>63</sup> On the macro level, they conceptualized six social classes: upper-upper, lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower, and lower-lower. Each class was composed of a variety of similarly

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, 15-20.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3-4, 41, 49-57.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

positioned social cliques. The characteristics that united both social cliques and social classes—or, the traits that determined who a person interacted with—related to wealth, occupation, prestige, education, appearance, dress, institutional ties, behavior, and worldview. In this section, the researchers thus explicitly distinguished their conception of social class from that of the Marxian, sociological definition of class that centered on economic groups. They observed that economic groups shared similar “incomes, economic possessions, and economic functions,” as well as comparable “attitudes and dogmas with regard to property and money and the distribution of these possessions among the members of the society.” However, they argued that economic groups “seldom participate with one another in group action.”<sup>64</sup> In the first section, therefore, the authors combined sociological categories of class, status, and association into a broad definition of class that emphasized social participation above all else. In following Warner in this manner, the first part of *Deep South*, like Warner’s Yankee City series, was susceptible to the criticism that it lacked conceptual rigor and underemphasized the centrality of economic class. The second section of the book, however, would offer a different, more economic analysis. Nevertheless, the system the authors observed was a highly stratified one that distributed class privileges unequally.

Social cliques were particularly important to the class analysis within the first part of the book. For one thing, cliques comprised the crucial link between individuals and the broader social classes that the researchers theorized. The empirical validity of the social cliques was thus essential in making the social-class system a meaningful and fruitful conceptual tool. Cliques were also central to the book’s functional analysis. The authors argued that cliques demonstrated “the function of the class structure in determining the scope and context of an individual’s social

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 237.



relationships.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, social cliques were important in portraying a society that was not simply static and unchanging, but also dynamic and fluid. The class system, after all, was not a closed system as caste was, for it allowed for social mobility. The authors explained social mobility as tied to a person's access to particular individuals within particular social cliques, which was informed by a person's occupation, residence, formal associations, and behaviors. If a person was upwardly mobile, he or she would have to cultivate contacts with members of higher-up cliques, and he or she would then have to embody the values, attitudes, and behaviors of those cliques in order to gain acceptance. The authors found that Natchez allowed for class mobility, but they perceived such mobility as gradual and usually limited to only one level per lifetime.<sup>66</sup>

The researchers argued that the most difficult transition was from the upper-lower class to the lower-middle class. In a way that would have particular importance for Davis's later thought, the authors perceived each class as "characterized by its particular behavior pattern and by a distinctive ideology."<sup>67</sup> Whereas the upper and middle classes seemed to share similar values and lifestyles, the authors saw lower-class life and culture as worlds apart from the other two classes. The middle class, for example, emphasized the importance of "social conformity," "self-improvement," "community improvement," and wealth and morality as both realities and aspirations.<sup>68</sup> The lower class, alternatively, was characterized by a "lack of integration into the community and isolation from other classes," "economic insecurity," the "primacy of the job," and the "importance of residential areas" in identity and association.<sup>69</sup> These and other

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 169-70.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 75-79.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 79-83.

differences created distinct “class cultures” that would be central to Davis’s later analysis of socialization and the perpetuation of inequality. I will say more about this later, but it is worth noting that this type of class analysis was already central to Davis’s thought in the late 1930s.

The researchers argued that the class system was essentially the same for both castes, but they explained how the caste system had particular effects on the black class system. Above all, the caste system truncated the black class system because it denied African Americans white-collar work, adequate education, and political office. Whereas about 50% of the white caste was lower-class, 75% of the black caste was of that class.<sup>70</sup> Despite its smaller size, however, they insisted that “to the Negro community the distinctions of social class determine thought and action to a high degree.”<sup>71</sup> Here Davis drew from his experiences with class differences in the black community across the country to explain the class system in Natchez. He and the other authors explained the linkage between skin pigmentation (black, brown, olive, yellow, white) and class status, with lighter skin correlating positively with higher class status. They elaborated on the nature of black class stratification by describing, for instance, the existence of the “blue-vein” group. This group of six light-skinned, upper-class mulatto families intermarried and kept apart from the rest of the black community.<sup>72</sup> Finally, echoing Davis’s earlier criticisms of the black bourgeoisie, the book explained how middle- and upper-class blacks at times actually perpetuated the caste system for their own gains. These classes, for example, cooperated with white leaders to keep lower-class blacks from emigrating North during World War I and hence threatening their control over a cheap labor supply.<sup>73</sup> The authors thus argued that the black

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 221-22.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 249. These classes also undermined the establishment of a local branch of a national civil rights organization (probably the NAACP) because it attempted “to modify the caste controls.”

class system served to maintain caste inequalities rather than to subvert them. But the larger achievement of the authors' analysis was that it portrayed a complex system of tradeoffs where social groups interacted across caste and class lines to further their own interests. Contrary to previous studies that examined "race relations" in the South, the authors captured the more complicated interactions among many different social groups and framed them as an outgrowth of the caste and class system.

*Deep South* issued a similarly conservative assessment of the black church and black associations. Davis authored this part of the book, and he developed his critique in a book-length research report he sent to Gunnar Myrdal for his famous study of American race relations, which the Carnegie Foundation sponsored and which resulted in the landmark text, *An American Dilemma* (1944).<sup>74</sup> Davis's contribution grew largely out of his Natchez fieldwork and his extensive research findings on the black church and black associations there, which were too numerous to include in *Deep South*. Because of the limited nature of the inquiry for which Myrdal solicited Davis, and likely because Davis was busy with many other projects, including doctoral work at the University of Chicago and several publications, his memorandum to Myrdal was not particularly impressive.<sup>75</sup> Essentially, the report focused on the "function of Negro churches and associations in maintaining both the caste and class structures in the deep South."<sup>76</sup> Here Davis's structural-functionalist orientation appeared more stilted than revelatory. His discussion of associations within the black community held descriptive value, but it held little

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<sup>74</sup> Allison Davis, "The Negro Church and Associations in the Lower South," June 1, 1940, Allison Davis Papers, Box 33, Folder 21, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>75</sup> For an understanding of what Myrdal asked of Davis, see "Memorandum on Questions to be Covered by Allison Davis," July 10, 1939, Allison Davis Papers, Box 33, Folder 19, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>76</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, 250.

analytical value.<sup>77</sup> Fitting black associations into the caste-and-class framework, he explained how caste made associations almost entirely racially segregated, and he described how class informed the typologies, dogmas, and rituals of black associations.<sup>78</sup> Generally, Davis was critical of black associations for reflecting and perpetuating class stratification within the black community. Reminiscent of his attacks on the “black bourgeoisie” in the 1920s, Davis exposed the exploitation of lodge leaders – such as embezzlement of lodge monies – and the popular hostility toward some lodges as a result.<sup>79</sup>

Davis’s analysis of the black church was more useful, but it portrayed the church as a particularly conservative institution. Rather than focusing on how the black masses used the church for their own ends to endure oppression, Davis examined how the church’s leaders, dogmas, and rituals actually buttressed the caste-and-class systems. Specifically, he saw the church – along with the associations – as functioning generally to mitigate race and class conflict by encouraging passive acceptance of one’s social station and by allowing for limited social mobility. From Davis’s leftist, secular position, this prevention of conflict obstructed potential social change. Davis discerned the status that black ministers derived from their positions of power within the black community, so he rebuked them for preaching that “antagonism was futile,” and that “a good church member should be an obedient tenant and a faithful worker for his (white) landlord.”<sup>80</sup> Though acknowledging that the Christian dogma of “the brotherhood of man” helped nurture “a resentment to [blacks’] lower-caste position,” he argued that the

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<sup>77</sup> To be sure, the excessive description stemmed from Myrdal’s demands, which called for Davis to include “a considerable amount of descriptive material” for use in Myrdal’s text. See “Memorandum on Questions to be Covered by Allison Davis” July 10, 1939, Allison Davis Papers, Box 33, Folder 19, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>78</sup> Davis, “The Negro Church and Associations in the Lower South,” 138-200.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 197. Davis shared this critique with other black critics such as E. Franklin Frazier and others. For an example of this type of criticism during the Harlem Renaissance, see Elmer Anderson Carter, “Fraternalism, Finance and Folly,” *Opportunity* 7 (July 1929): 204-205.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 46.

Christian ideology above all gave “supernatural sanction to the humble and deferential role demanded of Negroes by the caste system.”<sup>81</sup> His finding that church symbols tended to equate whiteness with holiness and virtue only confirmed for him that the black church supported “the superordination of whites to Negroes.”<sup>82</sup> In the end, Davis understood well the importance of the church for the black community, but his leftist perspective and his structural-functionalist orientation led him to issue an excessively critical role of the black church in the social life of African Americans. When civil rights activists in the postwar period effectively used the churches as bases for a mass movement against Jim Crow, the flaws within this thinking became evident.

In terms of *Deep South*, though, Davis’s analysis of black social institutions was peripheral. The book’s primary focus was on detailing the larger caste-and-class system that cemented social inequality and produced the divisions within the black community that Davis lamented. The second part of the book thus described the ways in which caste and class were integrated into the larger economic and political systems of Natchez. This section was the most original and important part of the book, and as St. Clair Drake made clear, Davis was the person most “responsible for the basic theoretical contribution.”<sup>83</sup> Referring to this section, anthropologist Faye Harrison argues that it “illuminated the economic underpinnings of Southern race relations in a way no other work published around that time did.”<sup>84</sup> Indeed, though *Deep South* never received as much attention as John Dollard’s *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937) or Hortense Powdermaker’s *After Freedom* (1939), the authors of *Deep South* were

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 46, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>83</sup> Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 47.

<sup>84</sup> Harrison, Faye V. “The Du Boisian Legacy in Anthropology.” *Critique of Anthropology* 12 (September 1992): 247.

pioneering in arguing that the caste system grew out of and maintained the economic advantages of the upper class. In other words, caste was an outgrowth of the class system, though it was an outgrowth that had developed into a viable system which then had the power to determine behavior in its own right. The authors explained how caste served to ensure a steady supply of cheap, docile workers after slavery's demise, and how it obstructed interracial organizing among lower-class workers. In the rural, cotton-oriented society of Old County, caste combined with tenantry to ensure the power of the upper class. For example, because the caste system denied blacks the ability to defend their interests through the courts or through the political system, which were controlled entirely by whites, planters were free to violate contracts and trap black tenants within a system of debt peonage.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, planters preferred black tenants over white ones precisely because they had more control over them. The cotton economy of the rural South represented caste at its most complete, so the authors spent seven chapters describing that environment.

This second section of the book thus revealed the authors' more radical conception of society and of social class. Here their emphasis on the centrality of economic class, rather than the social dimensions of class as defined in the first section, was more in line with Marxian ideas. In the end, most of the book actually portrayed economic relations as primary, and social relations and ideology as secondary. St. Clair Drake stated that "Davis and Gardner had gone originally to study the social-class aspects of the system, but as they began to look at it, they were struck by its economic features."<sup>86</sup> He continued: "Although they might have started without Marxian concepts, they were nonetheless driven to examine the system from what was

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<sup>85</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, 352-57.

<sup>86</sup> Drake, "In the Mirror of Black Scholarship," 52.

essentially a Marxian angle.”<sup>87</sup> In recounting the following interactions, Drake helped to explain why this was the case.

Mississippi had a Prohibition Law which was always defended on the grounds that black laborers would not work well if liquor was available, and that they would probably rape white women when drunk. But that wasn't the real story. In the county where we were doing our research, a law officer owned the stills and his black assistant made the liquor. No liquor was sold until Friday night and then it was sold all over the place. On midnight Saturday, the police started arresting people for disorderly conduct. One dollar per head was budgeted for feeding the prisoners, but they were fed for twenty cents. On Monday mornings, the [end 51] judge starting giving out sentences—one month in jail or ten dollars fine. All the planters then would come to ransom 'their Negroes,' because they needed their labor. That money went into the political machine. Thus, there was the profit from selling the liquor, a 'rake-off' from feeding the prisoners, plus the money the political machine got from the fines. That was the system.<sup>88</sup>

In the face of such blatant examples of profiteering, in which individuals transgressed racial mores but also reinforced them, Davis and the other fieldworkers saw clearly the economic basis of much of social life in Natchez. Their real accomplishment was in what Drake refers to as “interfac[ing] the Marxian analysis with Warner's sociology.”<sup>89</sup> That is, they—above all, Davis, as the senior author—made clear how the economic and social aspects of the community related to one another, and how they functioned together as a powerful system that directed the behavior of Natchez residents.

Despite such accomplishments, *Deep South* was at times inconsistent in its presentation. Though its final interpretation was at root economic, the authors downplayed that fact, and especially in the first part, they discussed social classes along lines that closely followed Lloyd Warner's framework in Newburyport. The reasons for the book's inconsistency are three-fold. First, the authors, like Warner, did legitimately wish to extend social class beyond only the economic, seeing how the social aspects of class could take on a life of their own and stratify

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 53.

society in ways that were not neatly parallel with wealth and economic power. In this way, they aimed to expand upon and complicate Marxian conceptions of social class. Second, the book was drafted by different authors with somewhat different interpretations. The evidence suggests that Davis and Drake, like other black intellectuals of the time, held more Marxian ideas than did mainstream white social scientists such as the Gardners and Lloyd Warner. The structural racism experienced by Davis and Drake enabled them to better discern America's structural inequalities along both race and class lines, and their contributions thus pushed the book in more Marxian directions. Burleigh Gardner, on the other hand, as his later work in business consulting showed, was less radical and more inclined to see business as capable of functioning to mitigate social inequality.<sup>90</sup> Finally, the deeply anti-radical environment within the United States played a role. Even during the depths of the Great Depression, most Americans saw communism as dangerous and extreme, so even sympathetic intellectuals labored to distance themselves from Marxism to avoid being discredited.<sup>91</sup> The authors' inconsistency, then, grew partly out of their competing aims to defend themselves against attacks of communist bias on the one hand, and yet to convey their fundamentally economic interpretation of social stratification on the other hand.

As for Davis, he may be best understood as a pragmatic and free-thinking left-liberal whose ideas were never neatly in line with Marxism or any other philosophy. His worldview was generally leftist, but he frequently revised or expanded upon Marxian ideas. Most notably, Davis critiqued the narrowly economic interpretation of racism, which held that racism was merely a byproduct of economic inequality that would disappear along with economic

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<sup>90</sup> Burleigh Gardner, "Human Relations in Industry and Social Research: 1940-1960," in "W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist," by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. Warner, W. Lloyd. Papers, Box 5, Folder 6, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>91</sup> Drake, "Studies of the African Diaspora," 93.



disparities. Davis discerned the social as well as economic dimensions of race, and he knew that race or caste had become a somewhat independent social system. His approach was always pragmatic and realistic, and for this reason he avoided making ideological pronouncements. He thus aimed to maximize his potential influence by calibrating his language to the particular audience at hand, which in the American setting meant differentiating himself from Marxism in order to avoid needlessly jeopardizing his reputation or alienating potential readers. American anti-radicalism and the requirements of “objectivity” in social science always informed Davis’s public statements. Perhaps Drake said it best: “Davis, I’m sure, didn’t consider himself a Marxist,” but he did at times employ “a Marxian approach.”<sup>92</sup>

A final contribution of the second part of the book related to what they saw as the ultimately mutable nature of caste. Indeed, throughout this section the authors detailed the circumstances precipitating caste modifications, or the relaxation of caste strictures. They described the social changes wrought by the Great Depression, the development of larger and more differentiated urban environments, and the advance of nonlocal corporations and the federal government in providing work and welfare to underscore that the Southern environment of the 1930s was by no means static. Neither was their portrait of the caste system, for it allowed for the loosening of caste strictures through a complex system of tradeoffs that did not necessarily threaten the system. The authors argued that it was in the economic sphere that caste had to most modify itself. Whereas “In the familial, class, associational, church, legal, and political structures all colored persons are subordinated to all white persons,” the same was not true in the economic sphere where some blacks were more powerful than some whites.<sup>93</sup> From

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<sup>92</sup> Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 52.

<sup>93</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, 454.

their vantage point, such realities constituted “only a modification, and by no means an abrogation, of caste as it applies to economic relationships.”<sup>94</sup>

Yet underpinning this structural-functionalist analysis was the notion that significant social change could and would happen if power dynamics changed. After the research for *Deep South* was complete, Drake even remembered that he and Davis felt optimistic that “profound change in American race relations was possible.”<sup>95</sup> *Deep South* made the case that people’s social positions, as opposed to their psychological states, informed their behaviors and ideologies. Essentially, people behaved according to the caste- and class-ways of the system, and not according to immutable cultural mores or deep-seated personal prejudice. While most contemporaries emphasized the latter, the researchers for *Deep South* found those approaches flawed. The degree to which Natchez residents modified their behavior in different contexts delegitimized most cultural and psychological interpretations. *Deep South*, on the other hand, explored the social, economic, and political factors that maintained the caste-and-class system, and it made clear that changes to the system would result in changes to people’s behavior. “The theory was that once political power was in the hands of Blacks,” Drake recalled, “whites would modify their behavior to achieve new economic, political, and social gains.”<sup>96</sup> In this way, *Deep South* laid bare the South’s social system, but it also showed that significant change was possible. In prescient fashion, the book made clear that the base for meaningful change was black empowerment.

### **The Reception of *Deep South***

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 465-66.

<sup>95</sup> Drake, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 98.

<sup>96</sup> Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 52.

Even though *Deep South* was published on the eve of the United States entry into World War II, the war did not prevent the book from finding an audience that was larger than most academic books. Davis reported to Edwin Embree that “In spite of the war,” the book sold “over 1,000 copies in just over four months.”<sup>97</sup> The book continued to sell several hundred copies each year for the next three decades, totaling almost 10,000 copies by 1965.<sup>98</sup> Then in 1965, amid the height of the civil rights movement, the University of Chicago Press issued an abridged edition of *Deep South*, which continued to sell well through the 1970s. Such longevity was particularly rare among academic books. In that later generation, commentators saw the relevance of the book, believing that “we must study the racial situation in the South of a generation ago to begin to understand the conflict today.”<sup>99</sup> St. Clair Drake was the boldest in stating the significance of *Deep South*:

I feel that the real significance of Davis’ work was its effect on all students of Southern life. Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown, James Forman, as well as Martin Luther King, were exposed to it in college. For the Supreme Court desegregation case in 1954, Kenneth Clark used data from *Deep South* in the social part of the brief. So the study by Davis, which dealt with the problem of rigidity and flexibility in the Southern social order, fed into the process of social change when the Freedom Movement decided to smash the caste system.<sup>100</sup>

Consequently, in 1972 Davis reported that *Deep South* was “still the most widely used study of Southern life.”<sup>101</sup> Although he may have overstated it, the book was quite successful, not least

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<sup>97</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, March 25, 1942, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>98</sup> “Profit and Loss on Davis: DEEP SOUTH,” Oct. 21, 1964, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 145, Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>99</sup> Joseph Haas (of *Chicago Daily News*), “Anti-Negro Structure Attacked,” *Cincinnati, Ohio Enquirer*, April 9, 1966.

<sup>100</sup> St. Clair Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship: W. Allison Davis and *Deep South*,” in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1974), 53-54.

<sup>101</sup> Allison Davis quoted in Barbara P. Turner, “Profile of Allison Davis; The Man and His Research,” *Education at Chicago 2* (Autumn 1972): 22.

because of its wide adoption in sociology courses. The book became “basic reading in sociology,” and such universities as Harvard, Yale, California, Syracuse, Ohio State, Colorado, Iowa, Atlanta University, and the University of Chicago used it regularly by 1948.<sup>102</sup>

Of course, the book also managed to find an audience outside of the academy. Because it had something to offer many different audiences, including those interested in a basic knowledge of the Deep South, an understanding of African-American life, or a grasp of social-anthropological theory and methods, *Deep South* was reviewed among a wide range of periodicals. For instance, newspapers across the country ranging from the *Wichita Daily Times* to the *Chicago Defender*, and national magazines such as *The Nation* and *The Republicans* joined the chorus of reviews among social-science journals. The reviews varied widely depending on the source, but the overall reception was positive. Nearly all of the commentators recommended it not only for academics, but also for literate Americans generally.

Liberal Christian periodicals comprised one group that translated *Deep South*’s findings to a popular audience. *The Christian Century*, which was the flagship journal of mainline Protestantism and which had a circulation of around 40,000 at midcentury, praised the book, calling for fiction writers to ground their stories in the empirical realities of the South as documented in the book.<sup>103</sup> A reviewer in a similar periodical, *The Protestant*, used the book to dispel eight pervasive stereotypes about African Americans, such as their alleged laziness, dishonesty, and thievishness.<sup>104</sup> The reviewer exposed not only how inaccurate those stereotypes

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<sup>102</sup> The University of Chicago Press, “Memo To: Teachers of Sociology,” May 18, 1948, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>103</sup> *The Christian Century*, November 6, 1941, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6, 222.

<sup>104</sup> Arthur Rex, “White Stereotypes of the Negro,” *The Protestant* (May 1944): 24-26.

were, but also how they originated from powerful whites who used them to shore up their own social power.

Other Northern and national periodicals praised the book. The *New York Age* synthesized the book's findings for lay readers, while *The Nation* called it a "penetrating study" that "every student of the South can consult...with great profit."<sup>105</sup> Daniel Bell in the *New Leader* called it "important for its detailed descriptions of the class systems within the Negro caste, and the class and clique system, over on the white side of the tracks, as well as the barrier between."<sup>106</sup> The reviewer in the national magazine for the Republican Party praised it on several fronts. He or she commended the book for exposing the contradiction between America's democratic values and the existence of a caste system, which he or she believed to be a Southern problem rather than a national one. This reviewer also exploited the international context to mobilize resistance to caste, writing: "The thoughtful reader...cannot fail to compare the facts presented in this book with certain recent trends in thinking concerning the underlying causes of the present world conflict. The strictness of the Southern Colored caste system is strongly suggestive of Nazi racial doctrines."<sup>107</sup>

More surprising were the sympathetic reviews from Southern periodicals. Davis eagerly reported to Embree that "A great many Southern newspapers have reviewed it favorably."<sup>108</sup> Many of these newspapers were from states in the Upper South, such as Tennessee, Virginia, and

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<sup>105</sup> "Book Review: Deep South," *New York Age*, November 22, 1941; and review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *The Nation*, April 4, 1942, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>106</sup> Daniel Bell, "Caste and Class," *New Leader*, May 16, 1942.

<sup>107</sup> A. G. N., review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *The Republican: The National Magazine for Republicans* (December 1941), University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>108</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, March 25, 1942, Box 406, Folder 5.

North Carolina.<sup>109</sup> They often justified their positive reviews by invoking the book's objectivity. The *Morning Tennessean*, for instance, called it a valuable study of race relations that was conducted "objectively and scientifically" and "without bias."<sup>110</sup> The reviewer's rhetoric in the *Virginia Teachers Bulletin* was even more excessive, explaining how "the microscopic eyes of Davis and Gardner" told "the story...without bias or emotion."<sup>111</sup> The claim of objectivity helped these reviewers promote work that Southerners might otherwise immediately dismiss as biased.

There was even at least one sympathetic review from a newspaper in the Deep South. A man named Moreau Chambers bravely praised the book in the *Clarion-Ledger* of Jackson, Mississippi. He wrote: "this work is valuable in that it supplies an unvarnished picture of the real life in a small Southern city of the white in his relationship to the Negro."<sup>112</sup> In what must have infuriated the few locals who actually knew the nature of the book, he extolled the book's "accuracy and care" and "soundness."<sup>113</sup> This article thrilled Davis and Embree. Embree confided to Davis that "The comment in the Jackson paper seems to me so significant that I have sent a note of congratulations to the editor."<sup>114</sup>

Others understood the book differently. One review in the *Wichita Daily Times* similarly praised *Deep South* for its objectivity and for its abstention from issuing calls for reform.

Misreading the book as merely a "factual and statistical book," this reviewer understood

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<sup>109</sup> Some examples include the *Kansas City Call*, the *Durham, N.C. Times*, the *Commercial Appeal* [Memphis, TN], the *NC Herald-Sun*, the *Virginia Pilot*, and the *Observer* [Charlotte, NC]. See University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>110</sup> H. C. Nixon, "South's 2-Race, 2-Caste System," *Morning Tennessean*, September 27, 1942.

<sup>111</sup> No Author Listed, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Virginia Teachers Bulletin* (January 1942): 39-(?), University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>112</sup> Moreau B. Chambers, "A Glance at New Books," *Clarion-Ledger* [Jackson, Mississippi], November 2, 1941.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Edwin Embree to Allison Davis, March 25, 1942, Box 406, Folder 5.

objectivity to mean not explicitly condemning the race and class inequality in the South.<sup>115</sup> In this way, the reviewer used *Deep South* to condemn other work as less “objective,” even though this amounted to a clear misunderstanding of the book. Playing up a sense of Southern regionalism, the reviewer concluded by saying, “When and if the prescription is written, it will not be by anthropologists or by non-Southerners.”<sup>116</sup> Though most Southerners surely shared that sentiment, most Southern commentators simply ignored the book, as with Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* (1944) and Rayford Logan’s anthology, *What the Negro Wants* (1944), both of which called for an immediate end to segregation. As historian Walter Jackson explains, Southern liberals did not want to stir up controversy, while Southern segregationists did not even want to acknowledge the critique of their way of life.<sup>117</sup>

Social scientists offered more substantive reviews of *Deep South*. Regarding the book’s achievements, one theme was the book’s use of anthropological methods in studying a modern community instead of a primitive one. Many social scientists understood the novelty of the researchers’ social-anthropological methods, including participant observation and informal interviewing over a long period of time while actually living in the community.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, many reviewers praised the rich, detailed findings on Natchez social life that such a method yielded. John Dollard maintained that “There is no other single book which does such an excellent job of portraying the social and economic systems of a community.”<sup>119</sup> W. E. B. Du

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<sup>115</sup> *Wichita Daily Times*, November 12, 1941, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 252.

<sup>118</sup> See, for instance, B. A. McC., review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Sociology and Social Research* 220 (March 1942), University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>119</sup> John Dollard, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *American Anthropologist* (October-December 1942): 705.

Bois commended the book's analysis of social cliques and the larger economic system.<sup>120</sup>

Margaret Mead argued that this "inside story of an American community" allowed readers to see "life from one highly constricted category, defined by caste, sex and class."<sup>121</sup> Unlike many other reviewers, she argued that the book "falls short of the standards of complete objectivity."<sup>122</sup> She found this to be a good thing, however, because the authors remained responsible and made clear "the extent to which the ideals of social, political and economic democracy to which Americans do lip service is contravened."<sup>123</sup> Giving voice to Davis's own hopes, Mead concluded by suggesting that *Deep South* "should prove an effective background for the kind of thinking which leads to social change."<sup>124</sup>

In addition to such high praise, the book also received several criticisms. Some criticisms were minor, such as the authors' occasionally "labor[ing] the obvious," the book's being somewhat out-of date by the time of publication, and caste theory's lack of novelty by 1941.<sup>125</sup> Others were more substantial, including complaints about the book's faulty organization and lack of integration. Though the authors had worked to streamline the book's organization during the revision process, the difficulties in balancing the perspectives of five researchers, and in navigating the complex caste-and-class theoretical framework, militated against a completely clear presentation. One reviewer commented that some parts of the book were "too technical"

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<sup>120</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 220 (March 1942): 275.

<sup>121</sup> Margaret Mead, "Class and Caste Study," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 7, 1941.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner," *The Nation*, April 4, 1942; Daniel Bell, "Caste and Class," *New Leader*, May 16, 1942; review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner," *Quarterly Review of Biology* 17 (June 1942), 171; and Charles H. Wesley, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *The United States, 1865-1900*, Vol. 1 (September 1941 – August 1942), 47-48, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.



and not related to the main theme.<sup>126</sup> Lewis C. Copeland in the *American Journal of Sociology* criticized the disjuncture between the first and second parts of the book, arguing that “Two complete books might have been preferable.”<sup>127</sup> Copeland also maintained that the authors overemphasized caste and class, which he thought were insufficient to explain the complexities of the community.<sup>128</sup> Another reviewer took the opposite approach, critiquing the book’s overly complex portrait of society. He wrote: “There seem to be too many social groups for the size of the entire population. Under such a thorough and minute system of stratification, there is a tendency to make society too complex to be understood by anyone other than a specialist in community organization.”<sup>129</sup> The reviewer saw this as a major problem because he believed that “the maintenance of these class or caste lines” within the community depended upon residents’ consciousness of those social demarcations.<sup>130</sup>

Another substantive criticism centered on the book’s methodology. As social science began to move away from the era of the community studies and toward the era of statistical sampling, reviewers became critical of the lack of quantification in *Deep South*.<sup>131</sup> One reviewer criticized the researchers’ reliance on interviewing, which, though it produced mounds of data, was subjective and hard to generalize.<sup>132</sup> Though John Dollard attributed the lack of quantification to the “exploratory design of this kind of research,” he nevertheless wished there

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<sup>126</sup> Jefferson Davis Bragg, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 28 (March 1942), 646.

<sup>127</sup> Lewis C. Copeland, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *American Journal of Sociology* 48 (November 1942): 432.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas D. Clark, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Journal of Southern History* 8 (August 1942), 439.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> The best overview for this shift is Sarah E. Igo’s *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). For an analysis of how this shift affected political culture, see Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 292-344.

<sup>132</sup> Clark, review of *Deep South*, 439.

were “more quantitative support to [the authors’] findings.”<sup>133</sup> The harshest review came from Robert Schmid in the *American Sociological Review*. Clearly defensive of sociology’s turf, he argued that social-anthropological methods were insufficient in studying a modern community. In particular, he, too, assailed the authors for their lack of quantification and the ultimate dubiousness of their findings as a result. In a mocking tone, Schmid concluded by writing,

To this reviewer it seems unquestionable that the project bit off more than it could chew. ‘Old City,’ Mississippi, is not just another collection of native huts on the banks of the river; it is a tremendously complex segment of a culture so vast that one wonders at the audacity of the four men and women who seek to comprehend it and indeed to generalize about it after mingling with the inhabitants and taking copious field notes for two years.<sup>134</sup>

Sociologists offered some of the most insightful reviews, but some of them were excessively critical. In truth, *Deep South* did include significant quantitative research.

The black press had mixed reviews for the book. One commentator named Thomas A. Webster, for instance, drafted a short, positive review that he syndicated to various black newspapers, including the *Chicago Defender*, the *Kansas City Call*, and the *Carolina Times*.<sup>135</sup> In *Opportunity* magazine, however, Alain Locke issued a critical review of the book that was sensitive to the politics of representation amid the social upheaval stemming from the Depression and the beginning of the war. He argued that the “numerous anomalies and exceptions” essentially invalidated caste theory, and he maintained that the authors took too seriously the “stock rationalizations” of residents as elucidating actual community life.<sup>136</sup> In the end, he criticized *Deep South* for being a static, “retrospective” study that failed to account for the

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<sup>133</sup> Dollard, review of *Deep South*, 705.

<sup>134</sup> Robert Schmid, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner,” *American Sociological review* 7 (April 1942): 263.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas A. Webster, “The Browsing Reader,” *The Call* (Kansas City), November 15, 1941; Thomas A. Webster, “Books on the Negro,” *The Carolina Times* (Durham, N.C.), January 31, 1942; Thomas A. Webster, “Book Review: *Deep South*,” *Chicago Defender*, February 14, 1942.

<sup>136</sup> Alain Locke, “Who and What Is ‘Negro?’” *Opportunity* 20 (March 1942): 86.

significant social changes taking place. He concluded that “Scant attention has been paid...to the insecure economic structure of the entire society or to the increasing conflict of economic interests with the traditional stock values both among the whites and Negroes.”<sup>137</sup> Here Locke shared with other black intellectuals, such as Charles S. Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier, the fear that an emphasis on entrenched racial stratification could be used by whites to dismiss as futile any efforts to redress inequality. Furthermore, he was interested in highlighting the racial change taking place in order to mobilize efforts to extend that change.

The black philosopher William Fontaine issued a strong critique of the environmentalist position of black intellectuals generally. In his critique, he discussed two of Davis’s articles directly, but *Deep South* was certainly part of the environmentalist social science he criticized, even though it was a biracial study. Fontaine drew from Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia*, which was concerned with the sociology of knowledge. As Fontaine understood it, “Absolute truth is, at best, a regulative ideal, a goal infinitely remote that man would approach with ever increasing hope. All knowledge is conditioned by incompleteness of development and by perspectives which the plastic human organism acquires in interaction with environment.”<sup>138</sup> From this position, which posited the socially-rooted, relative, and dialectical nature of knowledge, Fontaine attacked the environmentalist position taken up by most black scholars. He called their position biased, and he understood it as stemming from “resentment of the caste-like status forced upon their group.”<sup>139</sup> He identified four main areas of bias. First, black scholars preferred “analytical categories” over “morphological” ones. Morphological categories referred to reified essences such as “race,” whereas analytical ones focused on breaking down those

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> William T. Fontaine, “Social Determinism in the Writings of the Negro Scholars,” *American Journal of Sociology* 49 (January 1944): 302.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

categories and exposing their problematic nature. Second, black scholars emphasized the environment over heredity, which Fontaine implied was done on the basis of anger and resentment rather than empirical evidence. Third, black scholars examined exceptions rather than “quantitative majorities.” Specifically, Fontaine linked “race chauvinists” such as Carter Woodson with social scientists such as E. Franklin Frazier, suggesting that black scholars played up the few black accomplishments and ignored the larger absence of such accomplishments in order to further black people’s cause. Finally, black scholars’ arguments had a narrow “range of validity,” meaning that they dismissed without consideration the position of their opponents, thus making their own environmentalist position limited and weak.<sup>140</sup>

This was a fascinating critique of the type of black scholarship that Allison Davis embodied, especially because a black intellectual made it. Fontaine’s article showed a wide familiarity with black scholarship, and in fact Fontaine had closely studied black writing for years.<sup>141</sup> However, Fontaine studied and wrote an outsider within mainstream black-intellectual discourse, and so he had fewer qualms about issuing a full-fledged critique of black scholarship from his own ideological position. He surely felt that such a critique could serve to strengthen black writing as well as to demonstrate his own intellectual might before the American sociological community, but he seemed not to understand or care about how his ideas could merely reinforce the stereotypes white scholars had regarding black scholars. In the end, Fontaine was effective in delineating various epistemological positions within the arts and sciences, and in linking African Americans to environmentalist positions.

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<sup>140</sup> For more on Fontaine’s article, see Bruce Kuklick, *Black Philosopher, White Academy: The Career of William Fontaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 68-70; and Vernon J. Williams, Jr., *From a Caste to a Minority: Changing Attitudes of American Sociologists Toward Afro-Americans, 1896-1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989), 158.

<sup>141</sup> Kuklick, *Black Philosopher, White Academy*, 28-34, 53-55, 59-63.

Nevertheless, Fontaine's arguments had serious flaws that must have baffled most black scholars. For one, Fontaine seemed to miss the fact that not all scientific knowledge was created equal. On one hand, he clearly understood this, arguing that the morphological "race-thinking" of "Negrophobes" such as Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard "abounds in absurdity."<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, though, he condemned black scholars for not taking such hereditarian science into account and using it to broaden their own perspectives, adding that they failed to do so for "defensive" reasons.<sup>143</sup> However, Fontaine never said exactly *how* morphological, hereditarian social science could strengthen the work of black scholars, probably because he did not know how it could. His reasoning in this regard stemmed from the faulty logic of dialectical thinking, which held that the synthesis of competing ideas was the only path to greater truth and understanding. In fact, most morphological science had very little to offer, for it was actually scientific racism which began with flawed social conceptions of race and wrapped them in the mantle of scientific truth.

Fontaine's argument that African Americans took up environmentalist positions for defensive race-based reasons seemed like an unfair imputation. Davis and his black peers would have been quick to argue that environmentalist social science was not merely the purview of black scholars looking to further their own racial interests. It had become the dominant social science of the time and was adopted by the leading white scholars—who often trained these black scholars.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, an environmentalist book such as *Deep South* was a deeply collaborative project across racial lines, and it was the white Lloyd Warner who directed it.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 304, 312.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>144</sup> In rejoinders to Fontaine's article, E. Franklin Frazier and E. B. Reuter both made this point. See E. Franklin Frazier, "Rejoinder to 'Social Determination in the Writings of Negro Scholars,'" *American Journal of Sociology* 49

In the same way, Fontaine's claim that black scholars immediately dismissed alternative perspectives without seriously considering them seemed as incorrect as it did offensive. It made little sense for someone like Davis, who studied under Earnest A. Hooton at Harvard. Hooton was one of the world's leading racial taxonomists, and his work epitomized the morphological classification that Fontaine described. In his popular book *Up from the Ape* (1931), Hooton classified the human race according to "the morphological and metrical variations of such bodily characters as hair, skin, nose, eyes, stature, and differences in shape and proportions of the head, the trunk, and the limbs."<sup>145</sup> As a result, he grouped humans into four broad categories including "Negroids, Mongoloids, Whites, and Composites," with subgroups such as the Mediterraneans, the Nordics, and the Alpines.<sup>146</sup> Though he did not make grand claims about the superiority of one race over another, as white supremacists such as Madison Grant did, Hooton invariably saw Negroid groups as having a "generally low state of culture."<sup>147</sup> Davis's work under Hooton's tutelage shows how he and other black scholars knew this type of science well. Such familiarity exposed Davis to the flaws in taxonomical thinking, which geneticists such as Davis's mentor Lancelot Hogben were leading the way in refuting.

Perhaps most surprising, Fontaine did not seem to understand how black intellectuals' experiences with racial inequality could actually enrich their work. Fontaine argued that racism caused blacks to irrationally dismiss alternative knowledge, thus limiting their social view. But in many ways, racism did just the opposite: it broadened and deepened their view. By constantly encountering the racial barriers around them, black intellectuals developed a much keener sense

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(January 1944): 313-15; and E. B. Reuter, "Rejoinder to 'Social Determination in the Writings of Negro Scholars,'" *American Journal of Sociology* 49 (January 1944): 315.

<sup>145</sup> Earnest A. Hooton, *Up from the Ape* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 396.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 502.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 575.

of the structure and function of racial stratification, while racial privilege blinded many white scholars from seeing those same barriers. In effect, black scholars were better able to locate who held power in the system, and this allowed them to more easily perceive how hereditarian positions were actually rationalizations for the racial status quo. In other words, black scholars were more attuned to the socially-constructed nature of knowledge. Fontaine's criticism that black scholars played up the "exceptions" of black success and ignored the predominance of black failure thus missed the mark. Black scholars' position stemmed not from a narrow racial interest, but from a broad conception of social power. Men such as Carter Woodson and E. Franklin Frazier understood that the "exceptions" exposed the utter falsity of the idea of innate racial inequality, for if a black person could rise socially in a society so antagonistic to that rise, then he or she was a testament to the immense capabilities of the black masses.

Before proceeding in the next chapter to the reception of the most influential and controversial aspects of Davis's anthropological thought, which centered on caste and class, the impact of Davis's treatment of the black church and black associations warrants attention. Davis briefly summarized this material in *Deep South*, but it was in the book-length research memorandum to Gunnar Myrdal that he developed his interpretations and, through Myrdal, transmitted them to a large audience. In his treatment of the black church in *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal drew heavily from Davis. Myrdal argued that the black church was "inefficient and uninfluential" as "an instrument of concerted action."<sup>148</sup> He maintained, furthermore, that the church kept blacks "from going against the caste system," and that it "conformed to the power situation of the time and locality" and "favored a passive acceptance of

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<sup>148</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniv. ed. (1944; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 873.

one's worldly condition."<sup>149</sup> His indictment of the black church's "political fatalism" and "timidity and disinterest" reflected the influence of black radicals such as Davis, Ralph Bunche, and St. Clair Drake, all of whom wanted the church to lead the fight against caste-and-class inequality rather than passively accommodate it.<sup>150</sup> If the church failed to reform, Myrdal predicted that it would "decline...as an active influence in the Negro community."<sup>151</sup> In truth, Myrdal, Davis, and the others underestimated the church as a source of political leadership and cultural sustenance for the black community, but their critiques were nonetheless valid and influential. Black clergy later heeded such criticisms and actively reformed their practices in order to stay relevant to black people's needs. The bold leadership practiced by the next generation of preachers, which Martin Luther King, Jr. exemplified, measured the distance that black clergy had come.

Myrdal's treatment of black associations also drew from Davis and likewise reflected a narrow assessment of these institutions' roles within the black community. Myrdal, however, went even further than Davis in calling black associations "pathological."<sup>152</sup> Myrdal argued that "Negro clubs and lodges" embodied cultural lag, following "a pattern a generation behind the general American pattern."<sup>153</sup> Whereas white America had thirty years earlier begun to move away from the lodges and their "secret rites and elaborate ritual," lodges remained popular within black communities.<sup>154</sup> Myrdal also saw black associations as pathological because they "accomplish so little in comparison to what their members set out to achieve by means of

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 876.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 952.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 954.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 953.



them.”<sup>155</sup> Myrdal’s critiques were not without basis, but once again his almost exclusive emphasis on politics and power hindered him from taking seriously the social and cultural vibrancy of black institutions such as associations.

Because of the commercial and institutional success of *An American Dilemma*, Davis’s ideas on the black church and black associations reached a large audience. This became problematic, though, because of the rapidly shifting contexts in which those not-entirely-nuanced ideas took hold. Davis, along with E. Franklin Frazier and Ralph Bunche, issued those leftist critiques of black institutions during the depths of the Great Depression in the hope of galvanizing a widespread struggle against race and class oppression. Unfortunately, as historian Walter Jackson explains, “Myrdal’s version of their critique led not to a process of socialist transformation but rather to a white perception of blacks as a people afflicted with social pathologies calling for the cure of social engineering and adjustment to the norms of white, middle-class society.”<sup>156</sup> This process was exacerbated by Myrdal’s own conception of American race relations, which understood black social and cultural life primarily as outgrowths of oppression rather than as wellsprings of ingenuity and vibrancy.<sup>157</sup> In the postwar era, as Myrdal’s call for black assimilation to white American culture became the dominant discourse, Davis’s critiques of black churches and associations merely substantiated the argument that black culture was pathological. However, in such a rapidly shifting discursive terrain, Davis also adapted, and as later chapters will show, he began emphasizing the cultural resiliency of black and lower-class cultural life.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 954.

<sup>156</sup> Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience*, 227.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 219.

Above all, *Deep South* should be seen as a profoundly environmentalist project. The book emphasizes the power of the caste-and-class systems to determine the nature of Southern society, including the distribution of power, status, and wealth, as well as the character of both individual and collective behaviors, attitudes and ideologies, and symbols. By focusing on the larger social structures that shaped the fate of all individuals, the researchers attacked reductive, individualistic explanations of social inequalities, racial disparities, and differing beliefs and attitudes. Moreover, for the eugenicist who pointed to racial disparities as proof of biological differences, *Deep South* exposed the social, not biological, origins of racial inequalities. For white Southern apologists who espoused the greatness of Southern society and its plantation tradition, *Deep South* exposed a savagely cruel and unfair society that arbitrarily ranked individuals and delimited their lives. Perhaps most importantly, for the liberal who perceived racial inequality to be a problem of individual prejudice, *Deep South* revealed a prejudice that was systematic in nature and rooted within an exploitative economic system. For the optimist who believed that social change would eventually end racial inequalities, *Deep South* portrayed a system defended by powerful vested interests which could only be overcome by concerted action and revolt against the *entire* system. Systematic problems, after all, demanded systematic solutions.

For Allison Davis, *Deep South* represented the culmination of his early career within social science. He had left a career in English for one in social science with two major goals in mind: to better understand structural racial inequalities, and to contribute to a science of society that would elucidate the environmental roots of inequality, refute scientific racism, and point in directions for social engineering to foment racial change. He accomplished this with his work in social biology, but he did so above all with his work in social anthropology. With *Deep South*,

he left a lasting testament to the entrenched structural inequalities of caste and class that shaped the destinies of African Americans. He thus translated his modernist sensibility into an environmentalist social-science project that restored humanity and equality to an entire group of people. His work in social science, then, like that in literature before it, was part of his concerted aim to fight for equality and fairness for African Americans.

After 1935, Davis would move in new directions with his research, even as he continued to analyze and revise the *Deep South* manuscript. Those new directions, however, would continue to be fundamentally informed and structured by his social-anthropological work. Specifically, his studies of socialization, acculturation, intelligence, and education would all build from his understanding of class and caste structures. Before turning to the next chapter of Davis's thought—from explicating social structure to analyzing the socialization process—it is first important to better understand the controversy that erupted over the application of the social-anthropological concepts of caste and class to the American South, which Davis had pioneered.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Debating Caste and Class**

*It is to some extent, I believe, difficult for most of us to approach, without some degree of bias, a study of the concepts of class and caste as used to define the American social order. Nurtured as we have been on 'the great American myth,' we are likely to react emotionally to the idea that such seemingly undemocratic structures exist.<sup>1</sup>*

--- Maxwell Brooks

The central theoretical innovation of Davis's and Warner's social anthropology was the "caste-and-class" framework they devised. It was influential and important, but also controversial. In fact, the application of the caste concept in particular sparked a wide-ranging social-scientific controversy during the World War II era. Among social scientists, journalists, African Americans, radicals, and others, the caste-and-class framework had a large number of proponents—although not always for reasons that Davis would have liked—as well as a large number of detractors. In fact, the sharp debate that arose over the application of the caste concept to the American South reflected the competing disciplinary training and ideological interests of the commentators more than the actual formulation of the caste concept as propounded by Davis and Warner. As commentators talked past one another, however, they revealed the difficulties of representing the position of African Americans in a society that was rapidly changing amid depression and war, but was still fundamentally racist. The debates surrounding the caste-and-class framework thus serve as a microcosm of the larger social and intellectual divisions within the United States in the mid-twentieth century. As such, these debates highlight a revealing case study in the history of ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> Maxwell R. Brooks, "American Class and Caste: An Appraisal," *Social Forces* 25 (December 1946): 207.

## Debating Class

While the previous chapter highlights the general tenor of *Deep South*'s reception and the larger issues relating to Davis's anthropological thought, the most important aspects of that thought centered on the theoretical framework of caste and class. Lloyd Warner was the one who had initially laid out the basic caste-and-class framework, but Allison Davis had not only helped him to conceptualize caste in the first place, he had also adapted caste-and-class theory for his own ends. Therefore, *Deep South* should not be seen as merely a product of Warnerian social anthropology; it was also a product of the Davises' and the Gardners' research experiences and objectives. In this way, the book's reception—first, in terms of its class theory—was not entirely congruent with the other Warner-directed studies in Massachusetts, County Clare, and Illinois.

To be sure, there was much consistency, since the general class theory was quite similar. Once again, some of these criticisms were relatively minor. For example, one reviewer criticized the awkwardness and imprecision of such categories as “upper-upper” and “lower-lower.”<sup>2</sup> Though he found those categories somewhat “forced and meaningless,” he nevertheless appreciated that the upper and lower classes portrayed in the book represented very different social experiences, which the authors helped to explain.<sup>3</sup> Another reviewer named Grace Browning echoed this complaint and expanded upon it. Browning was concerned with the

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<sup>2</sup> Clifton R., Jones, “Social Stratification of the Negro Population in a Small Southern Town,” *Journal of Negro Education* 15 (Winter 1946): 159.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

“somewhat sweeping generalizations concerning status, attitudes, and behavior of members of these [social] classes.”<sup>4</sup>

The most significant criticism of Warnerian social class was definitional. C. Wright Mills’s review of Warner’s *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (1941), which was the primary theoretical exposition of Warnerian social anthropology, best reveals this criticism. Mills assailed Warner for being ignorant of sociological theory, and he charged that Warner’s conception of “social class” was theoretically confusing and troubling. In a convincing fashion, Mills criticized Warner for conflating class (economic) and status (social), which he saw as two distinct concepts necessary to explain the complexities of human behavior. Furthermore, he charged that Warner confused class with class-awareness, believing erroneously that people’s conceptions of their own social position matched up neatly with their actual social position. Mills thus saw Warner’s method of interviewing people to determine social stratification as problematic. Finally, Mills criticized Warner for ignoring the economic dimensions of class and for failing to articulate the functional relations between economic, social, and political life. Ultimately, Mills thought class needed to retain its fundamentally material bases in wealth, income, and economic power.<sup>5</sup>

Many other commentators rebuked Warnerian social anthropology for emphasizing the social over the economic aspects of class. E. Franklin Frazier was one of these, and he expressed this sentiment in a review of Robert and Helen Lynd’s *Middletown in Transition* (1937). In commentary applicable to *Deep South*, he wrote: “In lumping the white collar workers and

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<sup>4</sup> Grace Browning, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Social Science Review* (September 1942), University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>5</sup> C. Wright Mills, “The Social Life of a Modern Community, by W. Lloyd Warner; Paul S. Lunt,” *American Sociological Review* 7 (April 1942): 263-71.

professional men in a so-called ‘Business Class,’ the authors have confused class as a mere category based upon similarities in superficial aspects of behavior, with the more fundamental conception of class based upon divergent economic interests.” Though less of a radical than Frazier, Gunnar Myrdal also had problems with Warnerian social class.<sup>6</sup> As historian Walter Jackson explains, Myrdal “took exception to the Warner school’s use of the word class” and paid more attention to “the upper class’s monopoly of certain kinds of economic power, control of certain institutions, ‘restriction of free competition,’ and denial of ‘full social integration.’”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Davis’s own work was subject to this same type of criticism, evident in a response to his 1941 article in the *American Sociological Review*.<sup>8</sup> A respondent named Robin Williams critiqued Davis’s discussion of social classes by writing,

It has been stated that social class relationships are ‘extensions of intimate clique and family relationships.’ Undoubtedly, there is an interlacing web of clique relationships which spreads throughout the social system, but clique, friendship, kinship and caste relations are in certain respects different from class positions *in so far as* these latter are oriented to a competitive order in the occupational structure. In particular, caste and kinship patterns are *ascribed* in relation to biological reference points. All the relations mentioned above are functionally diffuse rather than specific as are occupational patterns. They are *particularistic* relations, i.e., within broad limits, they are oriented to *who you are* rather than to *what you have* or *what you do*, or can do.<sup>9</sup>

To the degree that Davis’s work was framed by Warner’s conception of social class, his work too was subject to this type of criticism.

Yet, as explained in the previous chapter, *Deep South*’s analysis of class stratification in Natchez was fundamentally an economic one, especially as portrayed in the second part of the book. Burleigh Gardner’s definition of social class in Part I followed Warner’s definition

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<sup>6</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, review of *Middletown in Transition*, by Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd, *Science and Society* 1 (Summer 1937): 574.

<sup>7</sup> Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 220.

<sup>8</sup> Allison Davis, “American Status Systems and the Socialization of a Child,” *American Sociological Review* 6 (June 1941): 345-56.

<sup>9</sup> Robin M. Williams, response to Davis, “American Status Systems and the Socialization of a Child,” 356.

closely, but Davis's interpretation of the economic, political, and social structure of Natchez in Part II was grounded in an economic conception of class. Indeed, leftists such as Arthur Brown and Herbert Aptheker discerned the implicit Marxian analysis framing *Deep South*, and they praised the book for this.<sup>10</sup> Both of these reviewers, though, were annoyed by the book's inconsistent discussions of social class, and by the authors' attempt "to disassociate themselves from Marxism."<sup>11</sup> Still, both understood that the general substance of their analysis placed economic matters at the center. As Brown wrote, "The primary importance of the economic organization is unwittingly revealed."<sup>12</sup>

Brown and Aptheker were not alone in praising *Deep South*'s class analysis. The famous sociologist Edward A. Ross also found the book's class framework rich. He ranked the book within the "best five studies in American society," and he credited the book's anthropological approach for providing the "soundest and most exhaustive analysis of class hierarchy and description of class characteristics I have ever met."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, he confided to Warner that "DEEP SOUTH is the first presentation of the class structure of contemporary Americans that I am quite unable to see any fault in."<sup>14</sup> Margaret Mead was similarly enthused by the book's caste-and-class framework, which she called a "working descriptive formula" that makes it "easier to think."<sup>15</sup> Albeit with exaggeration, she predicted that the class "categories which are

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<sup>10</sup> Herbert Aptheker, "The Black Belt," *New Masses*, January 6, 1942; Arthur Brown, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Science and Society* 7 (Spring 1943), University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Brown, review of *Deep South*, by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Science and Society* 7 (Spring 1943), University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 146, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. In Chapter 5, I discuss Davis's basic ideological position and the reasons for the manuscript's inconsistencies regarding class.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Edward A. Ross to Lloyd Warner, November 27, 1941, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Mead, "Class and Caste Study," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 7, 1941.



used will prove so useful and so stimulating that within a few months the reading world will be tossing about the classifications of ‘upper upper, ‘lower middle’ or ‘upper lower,’ applying them to the behavior of their friends, to the latest novel, or the latest political ideology.”<sup>16</sup>

Still, none of these commentators represented the majority of American opinion regarding the class concept within the United States. Liberal and leftist intellectuals such as Frazier, Mills, Myrdal, and Aptheker, all of whom perceived the centrality of economic class within American society, became marginalized in the postwar period. As World War II, the Cold War, and the booming postwar economy precipitated a retreat from Depression-era radicalism, most Americans stiffly rejected the existence of a class system within the United States. In a 1946 article in *Social Forces* that appraised the caste and class concepts, Maxwell Brooks spoke for this majority. He argued that class did not exist within the United States because of the remarkable social mobility offered to all Americans. He preferred instead to refer to a “*status system*, in which individuals of different origins compete for the SAME statuses,” instead of a more hardened class system.<sup>17</sup> Brooks thus mobilized conceptual critiques of Warnerian social class to reject the existence of a class system within the United States altogether. It was in the context of this type of conservatism that *Deep South* and Warnerian social anthropology took on even more importance as an ongoing testament to the existence of class stratification within the United States.

## Debating Caste

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Brooks, “American Class and Caste,” 210.

That same article by Maxwell Brooks exposed the similar American inability to see structural racism. Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis had elected to call America's system of racial inequality a "caste" system partly for rhetorical reasons, so as to nudge Americans to examine their own racial practices. Crucially, though, they also called it a caste system because they saw it as fundamentally "the same kind of social phenomen[on]" that existed within India, even though most Americans conceived of Indian caste as completely "other."<sup>18</sup> The word was thus useful in forcing Americans to think critically about racial hierarchy in their own country, even if only to dismiss it as Maxwell Brooks did. Indeed, the proliferation of Warner's and Davis's caste theory demanded that figures such as Brooks address racial hierarchy. Brooks did this in the same way that he refuted the existence of a class system in the United States. He wrote: "the effects of social experience—education, division of labor, and dispersion of populations—tend to produce a mobile social order and to alter social statuses interracial as well as intraracially."<sup>19</sup> Once again, Brooks's own privilege and ignorance blinded him from seeing social stratification and allowed him to glimpse only social mobility and opportunity along race and class lines. In the same way as with class, *Deep South* and Warnerian social anthropology offered vital countervailing forces to American ignorance about its racial hierarchy.

Even as Davis's and Warner's caste theory prompted people such as Brooks to discuss racial inequality, it also "ignite[d] a tremendous debate in the academic community" among left-

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<sup>18</sup> W. Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis, "A Comparative Study of American Caste," in *Race Relations and the Race Problem: A Definition and an Analysis*, edited by Edgar T. Thompson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1939), 231-32.

<sup>19</sup> Brooks, "American Class and Caste," 211.

liberals who in many ways agreed on the outlines of racial stratification.<sup>20</sup> Davis's and Warner's 1939 article was the main vehicle in laying out caste theory for a national audience, while *Deep South* was the fundamental case study proving the viability of the theory. For this reason, Davis was at the center of a far-reaching debate on American caste that extended well beyond social science. Undeniably, Warner and Davis spearheaded the proliferation of studies employing caste theory, or at least invoking the caste concept in defining the position of African Americans within the United States. Charles Cooley and Robert Park had casually used the term in reference to Southern blacks many years before, but it was Davis and Warner who disseminated it as a systematic theory of race relations.<sup>21</sup> As described in the previous chapter, caste theory as employed in *Deep South* was sophisticated and nuanced. Reviewers of the book and commentators on caste generally, however, failed to combat the full weight of the theory. Rather, the controversies over caste typically stemmed from critics who misunderstood the theory and used the discussion to further their own disciplinary, rhetorical, and personal objectives. This section dissects the anatomy and stakes of that social-scientific dispute on American caste.

To begin, it is important to understand the wide proliferation of Davis's and Warner's caste theory in the late 1930s and 1940s. The scholars comprising the "Warner school" produced a large number of publications in their own right. Specifically, figures such as Warner, Davis, Burleigh Gardner, Buford Junker, and Walter A. Adams were prolific.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, a

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<sup>20</sup> Dallas L. Browne, "Across Class and Culture: Allison Davis and His Works," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, eds. Ira E. Harrison and Faye Harrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 174.

<sup>21</sup> Brooks, "American Class and Caste," 210. For Cooley's and Park's references to caste, Brooks cites: Charles H. Cooley, *Social Organization* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 218; and Robert E. Park, *An Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, by Park and Burgess (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921), 263.

<sup>22</sup> W. Lloyd Warner, "American Caste and Class," *American Journal of Sociology*, 42 (September 1936): 234-37. See also, by the same author, "Social Anthropology and the Modern Community," *American Journal of Sociology* 46 (May 1941): 785-96; W. Lloyd Warner and W. Allison Davis, "A Comparative Study of American Caste," in

diverse array of scholars across the social sciences took up the concept directly, including John Dollard, Donald Young, Robert Sutherland, Edward Ross, William Ogburn, and many others.<sup>23</sup>

John Dollard is a good example of the Warner school's reach, for his widely read community study of Indianola, Mississippi, called *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937), drew its sociological outlines directly from Warner and Davis.<sup>24</sup> Even scholars such as Charles S. Johnson, who began turning away from the concept, employed it at various times to explain social relations.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most important avenues for the dissemination of Warner's and Davis's caste theory, though, was once again Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944). This 1,500-page tome served as the standard text on American race relations for two decades, and it informed not only social science, but also government policy, court rulings, and wider cultural beliefs.<sup>26</sup> In that landmark study, Myrdal drew from Warner's and Davis's work to conclude that

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*Race Relations and the Race Problem*, edited by Edgar T. Thompson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1939), 219-45; W. Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage* (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1940); W. Lloyd Warner, Buford H. Junker, and Walter A. Adams, *Color and Human Nature* (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1941); W. Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, Mary R. Gardner, *Deep South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941); Allison Davis, "Caste, Economy, and Violence," *American Journal of Sociology* 51 (July 1945): 7-15.

<sup>23</sup> John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937); Buell G. Gallagher, *American Caste and the Negro College* (1938); Donald Young, *Research Memoranda on Minority Peoples in the Depression* (1937); Robert Austin Warren, *New Haven Negroes* (1940); Horace Mann Bond, "The Negro Elementary School and the Cultural Pattern," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 13 (April 1940): 479-89; Kingsley Davis, "Intermarriage in Caste Societies," *American Anthropologist* 43 (September 1941): 376-95; Robert L. Sutherland, *Color, Class and Personality* (1942); Edward A. Ross, *New-Age Sociology* (1940); William F. Ogburn and Meyer F. Nimkoff, *Sociology* (1940); Robert L. Sutherland and Julian L. Woodward, *Introductory Sociology* (1940); Stuart A. Queen and Jennette R. Gruener, *Social Pathology* (1940); Alain Locke and Bernhard J. Stern, *When Peoples Meet* (1942); Clifton R., Jones, "Social Stratification of the Negro Population in a Small Southern Town," *Journal of Negro Education* 15 (Winter 1946): 4-13.

<sup>24</sup> The next chapter will cover the Warner-Davis-Dollard collaboration more, but Dollard acknowledges his debt to Warner for the caste-and-class framework in the preface to his book. See John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937; repr., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), ix.

<sup>25</sup> Charles S. Johnson, "The Conflict of Caste and Class in an American Industry," *American Journal of Sociology* 42 (July 1936): 55-65.

<sup>26</sup> Oscar Handlin, "A Book That Changed American Life," *New York Times*, April 21, 1963. For an in-depth study of the reception of *An American Dilemma*, see David W. Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations: The Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma, 1944-1969* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University press, 1987).

African Americans did in fact comprise a caste.<sup>27</sup> He believed this because he saw how the rigid taboos against interracial sex, the “one-drop rule,” and the legacy of black chattel slavery all made blacks different from other minority groups. In referring to the caste system, Myrdal departed from most caste critics in the United States by following Warner’s and Davis’s sophisticated conception of caste as constantly subject to change and adaptation. Myrdal understood that “social relations across the caste line...vary considerably from region to region within the country and from class to class within the Negro group,” and that they show “considerable change in time.”<sup>28</sup> But he saw such variation and change as “universal characteristics of social phenomena,” including in such societies as India, which he argued “do not have the ‘stable equilibrium’ which American sociologists from their distance are often inclined to attribute to them.”<sup>29</sup> In this way, Myrdal adopted Warner’s and Davis’s capacious definition of American caste, and his use of it in *An American Dilemma* assured its position within American discourse for decades.

Myrdal’s sophisticated understanding of caste theory, though, was the exception rather than the rule. Most commentators sidestepped Davis and Warner’s nuanced definition and instead discussed caste in simplistic, reductive ways as the equivalent of a wholly static social system. Debates on caste, therefore, typically revolved around straw-man definitions of the concept. Contemporary sociologists were some of the main perpetrators here. As James McKee argues, many sociologists adopted the simplified concept for conservative ends. He explains how the dominant sociology of race relations during the interwar and postwar eras conceptualized—and prescribed—racial change that was gradual, assimilationist, and naturally

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<sup>27</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniv. ed. (1944; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 57-60, 221-24, 667-705.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 668.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

occurring. Beliefs in entrenched white prejudice, black cultural inferiority, and the Sumnerian adage that “stateways can’t change folkways” all underpinned this conception of change.<sup>30</sup> Most sociologists, according to McKee, thus adopted caste theory in order to bolster their own conceptions of race relations during a time when rapid urbanization, northward migration, and interracial unionization were challenging their particular vision.<sup>31</sup>

Howard Odum is a perfect example of this type of sociologist. As the nation’s most distinguished Southern sociologist by the 1930s, chairing the sociology department at the University of North Carolina and founding and editing the *Journal of Social Forces*, Odum institutionalized the gradualist, assimilationist brand of sociology that McKee describes. In his review of *Deep South*, Odum praised the application of anthropological caste-and-class theory to the modern South.<sup>32</sup> The lessons he deduced from the book and its caste theory, though, were very different from those of Davis and his colleagues. Davis had labored to expose the systematic nature of racial inequality in order to undermine the fallacy that gradualist, piecemeal change could ever overcome it. He, like Myrdal, hoped that a full portrayal of such a cruel system, which so violated American values on egalitarianism and democracy, would mobilize readers to take concrete action to destroy caste. Odum, on the other hand, drew conservative lessons from the theory. He argued that the book’s implication was “the opposite of what is commonly expected. That is, the volume shows conclusively that racial divisions in the southern regions of the United States are culturally organic and are products of long, evolutionary development. This is the sociological and anthropological view of cultural evolution.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> James B. McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem: The Failure of a Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 4-10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-74.

<sup>32</sup> Howard W. Odum, “Southern Caste and Class,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, February 28, 1942.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Odum's view of racial caste as organic relied upon ignoring the abundance of evidence that showed how the system was only kept intact through violence. For him to use *Deep South* to support his ideology, he had to ignore entire sections of the book that explained explicitly how the caste system was rigorously enforced through violence, coercion, and the constant threat of lynching.<sup>34</sup> Like other white sociologists of the time, Odum used his flawed vision of Southern race relations to shore up his conservative agenda of inaction and nonintervention. He wrote: "It is unreasonable, therefore, to expect that through mere process of legislation or coercion or propaganda a situation so organically and culturally conditioned over so long a period of time can be changed overnight."<sup>35</sup> Ironically, then, Odum and other sociologists, who adopted and were instrumental in proliferating caste theory, did so for entirely different purposes than Warner and Davis.

With this sociological audience in mind, it makes more sense that black sociologists such as Charles S. Johnson, Oliver Cox, and E. Franklin Frazier were so critical of caste theory. Though purportedly arguing with Warnerian anthropology, they were really arguing with white sociologists and the conservative ends to which they put caste theory. To be sure, different disciplinary and theoretical traditions also played a role. Each of these three major critics of caste theory was affiliated with the Chicago School of Sociology as led by Robert E. Park at the University of Chicago. In sharp contrast to social anthropology's focus on elucidating social "structure" and the ways in which it directed individual behavior, Chicago Sociology

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<sup>34</sup> Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), 45-49, 392-400.

<sup>35</sup> Odum, "Southern Caste and Class."

emphasized “process” and how individuals interacted to create society from the ground up.<sup>36</sup> This converse approach predated Warner’s social anthropology, and indeed Warner had developed his theory partly to critique “process” sociology.<sup>37</sup> In the 1910s and 1920s, Park drew from evolutionary thought and from American pragmatism to help lay the conceptual, methodological, and institutional bases for a science of society that aimed to “describe and analyze this vast process of human interaction and the formation of specific groups.”<sup>38</sup> He eventually conceptualized a theory of race relations known as the “race relations cycle,” which posited that all racial and ethnic groups would eventually proceed through four stages of interaction: competition, conflict, accommodation, and finally assimilation.<sup>39</sup> The focus was also always on change and the micro-level interactions that slowly produced it.

Though Park had referred to caste in his own earlier work, he became critical of it during the 1930s at the very time that Davis and Warner were recommending it. Park helped to initiate a trend among caste critics by avoiding Davis’s and Warner’s definition of caste as a complex, modifiable system subject to change. He instead conceived of it as a completely static social system. With this definition, Park saw caste as operative in the United States only during slavery, when he believed that the system “was maintained not by law but by a body of customs that was more or less self-enforcing.”<sup>40</sup> After slavery ended, however, the fact that laws were required to maintain racial inequality demonstrated to Park that caste was breaking down, again

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<sup>36</sup> For an excellent overview of process theory and structural theory, see Fred Matthews, “Social Scientists and the Culture Concept, 1930-1950: The Conflict Between Processual and Structural Approaches,” *Sociological Theory* 7 (Spring 1989): 87-101.

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Saint-Arnaud, *African American Pioneers of Sociology: A Critical History*, trans. Peter Feldstein (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 77.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>39</sup> Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 506-510, 574-76, 663-66, 735-37; Robert E. Park, “The Conflict and Fusion of Cultures With Special Reference to the Negro,” *Journal of Negro History* 4 (April 1919): 112-33.

<sup>40</sup> Robert E. Park, Introduction to *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South*, by Bertram W. Doyle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), xx.



implying that caste was equivalent to stasis in race relations. After the Civil War, Park observed a black population that was “continuously in motion.”<sup>41</sup> He argued that migration, education, and “the rise within the Negro community of a professional class...seeking to organize and direct the Negro’s rising race consciousness” have all “conspired not merely to undermine the traditional caste system but to render it obsolete.”<sup>42</sup> He maintained that this confluence of factors combined “to transform the status of the Negro in the United States from that of a caste to that of a minority.”<sup>43</sup>

Charles S. Johnson, professor of sociology at Fisk University, critiqued caste along similar lines. He explicitly rejected Davis’s and Warner’s definition of caste, instead laying out four criteria for caste as it was “ordinarily conceived”: “prohibition of intermarriage between castes, the absolute impossibility of altering caste status, the religious sanctions, and the mutual acceptance of and adjustment to the fixed status.”<sup>44</sup> With such a different definition in mind, Johnson’s criticisms of caste were hardly even applicable to Davis’s and Warner’s work. Davis must have seen Johnson’s conception of caste as “a stable system in which changes are socially impossible” as the ultimate straw man.<sup>45</sup> Again, this talking past one another makes sense when we consider that Johnson was really aiming to refute caste as white sociologists and social commentators commonly used it. The degree to which Johnson and Davis agreed on what they saw in Southern society was in fact overwhelming. Their different emphases—Davis on structure and continuity, Johnson on process and change—reflected both their divergent theoretical training and their contrary aims. Johnson was ultimately interested in those “forces

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<sup>41</sup> Robert E. Park, “The Nature of Race Relations,” in *Race Relations and the Race Problem: A Definition and an Analysis*, edited by Edgar T. Thompson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1939), 33.

<sup>42</sup> Park, Introduction to *Etiquette of Race Relations*, xxi-xxii.

<sup>43</sup> Park, “The Nature of Race Relations,” 34.

<sup>44</sup> Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South* (1941; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 325.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

that are actually breaking up such caste organization as exists in the United States” so that he could refute arguments by men such as Howard Odum who pointed to the inevitability of gradual, natural change. By emphasizing the patterns of black migration, urbanization, interracial organizing, and taboo transgressions, Johnson exposed the fallacies of mainstream sociological thought on race relations, and he argued that racial change could and should also occur through political action.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the Depression era provided endless examples of such change, including the establishment of interracial unions such as the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union and those within the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the continued northward migration of millions of African Americans, and the rise of black political power within the New Deal Order.

It was another black Chicago School sociologist, however, who made a career out of criticizing caste theory. Though trained in Chicago Sociology, Oliver Cox was an irreverent Marxist who had no problems critiquing any social scientist, including his own mentor, Park.<sup>47</sup> His attacks on caste theory were particularly caustic, and he wrote a series of articles and a book that aimed to refute the theory.<sup>48</sup> In his first significant article, he issued several criticisms, many of which were not entirely new or sophisticated. First, reiterating the straw-man conception of the caste system as one that has “no basic antagonisms,” is “never challenged,” and can persist “forever,” Cox criticized caste theory as not being relevant to the dynamic society of the

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<sup>46</sup> Charles. S. Johnson, “Race Relations and Social Change,” in *Race Relations and the Race Problem: A Definition and an Analysis*, edited by Edgar T. Thompson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1939), 291-302.

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Oliver Cox, “The Racial Theories of Robert E. Park and Ruth Benedict,” *Journal of Negro Education* 13 (Fall 1944): 453-63.

<sup>48</sup> Oliver C. Cox, “The Modern Caste School of Race Relations,” *Social Forces* 21 (December 1942), 220; Oliver C. Cox, “Class and Caste: A Definition and a Distinction,” *Journal of Negro Education* 13 (Spring 1944): 139-49; Oliver C. Cox, *Caste, Class, & Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Modern Readers Paperbacks, 1948).

American South.<sup>49</sup> Second, he argued that caste theory provided nothing new to the study of the South, “other than perhaps publicity,” since it was a static theory and a tired concept already used long ago.<sup>50</sup> Third, ignoring the extended discussions within *Deep South*, Cox maintained that caste theorists failed to see the possibility for individuals to change their caste status through passing and interracial sex.<sup>51</sup> Fourth, Cox contended that endogamy was not a sufficient indicator of caste, because all sorts of “social classes, castes, tribes, sects, or any other social groups which think they have something to protect” may be endogamous.<sup>52</sup>

Two criticisms were more perceptive, though they applied more to Warner’s discussions of caste than to those in *Deep South*. First, Cox exposed a problematic assumption of Warner’s, namely that the caste line would remain intact even if wealth, power, education, and culture were equalized between the races.<sup>53</sup> Cox argued that this implied that blacks condoned caste and would not force its abolition even if they had the power to do so. Related to this, Cox also argued that caste theory did not place adequate blame on the class system, which he saw as the fundamental determinant of racial divisions.<sup>54</sup> He feared that caste theory reified caste and obscured not only its origin but also its susceptibility to change in light of changing economic conditions. For his part, Warner was trying to show the stark power of physical color to continue to determine people’s social status, even within a society marked by change in this regard. But

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<sup>49</sup> Cox, “The Modern Caste School of Race Relations,” 223-24. Davis later criticized Cox for his mythical conception of caste in a review of Cox’s book. Davis asserted that against all social scientists of India, “Dr. Cox holds that caste in India, unlike all other social institutions in the world, is unchanging...In fact Dr. Cox’s view of caste is mystical. To him, it is an absolute, unchanging entity, found in India, and nowhere else in the world. Yet cultural anthropologists are agreed that caste-systems, in the sense in which that word is used in scientific discourse, occur and have occurred in many other societies.” Allison Davis, “Mystical Sociology,” review of *Caste, Class, and Race*, by Oliver Cox, *Journal of Negro Education* 17 (Spring 1948): 162.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, 23-42.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 221. For a visual representation of Warner’s assumption, see W. Lloyd Warner, “American Caste and Class,” *American Journal of Sociology* 42 (September 1936): 235.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher A. McAuley, *The Mind of Oliver C. Cox* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 105.

his ahistorical, structural-functionalist orientation prevented him from seeing how caste, at least in its modern form of segregation, arose precisely *because* of the growing affluence of African Americans. Because wealth, power, culture, and education no longer separated the races so neatly, white Southerners erected Jim Crow to maintain the racial status quo. If Warner had a better understanding of historical change and of the power dynamics within Southern society, he would not have argued that caste could persist in a society where social power was equally distributed among the races. Ironically, in *Deep South*, Warner's own students addressed all of these critiques. They did explain caste as an outgrowth of capitalism and as a product of growing black affluence, but they also argued that race had come to determine social affairs in ways not entirely commensurate with class relations.<sup>55</sup>

It was in Cox's criticism that caste slighted the role of class that he overlapped with the third black caste critic of the Chicago School of Sociology, E. Franklin Frazier. In 1936, Charles Johnson published an article on the tobacco industry which argued that although caste divisions among workers had been breaking down since industrialization, they continued to divide workers and impede interracial organizing.<sup>56</sup> In other words, race continued to grant a social privilege to white workers, so they refused to surrender that social power despite the fact that interracial organizing would have increased their economic strength. Frazier argued that this interpretation ignored "the economic conditions controlling the working relations in the industry."<sup>57</sup> Focusing on how the "tobacco industry is a highly concentrated industry, from the standpoint of both location and control," he wrote: "Because of the traditional attitude of the American Federation of Labor toward the unionization of unskilled workers and the powerful opposition of the

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<sup>55</sup> Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*, 481-82.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, "The Conflict of Caste and Class in an American Industry," 55-65.

<sup>57</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, "Caste and Class in an American Industry," *American Journal of Sociology* 42 (September 1936): 252.

tobacco trust, the weak and official-ridden tobacco workers' union has failed to bring about an effective organization of either black or white workers."<sup>58</sup> Frazier was thus dismissive of racism among the workers as contributing to the difficulties of interracial organizing. He wanted to place all of the blame on the industry itself and the capitalists who had the power to divide and conquer labor.

Other young black radicals such as Ralph Bunche and Abram Harris shared Frazier's ideological insistence on the centrality of class over race. As such, they rejected the concept of caste, despite its utility in shedding light on structural inequalities.<sup>59</sup> As John Holloway explains, these radicals exhibited an "ideological refusal to let race shape their public stances," believing that "politics must purely follow ideology."<sup>60</sup> In public, they thus focused exclusively on the economic dimensions of inequality in order to foster an interracial labor movement. They were perceptive in discerning the economic roots of racism, and they were right that if workers could organize across racial lines, then both black and white workers could achieve major economic gains. Furthermore, their hopes were not entirely unrealistic, for they had seen how the Depression had spawned interracial unionization even in states as racially divided as Alabama.<sup>61</sup> Still, there was something ironic about their refusal to acknowledge the pervasiveness of racism and its power to undermine interracial movements of all stripes given the degree to which race framed their entire lives. Indeed, even during the height of the interracial labor movement during the Depression, these men worked at the all-black Howard University where they spoke

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, "Sociological Theory and Race Relations," *American Sociological Review* 12 (June 1947): 270.

<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 56.

<sup>61</sup> Frazier, "Caste and Class in an American Industry," 253.

to and wrote for a primarily African-American audience.<sup>62</sup> Their social lives, career trajectories, and even their research interests were fundamental testaments to the ongoing power of race to circumscribe their lives.

The older generation of black intellectuals was more inclined to stress race over class.<sup>63</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois is a case in point. Though he was a radical who applied Marxian analyses to society and history, such as in his *Black Reconstruction* (1935), and though he had spent many years working for the NAACP to promote the integration of African Americans into American society, Du Bois nevertheless became disillusioned during the Depression at the prospects of interracial alliances. As blacks bore the worst of the severe economic crisis, Du Bois encouraged African Americans to form black co-ops to help themselves endure the monumental crisis, because white Americans were doing little to help them, failing even to pass anti-lynching legislation.<sup>64</sup> For Du Bois and most black intellectuals of the older generation, the Depression only reinforced how race trumped class, even as they discerned the vital links between the two.

Allison Davis occupied a middle position between the older generation and the radicals of the younger generation. He largely shared the radicals' intellectual position, which conceived of the economic origins of racism and the ongoing centrality of the white capitalists in maintaining it. He also shared their concern about the creation of intra-racial organizations, recognizing their potential to "increase the segregation of Negroes from whites, and organize the sentiments of Negroes around their separate 'racial' identity in the American social order."<sup>65</sup>

Realistically, though, he perceived how race had developed into its own stratifying system that

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<sup>62</sup> Holloway, *Confronting the Veil*, 18-19.

<sup>63</sup> James O. Young, *Black Writers of the Thirties* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1973), x.

<sup>64</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, W. E. B. Du Bois-Embree Correspondence, W. E. B. Du Bois, "A Tentative Plan Looking Toward Consumers' and Producers' Co-Operation Among American Negroes and Negroes the World Over," Box 194, Folder 5.

<sup>65</sup> Allison Davis, "The Negro Church and Associations in the Lower South," June 1, 1940, page 148, Allison Davis Papers, Box 33, Folder 21, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

was partly independent of class dynamics. In other words, he discerned how all whites, including the extremely poor, gained social privilege and power through racial stratification—the “wages of whiteness,” as Du Bois called them—and so Davis saw how a genuine conflict between a person’s class interests and racial interests could exist. Davis thus worked with Warner to label this system “caste,” which he saw as inextricable to but also independent of the class system.

Pragmatically, Davis sympathized with the older generation’s emphasis on racial solidarity and intra-racial organizing to further black people’s interests. He reasoned that “As long as the subordinating controls which determine lower caste position are systematically exerted upon Negroes by the dominant white society...Negro organizations and their leaders have no choice but to maximize lower caste solidarity.”<sup>66</sup> For this reason, he fully supported the activities of his younger brother, John Aubrey Davis, who helped to form the intra-racial New Negro Alliance (NNA) in Washington, D. C. in 1933. The NNA was one of the country’s first “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns, and it “attempted to obtain employment for Negroes by the use of consumer pressure in those businesses heavily supported by Negro consumers,” resorting to boycotts when negotiation failed.<sup>67</sup> The organization was highly successful in using blacks’ purchasing power to secure black employment and minimum-wage compensation.<sup>68</sup> Despite the economic focus of the NNA, Bunche and Harris criticized the organization’s intra-racialism for being antagonistic to interracial organizing.<sup>69</sup> Like both Allison Davis and his brother, the NNA was “committed to seeing the world as it currently was

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, John Aubrey Davis Fellowship File, John Aubrey Davis, Resume, 1940, Box 406, Folder 4.

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, “A&P Hires 2 Clerks,” *Washington Tribune*, September 28, 1933; John Aubrey Davis, “We Win the Right to Fight for Jobs,” *Opportunity* 16 (August 1938): 230-37.

<sup>69</sup> Holloway, *Confronting the Veil*, 52-53.

and operating within a clear awareness of the racial limitations that defined daily life for virtually all blacks.”<sup>70</sup> During the Depression, then, as with the 1920s, Allison Davis continued to emphasize the practical necessity of racial solidarity in a caste society, even as he understood the role of the capitalist economy in maintaining and originally creating caste.

In the end, despite the many criticisms of caste theory, Americans continued to use the concept in reference to the American South’s racial system through the 1960s. Still, it was clear by the late 1940s that social scientists were already beginning to move away from the theory. Unsurprisingly, Chicago School sociologists led the way. Park and Johnson seized upon Donald Young’s conception of “minority” theory.<sup>71</sup> Interested as they were in developing a framework for comparing all racial and ethnic groups and placing them in a dynamic, “processual” schema, Young’s ideas were appealing. Young argued that “the problems and principles of race relations are remarkably similar, regardless of what groups are involved.”<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, he maintained that “only by an integrated study of all minority peoples in the United States can a real understanding and sociological analysis of the involved social phenomenon be achieved.”<sup>73</sup> Johnson concurred, even though he acknowledged that “Negroes as a group experience the most persistent and the most pervasive forms of segregation.”<sup>74</sup> For Johnson, it was a difference in degree, but not in kind.

Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis disagreed. Warner argued that African Americans were fundamentally different from white minority groups, who had the “possibility of escape” from

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>71</sup> Park, Introduction to *The Etiquette of Race Relations*, xxii; Charles S. Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943), 316.

<sup>72</sup> Donald Young, *American Minority Peoples: A Study in Racial and Cultural Conflicts in the United States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), xiii.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation*, 316.



their minority status.<sup>75</sup> He explained how a white minority member could “change his name, his religion, or his cultural behavior,” and could “marry out of his ethnic group and assimilate.”<sup>76</sup> African Americans, on the other hand, were forever considered black according to the “one-drop rule,” and they thus could not change this status through intermarriage or interracial sex, both of which were deeply tabooed, if not illegal.<sup>77</sup> Because of these social differences, all of which stemmed from blacks’ unique history of chattel slavery, Warner and Davis thought it imprudent to lump blacks in with all other minority groups. Furthermore, both of them perceived an entrenched system of racial stratification that persisted even within the context of dynamic social change, so they argued that caste theory was relevant even to the North, where the “one-drop rule” still dictated social relations, and where patterns of residential, educational, and workplace segregation persisted.<sup>78</sup> As Davis summed it up, a black man “can neither earn, nor learn, nor fight, nor marry his way out of caste.”<sup>79</sup> Davis continued to call the American racial system a caste system until at least 1965.<sup>80</sup>

Still, Warner and Davis realized that social scientists were moving away from caste theory during the 1940s. In 1941, Horace Cayton and Elaine McNeil argued that it was not applicable to the North, and in 1945 Louis Wirth’s elaboration on minority theory rose to

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<sup>75</sup> W. Lloyd Warner, Buford H. Junker, and Walter A. Adams, *Color and Human Nature: Negro Personality Development in a Northern City* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1941), 10.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> W. Lloyd Warner, “A Methodological Note,” in *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, Vol. II, New ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1970), 774-75.

<sup>78</sup> Warner, “A Methodological Note,” 781-82; W. Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, *Father of the Man: How Your Child Gets His Personality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), 84. St. Clair Drake later remembered Davis as being intrigued more by racial change than racial stasis, but in all of Davis’s writings he continued to insist on the value of a caste theory of American race relations. St. Clair Drake, “Studies of the African Diaspora: The Work and Reflections of St. Clair Drake,” in *Against All Odds: Scholars Who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Benjamin P. Bowser and Louis Kushnick (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 98.

<sup>79</sup> Allison Davis, “Racial Status and Personality Development,” *Scientific Monthly* 57 (October 1943): 362.

<sup>80</sup> Allison Davis, “Retrospect, 1965: Power and Caste,” in *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class*, Abridged ed. (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1965), 337-46.

prominence as a new framework for race relations amid the emerging postwar society.<sup>81</sup>

Conceding somewhat to this trend, Warner perceptively pointed out that “It is of small consequence what we call [the racial system] if we remember that it is a status system which organizes and controls the lives of our people and ‘educates’ the oncoming generations to learn its ways and conform to its precepts.”<sup>82</sup> In the end, Davis and Warner were concerned with elucidating America’s entrenched system of racial hierarchy, and they recognized that the very word “caste” seemed at times to run counter to that goal. This is because most commentators on American caste perceived it as a foreign, un-American concept, and they defined it in simplistic and reductive ways that did not match their own definition. So as caste theory faded in social-science circles, Davis and Warner adjusted their lexicon, but not their ideas. Later generations would refer to “institutional racism,” “structural racism,” and “racial stratification,” but fundamentally this was the same type of conception of racial hierarchy that Davis and Warner’s caste theory delineated. The fact that modern-day commentators continue to evoke the concept is a testament to its definitional breadth as well as to the persistent racial inequality to which the term attests.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Horace R. Cayton and Elaine Ogden McNeil, “Research on the Urban Negro,” *American Journal of Sociology* 47 (September 1941): 183; Louis Wirth, “The Problem of Minority Groups,” in *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, edited by Ralph Linton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 347-72; See also, Williams, Jr., *From a Caste to a Minority*, 149-73.

<sup>82</sup> Warner, “A Methodological Note,” 781-82.

<sup>83</sup> Michelle Alexander, for example, has recently invoked the caste concept to refer to the status of African Americans in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. She argues that the War on Drugs and the mass incarceration it spawned were so racially charged and so systematic in targeting African Americans that they represent the continuation of a racial caste system in the U.S. She explains how the huge numbers of blacks who are convicted (often through systematic plea-bargaining) are then politically disfranchised both inside and outside jail, and once free are systematically denied access to jobs, housing, healthcare, and other social rights guaranteed to most Americans. See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Era of Colorblindness*, Rev. ed. (New York: New Press, 2012).

The reception of caste-and-class theory among social scientists during the World War II era testifies to the diffuse and unintended ways in which ideas are interpreted and redeployed for various ends. Davis and Warner conceptualized the caste-and-class system in order to reveal the nature and function of a social hierarchy that was pervasive and entrenched within American society. They believed that too many Americans understood race and class relations in individualistic ways, thus failing to see how people's behaviors and beliefs were systematically determined. Accordingly, they developed a formidable and nuanced caste-and-class framework through which to help Americans understand how social structure directed individual interactions. Their goals were to aid efforts to redress race and class inequality by exposing the starkly unfair and antidemocratic structures directing social life, and by revealing how different power dynamics could lead to social change.

The fact that the caste-and-class framework could engender so much controversy speaks volumes about American society and culture. Maxwell Brooks spoke for the majority of Americans when he rejected the idea that caste and class was applicable to a nation as egalitarian as the United States. Indeed, a central feature of American national identity was the tenet that the U.S. was the "land of opportunity," always defined in opposition to the older, more aristocratic societies of Europe. Mainstream sociologists' praise for and proliferation of a reductive caste concept revealed Americans' anxieties about racial change and its implications for the future. Figures such as Howard Odum used the concept to shore up the gradual, assimilationist approach to race relations. Black radicals' rejection of caste theory, on the other hand, revealed their hopes for further racial change in the context of a radical workers' movement. Many Chicago School sociologists' rejection of the caste concept likewise reflected not only their competing theoretical approaches, but also their fears about the conservative uses

of the dominant sociology of race relations and the resistance to racial change it seemed to justify. All of these parties were guilty to one degree or another of avoiding the capacious conception of caste that Davis and Warner prescribed. In the end, the debate over American caste served as a microcosm of America's social divisions, and as a useful case study in the history of ideas.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Caste, Class, and Personality in *Children of Bondage***

*It may be we shall eventually have to go the whole way and state that there is a single social science and that what now seem like discrete fields or sciences are really shadings and points of emphasis in a unified field of scientific observation which is only distorted when we try to abstract 'sciences' from it as we do at present.<sup>1</sup>*

--- John Dollard

In the early 1930s, Allison Davis was at the cutting edge of social anthropology in his development of novel anthropological theories and methods in the study of a modern community in the American South. Davis would continue developing his Natchez fieldwork into the book, *Deep South*, throughout the remainder of the 1930s. During the mid-1930s, however, Davis was already seeking out innovative new approaches within social science, and he in fact learned new interdisciplinary methods, carried out new interdisciplinary research, and published an important book on this material, *Children of Bondage*, in 1940, which was one year before the University of Chicago Press released *Deep South*. Such innovative efforts were especially significant for a black anthropologist, because most African Americans were systematically denied opportunities to develop new social theories and methodologies. Most blacks of that generation were forced to study black life and race relations in support for paradigms set out by major white social scientists. Indeed, St. Clair Drake explained how Davis was “the only one of the first group of Afro-Americans” with training in anthropology who “contributed to the debates about concepts and methods that went on during the thirties.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Dollard, *Criteria for a Life History: With Analyses of Six Notable Documents* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), 276.

<sup>2</sup> St. Clair Drake, quoted in George C. Bond, “A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake: An American Anthropologist,” *American Ethnologist* 15 (1988): 780.

The years from 1935 to 1940 were thus important ones in the history of social science and in the evolution of Davis's thought. In this period, Davis collaborated with John Dollard, who "interested [him] seriously in the *processes of human socialization*."<sup>3</sup> Davis moved from the social-anthropological focus on elucidating social structure to the culture-and-personality focus on deciphering how the social structure shaped the learning processes of individuals. This emphasis on socialization would characterize his mature work as part of the Department of Education at the University of Chicago throughout the rest of his career. For this reason, the *Children of Bondage* project is essential in understanding the nature and direction of Davis's later research agenda.

Of course, *Children of Bondage* was significant beyond its function as a racial landmark in social science and its centrality to the career and thought of Allison Davis. This particular research project was deeply implicated in much larger historical and social-scientific developments. For example, the project gained legs as a result of the Great Depression and the American Council on Education's subsidizing of this and related studies of "Negro personality." Additionally, Davis and Dollard's methodology and approach are only comprehensible within the context of the larger culture-and-personality movement within social science, which aimed to combine anthropological, sociological, psychological, and psychoanalytic insights in the study of human beings. Davis's use of this interdisciplinary approach to socialization represented but one example of the powerfully liberal and progressive ends to which some social scientists put this theorizing. Davis continued his modernist, environmentalist project of using social science to expose the power of the social structure to stratify social life. Having previously focused on explaining the nature of the caste-and-class systems of stratification, he now moved to scrutinize

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<sup>3</sup> W. Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, *Father of the Man: How Your Child Gets His Personality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), viii.

the impact of those structures on the socialization of individuals. Doing this, he believed, would make the social structures more real in terms of actual lived experience. Moreover, it would demonstrate the devastating potential of caste and class to shape the patterns of behavior and thought among individuals, which most Americans continued to see in terms of innate, idiosyncratic dispositions.

## **Dillard**

Having completed his nearly two years of fieldwork in Natchez in early 1935, Davis was eager to write up his findings, but he was even more desperate to earn some income to support himself and his wife during the depths of the Great Depression. Davis thus accepted a professorship in anthropology at the newly established Dillard University in New Orleans for the fall of 1935, and Elizabeth Davis also took up teaching and research responsibilities at that institution. Here the couple spent the next few years, with Allison laboring under a heavy teaching load and serving as an administrator in several organizations, as well as pursuing various new research projects.

Dillard was the product of collaboration among the Rosenwald Fund, the General Education Board, the American Missionary Association, and the Methodist Episcopal Church to develop another first-rate black university in the Deep South. Edwin Embree of the Rosenwald Fund envisioned Dillard as rivaling the three other major black research institutions—Howard, Atlanta, and Fisk.<sup>4</sup> He thus spearheaded the development of Dillard, which merged New Orleans University and Straight College into one institution. Both of those institutions had been barely

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<sup>4</sup> Edwin R. Embree and Julia Waxman, *Investment in People: The Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 85.

viable due to a dearth of funding, resulting in miniscule undergraduate enrollments and periodic closings by the law and medical schools.<sup>5</sup> Even in the heart of the Depression, though, Dillard was able to overcome these problems through the financial largesse of the Rosenwald Fund and the General Education Board, as well as through local white philanthropists such as Edward B. Stern who were comfortable helping African Americans within the framework of segregation.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Dillard attracted impressive faculty, including educationalist Horace Mann Bond, historian Lawrence D. Reddick, and, of course, Allison Davis, who headed up the Division of the Social Sciences.

Located within the thriving metropolis of New Orleans, Dillard offered a unique social laboratory. As Davis had discovered in his occasional flights from fieldwork in Natchez, New Orleans was a far more liberal and permissive place than the surrounding parts of the Deep South.<sup>7</sup> The whole state of Louisiana, in fact, remained in the throes of “Longism,” even after the charismatic governor and United States Senator, Huey Long, was assassinated in September 1935. In the context of the Depression, Long was able to dominate Louisiana politics and mobilize populist sentiment against income inequality, business, and the banks. His impractical but seductive “Share Our Wealth” campaign, which called for massive wealth redistribution through taxes, continued to capture Americans’, and especially Louisianans’, imaginations in these years.<sup>8</sup> Beyond that, New Orleans had a racial demography unlike that in any other part of the country. New Orleans had a discrete Creole community with a mixed European and African

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>6</sup> Joe M. Richardson, “A White New Orleans Philanthropist Helps Build a Black University,” *Journal of Negro History* 82 (Summer, 1997): 332-33.

<sup>7</sup> Mary R. Gardner, Burleigh Gardner, and Allison Davis, “The Natchez Research,” in “W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist,” by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. W. Lloyd Warner Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, page 7.9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>8</sup> David M. Kennedy, *The American People in the Great Depression: Freedom from Fear*, Part One (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 237-39.



ancestry. These Creoles' European background, moreover, was usually Spanish or French (Cajun) rather than English.<sup>9</sup> New Orleans thus had one of the only communities of black Roman Catholics, as well as the only black Catholic university, St. Xavier.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, New Orleans provided a more tolerant atmosphere for conducting social research, and it offered a wide-ranging ethnic and racial diversity that afforded Davis the opportunity to study and compare disparate cultures.

During his years at Dillard (1935-1938), Davis attempted to take advantage of the ethnic diversity around him by pursuing further comparative social-anthropological work. In fact, Davis was aiming to build the nation's first department of social anthropology, one which would include a Caribbean Studies program.<sup>11</sup> He developed a research proposal entitled "Comparative Study of Negro Societies in New Orleans and the Caribbean Islands," which made this aim clear. The proposal reveals Davis's ongoing interest in the type of transnational, diasporic study of African peoples that he had originally planned to undertake in Africa under the sponsorship of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. The proposal laid out Davis's plans to study "four Negroid communities," including a direct comparison of the "colored Creole community" in New Orleans with that in a Caribbean country such as Cuba or Martinique, as well as a comparison of the "Negro community" in New Orleans with that in the British West Indies such as Jamaica or St. Lucia.<sup>12</sup> Davis argued that the social science on race "can make little further progress until scientific studies of the range and variation of Negro societies outside

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *Black Philosopher, White Academy: The Career of William Fontaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 41.

<sup>10</sup> *Annual Report of the General Education Board, 1934-35* (New York: General Education Board, 1936), 47-48.

<sup>11</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 9, New Perspectives on Black Education (Summer 1978): 95.

<sup>12</sup> Allison Davis, "A Proposal for a Comparative Study of Negro Societies in New Orleans and the Caribbean Islands," Allison Davis Papers, Box 3, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

of the United States have been completed.”<sup>13</sup> Davis knew that a comprehension of the great diversity of African peoples’ societies and cultures across the world would explode racist, biological explanations for the behaviors and attitudes of American blacks. With the Natchez project, Davis had labored to show how caste-and-caste structures informed the lives of blacks (and whites). With a project comparing very different societies, however, Davis could further prove the power of the social environment in shaping human behavior by exposing the sharply contrasting ways that African peoples lived in response to different cultures. Much as cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead had aimed to do in studying Samoa, Allison Davis wanted to study the broad variation in social and cultural organization *outside* the United States in order to critique the social and cultural organization *within* the United States.<sup>14</sup>

As with any study, however, its feasibility depended upon the researcher’s ability to secure funding and the requisite time to carry it out. As always, black scholars suffered disproportionately from the racism in the academy that denied them faculty positions in predominantly white universities, where faculty members were less burdened with teaching and better connected to philanthropic institutions. At Dillard, Davis was required to teach five courses each semester, and this severely handicapped his ability to conduct further research or to write up his Natchez material.<sup>15</sup> Because of Davis’s lack of time, and because foundations were tepid about funding a transnational racial project during the interwar years, nothing further came of this proposed research while Davis was at Dillard. Ironically, Davis’s success in gaining a faculty appointment at Chicago in 1942 also foreclosed his comparative research agenda, which

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> See Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa; a Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (New York: W. Morrow & Company, 1928).

<sup>15</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, St. Clair Drake Fellowship File, Lloyd Warner to Edwin Embree, August 15, 1935, Box 409, Folder 1.

would have been a generation ahead of the type of Diasporic studies of black people that began in the postwar era, when African decolonization movements sparked new interest in international social science. Rather than continue to head the social anthropology department at Dillard as he had originally intended, Davis became a professor of education at Chicago, which radically altered his research agenda. Nevertheless, Davis's mentee, St. Clair Drake, would eventually make a career out of this type of Diasporic study of African peoples, becoming a prolific pioneer in the field.<sup>16</sup> In this way, Drake partly built upon Davis's original research agenda to develop the field, and he frequently acknowledged Davis's important influence.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, Horace Mann Bond, Davis's friend and colleague at Dillard who had helped get him the professorship there, instructed Davis on navigating the politics of scholarship. As an expert on gaining support from the foundations, Bond advised Davis to "Do as good for yourself as you can, whether through [Charles] Johnson [of Fisk], [Lloyd] Warner [of the University of Chicago], [Will] Alexander [of Rosenwald], or the devil himself."<sup>18</sup>

Though Davis faced many frustrations at Dillard, he was also able to use his professorship there to get involved with numerous organizations supporting black people's practical needs and interests. Believing that "the ultimate aim of science should be social action," he must have enjoyed working for organizations that had tangible effects on African Americans.<sup>19</sup> For example, Davis was appointed "State Director of the Survey of The Training

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<sup>16</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Value Systems, Social Structure, and Race Relations in the British Isles" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1954); St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1971); St. Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology*, Vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1987); St. Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology*, Vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Drake, "Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience," 92-95.

<sup>18</sup> Wayne J. Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 70.

<sup>19</sup> Allison Davis, "The Study of Society," Allison Davis Papers, Box 30, Folder 13, page 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

and Employment of White Collar and Skilled Negro Workers in Louisiana,” for which the state empowered him to coordinate the study and to appoint local supervisors in such cities as New Orleans, Shreveport, Monroe, and Baton Rouge.<sup>20</sup> Davis also served on the “Committee on Coordination and Prevention,” which focused on meeting the needs of youth in New Orleans amid the devastating impact of the Depression.<sup>21</sup> He collaborated on a report of the Committee’s findings that spelled out for the government the crises facing Southern youth – especially black youth – in terms of food, shelter, clothing, education, recreation, and other areas. His activities here familiarized him closely with the circumstances facing local youth, from which he would draw for his study of black personality. Finally, the National Urban League also consulted Davis to serve on the committee to determine whether a local chapter was needed in New Orleans.<sup>22</sup> All of this work thus further grounded Davis in the social circumstances of this region of the Deep South, developed his practical administrative skills, and put him in contact with various levels of the government, especially through the Works Progress Administration and through members of the “black cabinet,” such as his friend Robert C. Weaver.<sup>23</sup> Davis would later use his knowledge of New Orleans to inform his research memo to Gunnar Myrdal on black associations and churches in the lower South.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Chas G. Gomillion, Regional Director of the U. S. Works Progress Administration, to Allison Davis, Feb. 8, 1936, Allison Davis Papers, Box 8, Folder 17, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>21</sup> Stuart K. Jaffary, Chairman of the Tulane University School of Social Work, to Allison Davis, Jan. 11, 1936, Allison Davis Papers, Box 30, Folder 6, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>22</sup> S. Walter Stern, Chairman of the Committee to Investigate the Desirability of Forming an Urban League in New Orleans, to Davis, Oct. 10, 1936, Allison Davis Papers, Box 30, Folder 6, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>23</sup> The “black cabinet” refers to the African-American officials serving Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s administration during the 1930s. Robert C. Weaver was one of the most important members of this group. For an example of Weaver’s correspondence with Davis, see Robert C. Weaver, Office of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior, to Allison Davis, Feb. 13, 1936, Allison Davis Papers, Box 8, Folder 17, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>24</sup> Allison Davis, “The Negro Church and Associations in the Lower South,” June 1, 1940, pages 6-16, Allison Davis Papers, Box 33, Folder 21, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Davis's most important project during the Dillard years, though, was his study of "Negro personality." As the New Orleans Committee on Co-ordination and Prevention observed:

Throughout the United States at the present time, there has developed a growing recognition that one major result of the depression has been the unsettling and thwarting of the normal opportunities for youth. Educational opportunities have been reduced and employment avenues closed. Many millions of youth have graduated from school with no opportunity and very little hope of any. The plight of this youth group has been recognized by the Roosevelt Administration in the National Youth Administration; a federal service set up to proceed with ameliorive [sic] measures.<sup>25</sup>

One such ameliorative measure was the establishment of the American Youth Commission (AYC) in 1935.<sup>26</sup> The AYC's mandate included the investigation of the nature and extent of the crises facing the nation's youth.

The crisis among African-American youth had garnered particular attention ever since high-profile cases such as the Scottsboro Boys trial in 1931 revealed to many Americans the potential for radicalism among American blacks trapped in utter economic, political, and social oppression. Americans' fears of the "Negro problem" only deepened as the Depression lingered on and as African Americans began organizing to confront fascism at home. As Robert L. Sutherland, the organizer of the AYC studies, explained: "at a time when the world conditions are challenging the stability of our nation's democratic institutions, the peaceful solution of our own minority problem takes on a special urgency."<sup>27</sup> He further noted that "Negro youth are becoming increasingly conscious of political discriminations which deny or make meaningless their participation in government, and are becoming increasingly impatient with the vocational and social barriers that limit their individual advance and place a stamp of inferiority upon their

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<sup>25</sup> Committee on Co-ordination and Prevention, "Summary of the Findings and Tentative Report of the Committee on Co-ordination and Prevention," Allison Davis Papers, Box 30, Folder 6, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>26</sup> Floyd W. Reeves, Foreword to *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940), viii.

<sup>27</sup> Robert L. Sutherland's "A Recommendation for a Demonstration Project in the Personality Adjustment of Negro Youth", Oct. 1939, Box 558, Folder 5962, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

group.”<sup>28</sup> As white Americans became increasingly uneasy with their country’s “Negro problem,” the foundations began sponsoring studies of African Americans; the federal government began appointing more African Americans to government positions; and more steps were taken to improve the social and economic plight of the black masses. Just as Davis’s *Deep South* project was a product of this national context, so too was his study of “Negro personality.”

The AYC initiated the research process by appointing Robert L. Sutherland to head up the project on black youth. Sutherland consulted with foundation officers at the General Education Board and the Rosenwald Foundation to decide the details of the study. Edwin Embree thus had a role in Davis’s appointment as the Director of the Southern Urban Division of the Negro Youth Study, though he also figured in the exclusion of other black scholars such as George Schuyler and Zora Neale Hurston, whom he doubted had the “poise and detachment” necessary for the project.<sup>29</sup> Though in other quarters Embree lamented the politics of “objectivity” in social science, he was not above using it as a cudgel to promote the scholars he most supported.<sup>30</sup>

Davis thus assumed a major role in the developing AYC project, which he, Sutherland, and others soon formally proposed to the General Education Board for financial support. Their proposed research sought to address this central question: “What Effects Does Their Minority Racial Status Have Upon the Personality Development of Negro Youth?”<sup>31</sup> The study would answer this question by analyzing the social and cultural environment of black youth in diverse

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, National Youth Commission File, 1937-42, Edwin Embree to Robert L. Sutherland, Jan. 31, 1938, Box 164, Folder 12.

<sup>30</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Dollard-Embree Correspondence, 1938-40, Edwin Embree to John Dollard, December 20, 1938, Box 110, Folder 3.

<sup>31</sup> “A Proposal for a Study of the Racial Factor in the Personality Development of Negro Youth,” Dec. 9, 1937, Box 558, Folder 5965, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

regional and urban/rural settings, and it would examine the effects of those environments on particular individuals through the extensive use of case studies involving in-depth interviewing, attitude tests, and personality inventories. The authors argued that the findings would be “invaluable to institutions responsible for his education, to private and public agencies concerned with his economic welfare, to religious and humanitarian groups that have regard for his social status, and to the larger public.”<sup>32</sup> They therefore laid out a program for wide dissemination of the findings through monographs, brochures, poster presentations, conferences, and journal publications. The General Education Board approved the research plan and awarded \$110,000 for the project.<sup>33</sup>

Eventually, the AYC project took the form of four primary research studies. E. Franklin Frazier studied black youth in two urban areas of the Upper South—Washington, D.C. and Louisville, Kentucky. Charles S. Johnson examined black youth in eight rural counties across the Upper and Deep South, including ones in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Lloyd Warner directed the study of black youth in the urban North, particularly in Chicago. Finally, Davis and John Dollard studied black youth in the urban Deep South, including Natchez and New Orleans. Each project drew support from other researchers, including such notable scholars as Kenneth Clarke, Horace Cayton, St. Clair Drake, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Hortense Powdermaker. The monographs that emerged from these studies—*Negro Youth at the Crossways*, *Growing Up in the Black Belt*, *Color and Human Nature*, and *Children of Bondage*—were all important contributions to the nation’s understanding of the plight of black

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<sup>32</sup> “A Proposal for a Study of the Racial Factor in the Personality Development of Negro Youth,” Dec. 9, 1937, Box 558, Folder 5965, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

<sup>33</sup> W. W. Brierley to Doctor Zook, Dec. 6, 1939, Box 558, Folder 5962, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

youth. However, only Davis and Dollard's *Children of Bondage* was theoretically pioneering through its unique and innovative culture-and-personality orientation.<sup>34</sup>

The Davis and Dollard study was theoretically pioneering because of the close collaboration between the two differently-trained men. Through his social-anthropological, caste-and-class approach, Davis offered Dollard a sophisticated and empirically valid way to understand the social environment of black youth. Dollard, for his part, through his training in social psychology and psychoanalytic theory, offered Davis a way to understand how individuals learn to behave and think according to larger social strictures. Since both men were eager to learn from each other and subsequently spent significant time together in New Orleans and at Yale's Institute of Human Relations, the final product of their collaboration, *Children of Bondage*, was an achievement in interdisciplinary collaboration. To understand the theory and approach of *Children of Bondage*, as well as Davis's turn to culture-and-personality research, we first have to understand his main guide into that field, John Dollard, and Dollard's position within the culture-and-personality school.

### **Edward Sapir, John Dollard, and the Culture-and-Personality School**

John Dollard loomed large in the intellectual trajectory of Allison Davis's career. Born in Menasha, Wisconsin in 1900, John Dollard studied English and commerce at the University of

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<sup>34</sup> Harry Stack Sullivan, a psychologist and important theorist within culture-and-personality, collaborated briefly with Frazier and Johnson in their projects, but the culture-and-personality orientation did not guide their research. For more on Sullivan's role in the Frazier and Johnson projects, see Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, Charles S. Johnson Collection, 1892-1956, Box 17, Folders 14-18.



Wisconsin, earning his B.A. in 1922.<sup>35</sup> Shortly thereafter, Dollard enrolled in the University of Chicago's renowned Department of Sociology, taking his Ph.D. in 1931 under the supervision of William Fielding Ogburn. Though offered a position at the Paris office of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1931, Dollard instead accepted an offer orchestrated by Edward Sapir to join Yale as an assistant professor of social psychology, and as a research associate at Yale's Institute of Human Relations (IHR).<sup>36</sup> Yale, which was traditionally more focused on undergraduate education, had formed the IHR in 1929 to enhance the school's graduate program and to attract research funding from the foundations. In this regard, the IHR was a resounding success, and it became a center for advanced, interdisciplinary social science in the 1930s and 1940s.

Cultural anthropologist and linguist Edward Sapir loomed large not only in the early career of John Dollard, but also in the trajectory of the culture-and-personality movement more broadly. Regna Darnell shows how Sapir was probably the single most important theorist and early advocate for this type of interdisciplinary research, which combined analyses of culture and society (anthropology, sociology) with analyses of the individual (psychology, psychoanalysis).<sup>37</sup> Sapir earned his Ph.D. from Columbia in 1909 under Franz Boas. Boas was the world's leading cultural anthropologist, and his interests in psychological anthropology appealed to Sapir. For example, Boas's *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) made clear the importance of early childhood socialization and the operation of unconscious processes in culture and language.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Biographical History," Guide to the John Dollard Papers, Yale University, <http://drs.library.yale.edu:8083/HLTransformer/HLTransServlet?style=yul.ead2002.xml&pid=mssa:ms.1758&clear-stylesheet-cache=yes> (accessed Nov. 11, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Regna Darnell, *Edward Sapir: Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 334-35.

<sup>37</sup> Darnell's book, *Edward Sapir: Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist*, forcefully makes the case for Sapir's centrality to culture-and-personality. She calls Sapir "the most articulate prophet of the emerging interdisciplinary social science." See Darnell, *Edward Sapir*, xiii.

<sup>38</sup> John S. Gilkeson, *Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America, 1886-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120.

But Boas questioned the cross-cultural validity of psychoanalysis, and he believed that much more historical-diffusionist work reconstructing the development of cultures over time needed to precede speculations about the processes in which individuals acquired culture. Boas thus left the field of psychological anthropology wide open for Sapir and his other students.

During the 1930s, from his post at Yale, Sapir began to cultivate the culture-and-personality movement. He published two important articles that laid out ideas which would remain central to the culture-and-personality school.<sup>39</sup> In particular, he called for social scientists to “bring every cultural pattern back to the living context from which it has been abstracted in the first place and, in parallel fashion, to bring every fact of personality formation back to its social matrix.”<sup>40</sup> In this same period, cultural anthropology reached its climax in portraying each culture as inherently unique, as integrated into a coherent whole, and as all-powerful in determining the behaviors and values of individuals within that culture. Ruth Benedict’s influential *Patterns of Culture* (1934) marked the culmination of this interpretation. As culture theory evolved, however, anthropologists finally caught up with Sapir in seeing how the holistic portrait of culture failed to explain how cultures change and how exactly they are transmitted to individuals. Sapir led the way in criticizing anthropology for erecting a mechanical model of culture in which individuality was nonexistent and individuals were used merely to “prove” the existence of the generalized culture.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, Sapir criticized psychiatry and psychology for seeing individual development as the unfolding of a universal

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Sapir, “Cultural Anthropology and Psychiatry,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 27 (October-December 1932): 229-42; Edward Sapir, “The Emergence of the Concept of Personality in a Study of Culture,” *Journal of Social Psychology* 5 (August 1934): 408-415.

<sup>40</sup> Sapir, “Emergence of the Concept of Personality,” 410.

<sup>41</sup> Sapir, “Cultural Anthropology and Psychiatry,” 229-33.

biological process.<sup>42</sup> Along with the “neo-” Freudians who revised Freud’s ideas, Sapir pointed to the power of culture to inform and alter individual psychological development. His mastery of language dynamics, furthermore, prepared him to see how concepts such as the “individual” and “culture” were merely simplistic linguistic tools that distorted the inextricable ties between the two. He wrote:

The term ‘society’ is itself a cultural construct which is employed by individuals who stand in significant relations to each other in order to help them in the interpretation of certain aspects of their behavior. The true locus of culture is in the interactions of specific individuals and, on the subjective side, in the world of meanings which each one of these individuals may unconsciously abstract for himself from his participation in these interactions.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, he argued that the individual is the locus for the culture, and that social scientists in their respective disciplines needed to study the dynamic interrelation between the two concepts.

In order to study the relation between self and society, Sapir prescribed a focus on child development and the processes of socialization. Instead of seeing culture as “a neatly packed-up assemblage of forms of behavior handed over piece-meal...to the passively inquiring child,” social scientists needed to understand the acquisition of culture, or acculturation, as a problem to be investigated.<sup>44</sup> How exactly does an individual learn a particular way of life? How is a person added to the group? Sapir argued that “As soon as we set ourselves at the vantage point of the culture-acquiring child...everything changes,” because individual personalities “are destined from the very beginning to interpret, evaluate and modify every culture pattern, sub-pattern, or assemblage of patterns that it [*sic*] will ever be influenced by.”<sup>45</sup> Sapir thus always

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.,233-34.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.,236.

<sup>44</sup> Sapir, “Emergence of the Concept of Personality,” 414.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

saw the individual as an active agent in making culture rather than as a passive recipient of it, so he recommended scrutinizing the child “from birth until, say, the age of ten with a view of seeing the order in which cultural patterns and parts of patterns appear in his psychic world.”<sup>46</sup> Sapir’s emphasis on learning, socialization, and children would all become givens of the culture-and-personality school.

One culture-and-personality approach that Sapir promoted was the life history method, which he helped to gain traction through training John Dollard at Yale. Dollard’s *Criteria for a Life History* (1935) revealed Sapir’s influence in its passionate call for culture-and-personality studies via intensive studies of the individual over time.<sup>47</sup> Dollard defined the life history as “a deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu.”<sup>48</sup> Like Sapir, he argued that a close understanding of individuals could make sense of how cultures were transmitted to individuals – “the group *plus* a person” – and how those cultures perpetuated themselves.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to enhancing scholars’ understanding of processes of cultural change and transmission, Dollard also argued that a focus on individuals would enable investigators to answer questions about human behavior that the generalized explanations of sociologists and anthropologists could not. For example, though the Chicago School of Sociology was adept at explaining the social origins of criminality, it failed to make clear why individuals within those groups had very different experiences – i.e., why did one gang member rise in rank while another

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>47</sup> In a footnote in his study of the life history method, Dollard wrote: “It is difficult to overstate the indebtedness I feel to my teacher and colleague, Professor Edward Sapir, for every perception I have of the fact and nature of culture...It was especially during the seminar on the Impact of Culture on Personality, of which he was director and which was held at Yale University during the academic years, 1932-33, that I became familiar with his position.” Dollard, *Criteria for a Life History*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Dollard, *Criteria for a Life History*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 16.

did not?<sup>50</sup> Psychologists, for their part, “have neglected the study of the life of the human being.”<sup>51</sup> They have missed how culture “forms a continuous and connected wrap for the organic life,” and how the individual is “a microcosm of the group features of his culture.”<sup>52</sup> In calling for a synthesis between anthropology and psychology through the intensive analysis of individuals over time and in relation to culture, Dollard was operating very much in the realm of Sapirian culture-and-personality thought.

Yet Dollard’s brand of culture-and-personality also began to depart from Sapir’s through its emphasis on psychoanalytic and social-psychological theory. This process began early on when the Yale Impact Seminar of 1931-32 was delayed until 1932-33.<sup>53</sup> This extra year allowed Dollard the time to win an SSRC fellowship and to study psychoanalysis under Dr. Hanns Sachs in Germany, whom Dollard referred to as his “portal to...Freud.”<sup>54</sup> Dollard returned “committed to fairly orthodox Freudianism,” which quickly produced tension with Sapir, whose aims were more anthropological than psychiatric.<sup>55</sup> Led by Mark A. May, Yale’s Institute of Human Relations shifted culture-and-personality studies in increasingly psychoanalytic and social-psychological directions. In 1935, Clark Hull introduced behavioristic psychology as a potential integrating device that could “reconcile learning theory with Freudian psychology.” Dollard, Hull, and the psychoanalyst Earl Zinn began to test whether the “basic generalizations in psychoanalysis could be deduced logically from principles of behavior and learning theory.”<sup>56</sup> In 1935-36, they held a seminar that examined aggression as a response to frustration, which they eventually published as *Frustration and Aggression* in 1939. In this book, the authors

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>53</sup> *The Social Science Research Council: Seventh Annual Report, 1930-1931* (New York: 1931), 28.

<sup>54</sup> Dollard, *Criteria for a Life History*, iii.

<sup>55</sup> Darnell, *Edward Sapir*, 337.

<sup>56</sup> Mark A. May, quoted in Darnell, *Edward Sapir*, 390.

acknowledged Freud as their most important intellectual influence. They followed his insight that “the tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain” was “the basic mechanism of all mental functioning,” and that “Frustration occurred whenever pleasure-seeking or pain-avoiding behavior was blocked,” thus producing aggression as “the ‘primordial reaction’ to this state of affairs.”<sup>57</sup> In a chapter titled “Socialization in America,” the authors followed Freud in emphasizing the centrality of early childhood socialization and the attendant frustrations that accompanied social learning. Anticipating material in *Children of Bondage*, the book examined feeding, cleanliness training, and early sex training as inherently frustrating experiences that were formative in shaping personality.<sup>58</sup>

Dollard and the other IHR theorists were “neo-Freudian” in their approach. This term refers to those theorists who borrowed from Freud but modified his ideas in a number of ways.<sup>59</sup> First, Dollard and the others did not focus exclusively on early childhood socialization as Freud did, for they saw socialization as an ongoing process throughout life.<sup>60</sup> Second, though they emphasized the repression and frustration involved with socialization, they acknowledged that there were rewards and satisfactions that accompanied this process as well.<sup>61</sup> Finally, they understood that socialization was not a universal biological process, but rather one that varied significantly across cultural lines.

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<sup>57</sup> John Dollard, Neal E. Miller, Leonard W. Doob, O. H. Mowrer, and Robert R. Sears, *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), 21-22.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-68.

<sup>59</sup> For more on neo-Freudianism, see: Hale, Jr., *Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, 135-43, 173-79; William C. Manson, “Abram Kardiner and the Neo-Freudian Alternative in Culture and Personality” in *Malinowski, Rivers, Benedict and Others: Essays on Culture and Personality*, vol. 4 of *History of Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 72-94; Kenneth L. Chatelaine, “Harry Stack Sullivan: The Clinician and the Man,” in *Portraits of Pioneers in Psychology*, eds. Gregory A. Kimble, Michael Wertheimer, and Charlotte L. White (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1991), 325-340; Bernard J. Paris, “Karen Horney: The Three Phases of Her Thought,” in *Portraits of Pioneers in Psychology*, Volume 4, eds. Gregory A. Kimble and Michael Wertheimer (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2000), 163-179.

<sup>60</sup> Dollard, et al., *Frustration and Aggression*, 72-76.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

Dollard and Neal E. Miller laid out the IHR's social-psychological theoretical approach in a volume entitled *Social Learning and Imitation* (1941). Here Dollard and Miller took Clark Hull's principles of learning, which he originally developed through animal experiments, and applied them to human beings' *social* learning.<sup>62</sup> In a life-history study of personality in Indianola, Mississippi, entitled *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937), John Dollard had already made the empirical case that individuals had to be understood in relation to the social structures framing their lives.<sup>63</sup> Dollard and Miller now explained how behavioristic theories of learning could and should be integrated with sociological and anthropological analyses of social life. They wrote:

To understand thoroughly any item of human behavior—either in the social group or in the individual life—one must know the psychological principles involved in its learning and the social conditions under which this learning took place...The field of psychology describes learning principles, while the various social science disciplines describe the conditions.<sup>64</sup>

Those psychological learning principles included the behavioristic concepts of drives, cues, responses, and rewards. In other words, a person must “want something, notice something, do something, and get something” in order to learn a behavior.<sup>65</sup> The authors, though, argued that the nature of what a person wants, sees, does, and receives is entirely dependent upon his or her cultural context and social position. As Dollard had done before in employing the concepts of caste and class, he again borrowed from Lloyd Warner's social anthropology by emphasizing the centrality of social class in framing an individual's learning environment. He and Miller argued that people's principle learning accorded with “hierarchy or rank with regard to specific skills

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<sup>62</sup> Mark A. May, Foreword to *Social Learning and Imitation*, by Neal E. Miller and John Dollard (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941) vii.

<sup>63</sup> John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937; repr., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949).

<sup>64</sup> Miller and Dollard, *Social Learning and Imitation*, 1.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

and social statuses.”<sup>66</sup> Stated another way, Dollard and Miller argued that classes formed particular learning environments—or cultures—and that social behavior needed to be understood according to one’s social-class position above all else.<sup>67</sup>

Edward Sapir found such behavioristic learning theory to be simplistic and problematic, but John Dollard had managed to integrate psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, and anthropology into a compelling and practical framework for conducting culture-and-personality research.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, one scholar noted that “few social scientists worked as hard to bind theoretical, empirical, and social interests as Yale’s John Dollard.”<sup>69</sup> At a time when most culture-and-personality theorists were emphasizing the links between holistic, value-based cultures and individual personality, Dollard worked with Allison Davis to insert sociological and social-anthropological analyses of social stratification into the mix.<sup>70</sup> The result was a sophisticated analysis that incorporated a valuable material edge to culture-and-personality discourse. *Children of Bondage* is the product of this type of theorizing, and the Davis-Dollard collaboration involved in producing it helps to further explain its social origin.

### **Davis, Dollard, and the Making of *Children of Bondage***

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>67</sup> To be sure, Dollard and Miller also emphasized the importance of a person’s position in other social criteria, including age, sex, and intelligence. They argued, however, that social class was the most important. Miller and Dollard, *Social Learning and Imitation*, 183.

<sup>68</sup> Darnell, *Edward Sapir*, 396.

<sup>69</sup> Steven Weiland, “Life History, Psychoanalysis, and Social Science: The Example of John Dollard,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 86 (Summer 1987): 269-70.

<sup>70</sup> Scholars have not understood Davis’s central role in Dollard’s interdisciplinary research. For example, in his analysis of John Dollard’s book, *Caste and Class*, Steven Weiland never credited Davis or Lloyd Warner for the social-anthropological conception of “caste and class” which framed the book. See Weiland, “Life History, Psychoanalysis, and Social Science,” 269-81.



Allison Davis and John Dollard first met through Lloyd Warner. Upon learning of Dollard's proposed community study of Indianola, Mississippi, Warner advised Dollard to meet up with his students, Allison Davis and Burleigh Gardner, who were already conducting their own community study in nearby Natchez. Dollard then "went to Natchez to visit Burleigh and Jackie Gardner and Allison Davis," where he "first got the idea of caste and class."<sup>71</sup> Dollard incorporated those social-anthropological concepts into his *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937), which came out before *Deep South* and was widely read, and hence stole some of *Deep South*'s thunder and denied due theoretical credit to Davis and Warner.<sup>72</sup> Though Dollard admitted that his study was weaker in its explication of caste and class, he believed that it was superior to *Deep South* in terms of its "strong basis in Freudian analysis."<sup>73</sup> He argued that "Without the Freudian analysis, the study was structured without content. To get a complete sense of the southerner, I had to show him loving and hating, laughing and breathing. In this way, Freud is unparalleled in describing human life."<sup>74</sup> For his part, Davis found Dollard's psychological and psychoanalytic approach useful for strengthening his own understanding of human behavior. Indeed, as Davis's adoption of New Humanism a decade earlier had shown, he was not taken with environmental-determinism and always sought to balance individual agency with structural constraints. Consequently, a few years after they met in Mississippi, Davis asked Dollard to collaborate with him on his AYC project on black youth so that they could further share insights and integrate their disciplinary approaches. Dollard agreed, and hence the collaboration that resulted in *Children of Bondage* began.

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<sup>71</sup> John Dollard, quoted in interview with William R. Ferris, "John Dollard: Caste and Class Revisited," *Southern Cultures* 10 (Summer 2004): 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, 62.

<sup>73</sup> Dollard, quoted in Ferris, "John Dollard," 11.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

Between 1937 and 1938, Davis and Dollard carried out their research for their part in the larger AYC project on black personality. Their previous community studies in Natchez and Indianola, respectively, and the Warnerian caste-and-caste model generally, served as the structural framework guiding their life-history study of personality. In all, they gathered 35 life histories of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 who lived in either Natchez or New Orleans. Davis oversaw the research and appointed staff to conduct in-depth, weekly interviews of the 35 adolescents over the course of four to seven months, in addition to briefer interviews with the adolescents' parents, teachers, and friends.<sup>75</sup> Davis and Dollard selected these students on the basis of their representing various positions within the class system and the color hierarchy. The staff was comprised of various educators and social researchers, including once again Elizabeth Davis, who administered an array standardized tests. The students took tests that measured their personal attitudes, their values, their occupational aspirations, their views of color differences among people, and their intelligence (through Kuhlman-Anderson Intelligence Tests).<sup>76</sup> Davis and Dollard's main role during the research stage was to organize, train, and direct the staff. They helped the team to overcome the social "gulf between the interviewer and the person being interviewed," particularly "when that person [was] a lower class [or caste] person."<sup>77</sup>

During the summer of 1938 and especially during the first half of 1939, Davis and Dollard collaborated intensively to analyze the data and write up the book. At the beginning of 1939, Davis left Dollard to spend the next several months with John Dollard as a guest research

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<sup>75</sup> Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940), xxiii.

<sup>76</sup> Bonita Valien, Acting-Departmental Secretary for the American Youth Commission, to Allison Davis, Dec. 3, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Box 30, Folder 4, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>77</sup> John Dollard, "Staff Meeting; Dr. Dollard: Re: Wilbur Scott," Sept. 16, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Box 31, Folder 5, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

associate at Yale's Institute of Human Relations.<sup>78</sup> Here Davis was trained in the psychological and psychoanalytic approach to learning theory permeating the IHR at that time. The theoretical approach of *Children of Bondage* would directly reflect this history of interdisciplinary collaboration. Davis gave Dollard "actual practice in perceiving American social class relationships," while Dollard, according to Davis, gave "his time and energy to instruct me in those elementary principles of Freudian and of stimulus-response psychology which I was able to absorb."<sup>79</sup> Both men, of course, drew from Warner's caste-and-class structural framework, and they also drew from the work of Clark Hull, Neal Miller, O. H. Mowrer, and John Whiting relating to their "applications of stimulus-response principles to the study of social behavior."<sup>80</sup> By July of 1939, Davis and Dollard had completed the manuscript, which they tentatively titled "Not Black in Their Hearts."<sup>81</sup>

A crucial aspect of the manuscript was its popular format and lively writing style. Davis and Dollard were not merely aiming to draft a pioneering interdisciplinary study of personality that would further social-science research; they also wanted their book to reach and be accessible to "a relatively large audience," including especially "teachers, social workers, and guidance people."<sup>82</sup> They targeted "the great body of general white readers," believing that to be "the audience one must reach in any effort to change controls with regard to the Negro."<sup>83</sup> With the Great Depression still wreaking havoc on African Americans, the authors wanted to mobilize

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<sup>78</sup> The black press proudly reported Davis's affiliation with Yale. See "Goes to Yale," *Afro American*, February 11, 1939.

<sup>79</sup> Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, xix, xvi-xvii.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, xix, xvii.

<sup>81</sup> In fact, Davis very much disliked the title "Children of Bondage," which the publishers insisted upon in the final product. He emphasized to Edwin Embree how the title was one "which I did not choose!" Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, July 10, 1940, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>82</sup> Allison Davis to Robert Havighurst, Sept. 20, 1939, Box 558, Folder 5962, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

public support for aiding desperate black youth across the country. Their book thus labored to provide “a vivid and intimate presentation of the humanity of Negro Children.”<sup>84</sup> As Davis’s Negro-Stoical art during the New Negro Renaissance had already done, his social-scientific investigations into black personality would now also realistically portray and humanize poor blacks struggling against race and class oppression. Davis’s social-science work, however, targeted a general white audience instead of a black one, as his literature had done. He saw this as an important way to foment larger change. Much as Gunnar Myrdal would do in *An American Dilemma*, Davis sought to win over the hearts and minds of general white readers and to get them to see race and class inequalities as unfair delimitations on the lives of black youth. However, Davis faced resistance from AYC officers in publishing the book in a popular format, and he had to work behind the scenes with the Rockefeller Foundation before finally ensuring that result.<sup>85</sup>

The final product of Davis and Dollard’s efforts, *Children of Bondage* (1940), revealed how successful the two men had been in combining disciplinary insights and in conveying those insights in clear language and analysis that humanized the subject matter for a wide audience. Above all, the book was fundamentally a work of culture-and-personality through its emphasis on the process of socialization, which served as the crucial link between the social structure and the individual. By scrutinizing the processes by which people learned their social behaviors and attitudes, Davis and Dollard aimed to elucidate how social structures perpetuated themselves and framed the experiences of all individuals. In this way, the project was as environmentalist as was Davis’s earlier work, but the new terrain of socialization offered answers to new questions and

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Allison Davis to Fred McCuistion, Nov. 17, 1939, Box 558, Folder 5962, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

helped to humanize abstract social structures by making them real in the lives of individual people.

Davis and Dollard organized *Children of Bondage* into two main parts. The first part, including the first chapter and the last four chapters, explained their theoretical approach. The second part, including the middle eight chapters of the book, provided detailed case studies of eight black youth whom the authors perceived as most representative of each of the different social classes. They hoped that readers would use each case study to “vicariously experience life in each of the class positions.”<sup>86</sup> Davis and Dollard presented their theoretical approach in generally clear, non-technical language aimed at explaining complicated disciplinary theories to uninitiated social scientists and informed readers. The bulk of the book, though, was the case studies, in which they targeted wider lay audiences who could come to understand and sympathize with black youth from very different social strata. Though the case studies were less explicitly theory-laden, they were clearly rooted in Davis and Dollard’s culture-and-personality theory, and hence they were effective in developing the authors’ central argument.

That central argument was that caste and class fundamentally shaped the personalities and lives of black youth in the Deep South. The monograph focused on explaining how and why this was the case. Though the AYC studies began with the organizing question of “What Effects Does Their Minority Racial Status Have Upon the Personality Development of Negro Youth?,” Davis and Dollard argued that class was far more central to black personality than was race or caste.<sup>87</sup> The authors saw caste as an additional deprivation for African Americans, but they

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<sup>86</sup> Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, xix, xxvii.

<sup>87</sup> “A Proposal for a Study of the Racial Factor in the Personality Development of Negro Youth,” Dec. 9, 1937, Box 558, Folder 5965, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

insisted that it was most important in simply exacerbating class inequalities.<sup>88</sup> Specifically, caste so delimited African Americans' social, political, educational, and economic lives that it stunted the black class system; not only were the vast majority of blacks lower-class, but in percentage terms, there were three times as many blacks as whites in the lower class.<sup>89</sup> The authors attributed the disproportionate power of class over caste to the fact that "social class governs a much wider area of the child's training than do the Negro-white controls."<sup>90</sup> In other words, since caste so divided the races, a person's racial status was a less important factor in his or her daily socialization, apart from the broad outlines of social, economic, and political deprivation that it guaranteed.

The method Davis and Dollard employed to expose the impact of caste and class on black personality was the life-history emphasis on socialization over time. Essentially, they examined caste and class not as holistic structures abstractly shaping individuals, but rather as concrete realities in the training and learning experiences of individuals. They asked: what forms do caste-and-class structures take in the lives of the maturing child? How do caste and class present tangible social controls on an individual's life experiences? Drawing from Dollard's behavioristic and psychoanalytic social psychology, the authors argued that individuals experienced the social structure as a series of rewards and punishments beginning at birth. They explained how the families and social cliques of children acted as the central agents in administering those rewards and punishments, and they maintained that the nature of those rewards and punishments was fundamentally class-typed. They wrote: "the goals and sanctions of both the family and the intimate social clique are determined principally by the class-ways,

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<sup>88</sup> Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 65.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

that is, by the criteria of status in *their part of the society*.”<sup>91</sup> The authors consistently used concepts such as “class-ways,” class “mores,” class “folkways,” and class “modes of living,” essentially contending that social class functioned as a type of culture such that fundamental differences in social experiences, behaviors, and attitudes existed between the middle and lower classes.<sup>92</sup> In other words, the classes socialized children differently.

Davis and Dollard understood class in a sophisticated way. Following Warner, they often emphasized the social aspect of class that centered on “intimate access” and social participation more than the economic dimension of class that centered on wealth and power.<sup>93</sup> Here they tracked residents’ understanding of social hierarchy and paid close attention to the very real status barriers shaping social interaction. In this way, they maintained that their tri-partite class system was “real,” and not an anthropologist’s invention.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, Davis and Dollard also understood the importance of economic class, evident in Davis’s argument in *Deep South* that wealthy Southern planters established the fundamental underpinnings of the caste-and-class system in Natchez. Crucially, their emphasis on social and cultural class was not an attempt to minimize the importance of economic class, but rather was a way to extend the significance of class divisions to other aspects of society.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, when they wrote of class as a type of culture, they always portrayed culture as far more than merely ideational. In fact, Davis and Dollard minimized the importance of long-term values in shaping behavior, instead emphasizing the immediate social situation and the histories of reward and punishment that directed a

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 13, 82, 143.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>94</sup> They wrote: “Social class is of the society’s making.” Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 259.

<sup>95</sup> This is a point that John Gilkeson downplays. He sees Warner’s, and hence Davis’s, emphasis on social class as part of the larger retreat of class analysis in American society in the 1940s and 1950s. Rather than retreating from this analysis, I see especially Davis as actually building from and extending class analysis to other aspects of society. See John S. Gilkeson, Jr., “American Social Scientists and the Domestication of ‘Class’ 1929-1955,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 31 (July 1995): 337-40.

person's attitudes and actions. The point was always to place individual behavior and thought in the dynamic social context that controlled it through various rewards and punishments. Using this approach, they consistently placed the onus of responsibility for behavior on the wider environment.

One of the book's central aspects, then, was its explanation of the differences between the lower and the middle classes (they found the upper and middle classes to be more similar than different). Davis and Dollard contended that the "social experiences and available goal responses of lower-class and lower-middle-class people are separated by a virtual chasm."<sup>96</sup> The middle classes, unsurprisingly, had better-paying and more stable jobs, higher educational attainments, and higher social status as "respectable" types. The lower classes, on the other hand, were economically insecure, poorly educated, and forced to live in environments of violence and aggression. The cultural patterns of the classes were thus similarly distinct. The middle classes labored to delay gratification, work hard and save, and invest in long-term goals for educational and career success. This type of ethic was geared towards preserving class privilege. The lower classes, though, faced different social and economic realities, so by necessity they were generally more focused on immediate gratification and on meeting short-term goals, all the while condoning more overtly aggressive and sexualized behavior. The lower-class ethic was calibrated for survival in a harsh and insecure environment.

Davis and Dollard then explained how these very different class environments translated into disparate patterns of socialization. Beginning at birth, children learned their class positions through what they perceived as a series of rewards and punishments for their behaviors and attitudes. Drawing from Freudian theory, the authors perceived early childhood socialization as

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<sup>96</sup> Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 265.



foundational.<sup>97</sup> They believed that the ways in which parents dealt with their children's early feeding habits, cleanliness training, and sex training all had far-reaching effects on the children's personalities. Essentially, children encountered the restraints on how and when they could eat, defecate, urinate, and explore their bodies as punishments to their organic drives. Depending on the severity of this early training, the authors understood that children may develop lifelong anxieties that inform their particular personalities. Interestingly enough, Davis and Dollard found no real caste and class differences in these forms of early childhood socialization, and hence this theorizing did little to prove the authors' thesis.<sup>98</sup>

Aside from this early childhood training, though, Davis and Dollard perceived middle- and lower-class socialization as worlds apart. Through the processes of punishing unwanted behaviors and rewarding desired ones, children in their respective classes learned distinct behaviors from their parents, social cliques, teachers, and other socializing agents. Middle-class parents allied with teachers to

exert a powerful and continual pressure upon their children to study, to repress aggression at school, to inhibit sexual impulses, to avoid lower-class playmates, to attend Sunday school regularly, and to avoid cabarets, night clubs, pool parlors, and gambling houses. They set before their children the goals of a high school education, a skilled or white-collar occupation, and a 'good' marriage.<sup>99</sup>

Through constant supervision, middle-class parents worked to control the environments of their children and to shelter them from adult life. They had the economic and social resources to carry out these efforts.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 265.

The lower-class child, on the other hand, “is a man sociologically at a much earlier age.”<sup>100</sup> Because lower-class parents had very different life experiences and conceptions of parenthood, and because economic realities forced them to work more and spend less time socializing their children, lower-class children tended to grow up in the streets and to face very different environments. The lower-class child

is surrounded by people of quite different habits who make other demands and set other goals before him. His parents are very likely to separate several times during his life. Extramarital partnerships are common for both husband and wife. Fighting with fists and knives occurs within most families and is common in their cliques and their neighborhoods. Gambling and magic are accepted class-ways...The parents have attended only a few grades in school and the educational goal they set for their children is not much higher than their own...Illegitimate birth runs from one-fourth to one-third of all lower-class births; delinquency is far higher than in the lower-middle class and school retardation is almost universal.<sup>101</sup>

As a result of this starkly different environment, Davis and Dollard argued that lower-class and middle-class children grew up to be very different people.

However, Davis and Dollard complemented their structural sociological analysis with an empirical life-history approach that exposed the fluidity and messiness of these class cultures for actual individuals. They believed that it was important first to make clear the abstract stratifying systems informing individual life, as most people either did not see the structures at all or missed the comprehensiveness of their influence. Again, the structural-functionalist orientation that Davis had imbibed from his social-anthropological training remained central in framing how Davis explained social systems as integrated, holistic, and functional. Davis and Dollard’s addition of culture-and-personality theory then clarified how individuals actually experienced abstract systems such as caste and class. Here they drew from Edward Sapir’s and others’ emphasis on acculturation, or the process through which people learn a culture different from

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 266.

their own. Though this material was subtly expressed and only implicitly argued within *Children of Bondage*, acculturation theory underlay their analysis.

In particular, Davis and Dollard's acculturation theory overlapped with their discussions of social mobility, or how individuals rose and fell within the class system. In the case studies, they exposed the divergent types of class training and goals that each individual youth experienced. They argued that Julia Wilson, for instance, experienced middle-class training from her mother, but lower-class training from her father.<sup>102</sup> They contended that she ultimately adopted more of the lower-class behavioral orientation because it allowed her more freedom to release the frustrations she developed during early childhood socialization. Rather than acculturating the middle-class ways of her mother and her teachers and striving for upward social mobility, as other adolescents such as Chester Oliver did, Wilson thus made no effort to change her class status.<sup>103</sup> For Davis and Dollard, then, acculturating the values and behaviors of another group was central to a person's social mobility—arguably more so than even one's economic status. Davis would later extend his analyses of acculturation to other areas, but *Children of Bondage* already made clear the value of this orientation. It resisted the sociological tendency to reify social structures and to miss their final messiness in shaping the lives of individuals. In this way, it actually made their conception of class much more realistic and comprehensible.

Davis would also later expand upon the implications of the class-cultural schema for education, work, intelligence, and other spheres, but here too the radical implications of these ideas were already clear. Davis and Dollard insisted that all people were equally socialized, despite the fact that “it is common practice, even of sociologists, to speak of the lower class as

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 35-39.

<sup>103</sup> For Chester Oliver's case study, see Ibid., 98-135.

‘unsocialized,’ from their middle-class point of view.”<sup>104</sup> The point was that lower-class children were equally trained culturally; but with different environments, they necessarily learned different behaviors. The authors exposed how the middle-class bias of outside commentators prevented them from seeing the very real, but different, code of behavior among lower-class people. Though the lower class was more tolerant of sexual promiscuity and violence, it generally condemned prostitutes, drug addicts, criminals, and homosexuals.<sup>105</sup> In other words, the lower class had its own set of standards and ethics, permissive as they may have seemed to the middle class. At the same time, the authors argued that this middle-class bias prevented psychologists and others from seeing the intelligence of lower-class youth. Anticipating Davis’s future work in exposing the class biases within intelligence tests, the authors wrote: “How shall one measure by standardized tests the skills of a boy who has learned to acquire the fruits of stealing and at the same time to escape being put into jail?”<sup>106</sup>

Even more radically, Davis and Dollard argued that the behaviors of the lower class were actually realistic, logical, and adaptive to difficult environments.<sup>107</sup> Without romanticizing them, the authors pointed to the virtues and resiliency of the lower class. For example, they explained how one lower-class child, Mary Hopkins, learned to use violence as a necessary tool of defense in lower-class life.<sup>108</sup> Simultaneously, they described how it was a rational, proactive decision for another lower-class child, Edward Dodge, to become a gang leader in order to gain social

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>107</sup> For comparable views about the white ethnic poor, see E. Wight Bakke, *The Unemployed Worker: A Study of the Task of Making a Living without a Job* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); and E. Wight Bakke, *Citizens Without Work: A Study of the Effects of Unemployment upon the Worker’s Social Relations and Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940). For further background, see Mark Pittenger, *Class Unknown: Undercover Investigations of American Work and Poverty from the Progressive Era to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 112, 123-23.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 50.

status and power otherwise unavailable to him.<sup>109</sup> The authors also argued that the lower-class ability to enjoy immediate gratification and to avoid certain anxieties that accompanied middle-class training were potential “gains” for lower-class people. Davis’s ability to perceive the virtues of the lower class grew directly out of his earlier experiences with the New Negro Renaissance, in which he, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay had all worked to humanize the “low-down folks.”

Nevertheless, Davis and Dollard were clear that lower-class life was above all hard, unfair, and debilitating. Lower-class people adapted as best they could, but their behaviors were unfortunate adjustments to oppressive circumstances. The root problem was that lower-class life offered few educational, economic, and social opportunities, and it was thus “crippled by the scarcity of available rewards” that could modify destructive behavior.<sup>110</sup> “The long-range goals do not seem to be ‘there’ in [the lower-class person’s] world,” they concluded.<sup>111</sup>

Though it was less central to their argument, Davis and Dollard also explained how the black youth learned their place within the caste system. As with class training, black youth learned their inferior caste status through a series of rewards and punishments. The authors described how “caste controls appear as sanctions defining the conditions under which [a black person] may reach the basic biological and social goals. They are experienced as privileges and punishments which facilitate or block the road to certain basic goals,” including the freedom to move about, to acquire and spend money, to have sex, to avoid physical punishment, to access education, and to participate in politics.<sup>112</sup> The lower caste, therefore, experienced the deprivations of caste as a series of punishments, which taught black people to learn caste

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 243-44.

behavior in order to avoid punishment.<sup>113</sup> Drawing from the IHR's emphasis on frustration and aggression, the authors portrayed the black youth as frustrated by the caste deprivations, and they saw such frustration as then translating into resentment and aggression towards whites.<sup>114</sup> Caste strictures, though, channeled most of this aggression into the form of verbal remarks and internal resentment. Still, the authors emphasized how black youth did not acquiesce to their subordination. Above all, the authors explained caste behavior as a rational and adaptive response to an oppressive environment that controlled black behavior through constant sanctions and punishments.

Davis and Dollard's approach of seeing caste as a system of controls was a useful one. First, it humanized individuals by explaining behaviors not as reflections of maladaptive, idiosyncratic characteristics, but as reasonable responses to discriminatory systems. Moreover, it explained how behavior stemmed from the power dynamics within immediate social situations, not simply from the stable "values" a person acquired from the larger culture. The authors thus put the onus on the differentiated system and the myriad social situations, not on the individual. Second, as Davis and the Gardners did in *Deep South*, Davis and Dollard described how caste controls were not monolithic but variable. In particular, caste controls did not govern economic matters as centrally as they dictated social and political ones, nor were they as powerful in urban communities as they were in rural ones.<sup>115</sup> In this way, their portrait of caste was not static, as some critics would maintain. Their system actually allowed room for variation and change over time, yet without ever losing sight of the racial hierarchy that remained central in American society. Finally, though focused on clarifying the larger social controls that governed behavior,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 247.

Davis and Dollard also emphasized individual agency and resistance in response to caste. They explained how “within the bounds of [the black youth’s] caste position he may adopt substitute modes of aggression toward whites,” such as “sabotage of his work (slowness, lack of punctuality, clumsiness), and the use of flattery, humor, secretiveness, ‘ignorance,’ and other behavior for outwitting white people,” which are all “learned at an early age.”<sup>116</sup> Here Davis’s own experiences with racial oppression and his knowledge of African-American culture put him a generation ahead of mainstream social science in understanding black life. Only by the 1960s and 1970s, when the new social history took root, did mainstream scholars begin to follow the lead of figures such as Davis.<sup>117</sup>

Using this type of analysis of caste and class as learning environments, then, Davis and Dollard spent the bulk of the book analyzing the life histories of eight black youths from different social classes. Their deployment of psychoanalysis was uneven and not particularly revealing, but their culture-and-personality orientation was compelling. Beginning with individual people, the authors managed to explain in a clear and convincing way the nature and origin of their personalities. For instance, they took an angry and abusive girl named Julia Wilson and analyzed her life experiences in order to explain her behavior and, ultimately, to humanize her.<sup>118</sup> Whereas most people who encountered someone as aggressive as Wilson would have been quick to condemn and despise her, the authors unpacked the deep traumas and difficulties at the root of her behavior. For example, they explained how Wilson experienced severe illness as a child, intense sibling rivalries and limited affection from her mother, a

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>117</sup> See, for example: Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974); Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (1974); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (1977).

<sup>118</sup> Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 23-42.

sweeping flood that destroyed her home, and devastating loss of family and friends at the hands of local violence.<sup>119</sup> Wilson thus learned early on to expect only pain from the world and to exploit others to secure her basic needs. The authors then tied such traumas to the stratifying systems of caste and class that created the conditions through which similar traumas were systematically reinforced and perpetuated for other youth just like Wilson. For instance, lower-class people had inadequate healthcare and thus more disease; they had more broken families owing to economic insecurity; they faced municipal neglect owing to their lack of political capital; and they encountered a police force indifferent to black-on-black crime as part of the segregation regime.<sup>120</sup> At the same time, the authors made clear how Julia's and the other youths' behaviors changed abruptly depending of the immediate social situation, such as during interviews with different people or on the streets with friends. Here the authors' social-psychological approach revealed the transience and adaptability of human behavior. In all of these ways, *Children of Bondage* was a powerfully environmentalist and humanist portrait of life in the face of terribly unjust social conditions.

The final chapter, "Social Class and School Learning," anticipated Davis's future work in education and revealed how his turn to the study of socialization and learning led naturally into that field. This chapter argued that "the goals of white-collar or professional occupation and of middle-class status which are at the end of the school route, are not made to appear valuable, near, or certain for the lower-class child."<sup>121</sup> Lower-class children thus performed poorly in school because education was not a realistic route to social success, as was made clear by the low educational achievement of lower-class parents and friends, and by the fact that lower-class

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 35-42.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 286.



families could not afford to subsidize the education of their children in later adolescence. At the same time, Davis and Dollard explained how schools were thoroughly middle-class institutions staffed by middle-class teachers who favored middle- and upper-class students. Middle-class teachers did not understand the more aggressive behaviors of lower-class pupils, and the teachers' class bias prompted them to stigmatize the lower-class student "on grounds of the 'ignorance' of his parents, the dialect which he speaks, the appearance of his clothes, and, very likely, the darkness of his skin."<sup>122</sup> So the punishment that lower-class children received in their early school years from both parents and teachers was not enough to cultivate and sustain long-term learning. The lower-class child needed also to be rewarded for school performance. Above all, the authors understood these rewards as long-term ones in which students had to see education as a realistic avenue to social and career success. The caste-and-class systems, however, prevented lower-class children from securing these social rewards, thus instigating lower-class children to pursue the rewards that were attainable to them within the more violent lower-class world. All of these ideas would become central to Davis's later work at the University of Chicago.

### **The Dissemination and Reception of *Children of Bondage***

Originally published in 1940, *Children of Bondage* had by 1948 sold over 13,000 copies.<sup>123</sup> This number only scratched the surface regarding the influence of the book and the wider circulation of its ideas. As part of the AYC project, the American Council on Education

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>123</sup> Allison Davis, "Author Questionnaire," Nov. 16, 1950, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 165, Folder 3, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

did much to promote the resulting case studies and to distribute them to universities, teachers, social workers, government agencies, and the general public.<sup>124</sup> Robert L. Sutherland, the director of the AYC project, published *Color, Class, and Personality* in 1942. This book was “a summary volume coordinating the results and recommendations of the four main area reports,” and it thus served to further transmit Davis and Dollard’s ideas.<sup>125</sup> As planned, the AYC also promoted the four major case studies through a series of brochures and other forms of advertising. Moreover, though the “principle purpose” of the black youth project was “research, not implementation,” Sutherland and others spelled out recommendations for practical efforts to implement their ideas.<sup>126</sup> For instance, Sutherland called for a grant from the AYC for a “demonstration project” in the form of two guidance centers for black youth, which would aim to provide viable institutional support for black youth as well as to disseminate the findings of the researchers.<sup>127</sup>

Davis himself did much to publicize *Children of Bondage* and its ideas. First, in addition to an incalculable number of informal conversations and speeches, Davis gave several important presentations at key venues. Some of these included Yale’s Institute of Human Relations and the annual meetings of the Progressive Education Association, the American Sociological Society, and the National Conference on Family Relations.<sup>128</sup> Second, as a doctoral student in anthropology at the University of Chicago from 1939 to 1942, Davis also presented to and otherwise participated in the Child Development Study group organized by Professor Daniel

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<sup>124</sup> “A Proposal for a Study of the Racial Factor in the Personality Development of Negro Youth,” Dec. 9, 1937, Box 558, Folder 5965, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

<sup>125</sup> “Report on the Negro Youth Study,” Box 558, Folder 5965, Series 1, page 4, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., page 3.

<sup>127</sup> Robert L. Sutherland’s “A Recommendation for a Demonstration Project in the Personality Adjustment of Negro Youth”, Oct. 1939, Box 558, Folder 5962, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

<sup>128</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Box 406, Folder 5, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, Dec. 19, 1940.

Prescott. Davis recalled that this group was “very receptive to the method and theoretical framework” of *Children of Bondage*, and that “Professor Prescott feels that the approach should be presented to the people dealing with the practical problems of education who will meet with him next year.”<sup>129</sup> Third, Davis led special summer courses at Atlanta University in 1940, even briefly heading up that university’s Department of Education and serving as an editor of *Phylon*, the Atlanta-based journal of black history and culture. The courses he offered dealt with the region’s “social and economic problems...and their implications for teacher education.”<sup>130</sup> Finally, from 1940 to 1942, Davis served as a staff member of the Division on Child Development and Teacher Personnel of the American Council on Education, where he collaborated with important educationalists such as Margaret Mead and Kurt Lewin. All of these presentations and affiliations offered Davis opportunities to share his culture-and-personality ideas with other major scholars.

In addition to these efforts, Davis began publishing his ideas from *Children of Bondage* in various journals. In 1939, he distilled these ideas in an important special volume of the *Journal of Negro Education* that was focused on explaining the status of blacks within American life amid the sweeping changes stemming from the Depression and the New Deal.<sup>131</sup> Along with other leading black intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, E. Franklin Frazier, Ralph Bunche, and Charles S. Johnson, Davis contributed his insights into black life, which grew out of his social-anthropological and culture-and-personality training. Davis also published similar

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<sup>129</sup> Allison Davis to Fred McCuiston, Nov. 17, 1939, Box 558, Folder 5962, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

<sup>130</sup> Fred McCuiston to Allison Davis, Dec. 4, 1939, Box 558, Folder 5962, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

<sup>131</sup> Allison Davis, “The Socialization of the American Negro Child and Adolescent,” *Journal of Negro Education* 8, The Present and Future Position of the Negro in the American Social Order (July 1939): 264-74.

ideas in two major journals: the *American Sociological Review* and *Scientific Monthly*.<sup>132</sup> Both journals reached wide audiences within social science. At the same time, the Society for Research in Child Development selected Davis as a contributor to a sourcebook on child development.<sup>133</sup> Davis's essay, "Child Training and Social Class," grew directly out of a chapter in *Children of Bondage*. Of course, all of Davis's work at the University of Chicago in the 1940s stemmed from the culture-and-personality research he had conducted with John Dollard, so in this way, the dissemination of *Children of Bondage* was inextricably bound with that later application, which I will discuss in later chapters.

While the broadest reception of Davis's culture-and-personality ideas will be addressed in later chapters, the more immediate reception of *Children of Bondage* itself warrants some attention. In general, the book was well-received. This warm reception extended beyond the scholars associated with Davis and Dollard at the IHR and the University of Chicago. Important figures such as Margaret Mead, Clyde Kluckhohn, and several professors of education at Ivy League schools were "quite enthusiastic."<sup>134</sup> In fact, in 1941 the book was "used as a text or required reading at about thirty institutions, including Yale, Harvard, Columbia, Stanford, California, Cornell, Illinois, Chicago, Mt. Holyoke, and a large number of teachers' colleges."<sup>135</sup> Robert Havighurst said it had "sparkle" beyond that of the other AYC monographs and other

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<sup>132</sup> Allison Davis, "American Status Systems and the Socialization of a Child," *American Sociological Review* 6 (June 1941): 345-56; Allison Davis, "Racial Status and Personality Development," *Scientific Monthly* 57 (October 1943): 354-62.

<sup>133</sup> Allison Davis, "Child Training and Social Class," in *Child Behavior and Development*, by R. G. Barker, J. S. Kounin, and H. F. Wright (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1943); Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, Nov. 17, 1941, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>134</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, Oct. 29, 1940, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>135</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, Nov. 17, 1941, Box 406, Folder 5.

social-science books in general.<sup>136</sup> Edwin Embree, whom Davis kept closely informed about the reception of the book, gave it a glowing review in *The Survey* and wrote to Davis:

I thank you for the copy of *Children of Bondage* which I have read with boundless enthusiasm – really boundless, for I did not find any part of it which did not exceed my expectations and which did not illumine the whole difficult subject with which you are dealing. I am the more impressed because in general these psychoanalytic and behaviorist approaches are confused in thought and written in a hopeless jargon. You have used English clearly and beautifully, and you have outlined most difficult vistas in a way that makes them understandable to the layman and profoundly interesting to those who have had some experience with these concepts.<sup>137</sup>

Indeed, Embree was so pleased with Davis's ability to draw from diverse esoteric theories in a clear and productive way that he tried to secure for Davis an additional Rosenwald fellowship to complete his training in psychoanalysis. Embree was convinced that Davis was "likely to become one of the really important social students of the next twenty years, especially in that realm which attacks social problems from the psychological viewpoint."<sup>138</sup> He thus led an apparently unsuccessful effort to subsidize such training, which Davis was eager to undergo.

Reviews in academic journals were sometimes more critical, though still generally positive. One criticism centered on Davis and Dollard's social-class schema, which most reviewers agreed had not yet been empirically established, and hence was problematic.<sup>139</sup> Of course, Davis and Dollard knew this, and they chose to rely on the soon-to-be published Yankee

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<sup>136</sup> Robert Havighurst to Robert Sutherland, Oct. 7, 1940, Box 558, Folder 5965, Series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

<sup>137</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Edwin Embree to Allison Davis, Sept. 18, 1940, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>138</sup> Despite Embree's efforts, it appears that Davis never did undergo this psychoanalytic training. Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Edwin Embree to Will Alexander, Charles S. Johnson, Raymond Paty, and Henry Allen Moe, Nov. 14, 1940, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>139</sup> See No Author Listed, review of *Children of Bondage*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Journal of Educational Sociology* 15 (September 1941): 62; Warren M. Banner, review of *Children of Bondage*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Opportunity* 18 (October 1940): 317-19; and Guy B. Johnson, review of *Children of Bondage*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *The Negro Caravan* by Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis and Ulysses Lee, *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* by Richard Wright and Edwin Rosskam, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880* by Alrutheus Ambush Tayler, and *Gullah: Negro Life in the Carolina Sea Islands* by Mason Crum, *Social Forces* 20 (May 1942): 511.

City volumes along with *Deep South* to show the validity of their caste-and-class approach. A second and related criticism was the limited methods the authors employed—essentially only interviews, combined with some personality and intelligence tests. As Max Meenes wrote in the *Journal of Negro Education*, this heavy reliance on interviewing allowed the analysts to select the material that suited their interpretation and ignore what did not.<sup>140</sup> A third and anticipated criticism related to the nature of Davis and Dollard’s integration of sociological and psychological theories. Several reviewers critiqued the authors’ ability to combine the different theories into a comprehensive, convincing scientific approach. In the *American Journal of Psychology*, for instance, Wayne Dennis argued that the book represented a sociological framework “touched...up with Freudianism and some terminology from conditioned response theory” that ultimately “failed to improve the product.”<sup>141</sup> Davis and Dollard, of course, understood that their pioneering interdisciplinary efforts were not perfect, and that they would encounter resistance from scholars positioned more squarely within one discipline, but they believed these efforts were nonetheless vital.<sup>142</sup>

A fourth criticism centered not on the integration of the theories but on the nature of the theories themselves. In particular, many reviewers criticized the authors’ use of Freudian and behaviorist psychology. Psychoanalysis remained marginal within social science because of its unempirical, even unscientific, nature. The reviews in *Phylon* and the *American Journal of Sociology* critiqued the ability of this type of science to elucidate social behavior. The *AJS* review also rightly pointed out the “disjunctive” use of Freudian theory, some of which seemed

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<sup>140</sup> Max Meenes, review of *Children of Bondage*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Journal of Negro Education* 10 (January 1941): 88.

<sup>141</sup> Wayne Dennis, review of *Children of Bondage*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *American Journal of Psychology* 55 (January 1942): 149.

<sup>142</sup> Richard Sutherland, “Comments on Criticisms of Davis-Dollard Typoscript,” 1939, Allison Davis Papers, Box 32, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

“almost dragged in by the heels.”<sup>143</sup> Moreover, echoing Edward Sapir’s earlier critiques, several reviewers argued that Davis and Dollard’s social psychology was overly simplistic. As Max Meenes wrote, “To explain learning in a complex social situation by the simple principles of conditioning, under reward and punishment, appears over simplified.”<sup>144</sup> In the *American Sociological Review*, Donald C. Marsh similarly stated that “Sociologists may take some issue with Davis’ and Dollard’s fundamental thesis of frustration-aggression as an oversimplification of a more complex social situation.”<sup>145</sup>

Finally, some reviewers critiqued other elements of Davis and Dollard’s interpretations in *Children of Bondage*. One was the authors’ overemphasis on class over race. One reviewer wrote: “The book is somewhat disappointing if one expects it to shed much light on the impact of race upon a minority group.”<sup>146</sup> Davis and Dollard knew that their emphasis on class challenged conventional wisdom and would hence be controversial, but they stood by their interpretation because they came to believe that class shaped the socialization patterns of youths more than race. Race, in their minds, was most consequential in simply determining the class position of African Americans. Throughout his life, Davis had come to see the parallels in class training across the color line, and he could no doubt often identify more with the behaviors and values of middle-class whites than with lower-class blacks. Still, the ideological context of interwar America played an important role in Davis’s decision to emphasize class more than race. During his fieldwork in Natchez, he came to see how effectively the white upper classes

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<sup>143</sup> Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr., review of *Negro Youth at the Crossways: Their Personality Development in the Middle States*, by E. Franklin Frazier, and *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South* by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *American Journal of Sociology* 47 (July 1941): 114; O. W. E., review of *Children of Bondage*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Phylon* 2 (1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 1941): 91.

<sup>144</sup> Meenes, review of *Children of Bondage*, 88.

<sup>145</sup> Donald C. Marsh, review of *Children of Bondage*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *American Sociological Review* 7 (August 1942): 575.

<sup>146</sup> Unnamed Author, review of *Children of Bondage*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Journal of Educational Sociology* 15 (September 1941): 62.

played up racial differences to divide lower-class workers of all races. In 1935, he told Horace Mann Bond that “We must utterly abandon racialism,” for “This thing we’re in is a class alignment” and “‘Race’ or ‘caste’ is the wedge.”<sup>147</sup> This type of reasoning helps to explain why Davis focused this book and much of the rest of his career on class stratification over racial stratification, and it sheds light on why he moved away from his earlier interests in the African influences on African-American culture. That subject quickly became too susceptible to racist appropriation.

Other reviewers critiqued the authors’ emphasis on the environment over the individual. As the reviewer in *Phylon* put it: “The setting is considered so completely, that, at times, the personality itself seems either neglected or of secondary importance.”<sup>148</sup> Naturally, Davis and Dollard’s emphasis on the environment over the individual, as with class over caste, was a conscious revision to the racialist and hereditarian dogmas of the day. Stricken from that context, though, many commentators saw the book as overemphasizing class and the wider environment.

Nonetheless, the reviewers also had much praise for *Children of Bondage*. In fact, what some critics saw as weak points, others saw as strengths. For example, one review in the *American Journal of Sociology* praised the environmentalism of the book, calling it “one of the best things we have in American sociological literature” in showing how one’s “position in the social system is a powerful determiner of personality.”<sup>149</sup> Indeed, this comment underscored one of the major achievements of Davis and Dollard’s brand of culture-and-personality. Essentially,

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<sup>147</sup> Davis, Allison, 1934., 1935. Letter from Allison Davis to Horace Mann Bond. May 17, 1935. Horace Mann Bond Papers (MS 411). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>148</sup> O. W. E., review of *Children of Bondage*, 92.

<sup>149</sup> Cottrell, Jr., review of *Negro Youth at the Crossways* and *Children of Bondage*, 114.



they added sociological emphases on social stratification to a larger culture-and-personality school far more focused on holistic, value-based cultures and the individuals within them. This inserted a vital material edge into culture-and-personality, and it made the Davis-Dollard collaboration distinct and important. In a 1948 anthology, Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry Murray drew directly from Davis and Dollard's work to map out one of four types of culture-and-personality studies. In addition to "constitutional determinants," "role determinants," and "situational determinants," Kluckhohn and Murray conceptualized "group determinants" in the development of personality.<sup>150</sup> Here they referred not merely to holistic national and ethnic cultures as analyzed by cultural anthropologists, but also to a person's position within the social structure itself as articulated by social anthropologists such as Davis. Indeed, they included two of Davis's articles on this subject, demonstrating his importance in culture-and-personality theorizing.<sup>151</sup>

Many reviewers also understood the value of the authors' interdisciplinary efforts and saw *Children of Bondage* as an important early contribution to such scholarship. Donald C. Marsh wrote, "The fundamental importance of the study lies in its attempt to add something to the knowledge of factors involved in the socializing process no matter what racial or nativity group is considered."<sup>152</sup> Wayne Dennis praised the authors' clear explication of the diverse theories, while another reviewer applauded Davis and Dollard's "significant illustration of the contribution which sociology has to make to education."<sup>153</sup> Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr. similarly

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<sup>150</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry A. Murray, eds., *Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), xviii.

<sup>151</sup> Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, "Social Class and Color Differences in Child-Rearing," in *Personality in Nature*, 308-320; and Allison Davis, "American Status Systems and the Socialization of the Child," in *Personality in Nature*, 567-76.

<sup>152</sup> Marsh, review of *Children of Bondage*, 575.

<sup>153</sup> Dennis, review of *Children of Bondage*, 149; Unnamed Author, review of *Children of Bondage*, 62.

stated that the book “indicates that some fruitful cross-fertilization is underway” and that “the products will be increasingly important as time goes on.”<sup>154</sup>

Almost universally, reviewers praised the book’s readability and its compelling case studies. Cottrell, in the *American Journal of Sociology*, said it best. Whereas the case studies of other AYC books were “stilted and depersonalized,” Davis and Dollard’s reflected “flesh-and-blood personalities.”<sup>155</sup> The popular press echoed this sentiment. For instance, the *Washington, D.C. Star* called *Children of Bondage* “An intensely human book” that “achieves color unrivaled by fiction,” while the *Washington, D.C. News* wrote of it: “The authors...have combined sociology and psychology to produce in this volume a stirring human document as well as a study of scientific and social importance.”<sup>156</sup> Discerning the significance of this humanizing portrait, Cottrell stated: “One very important result of this method of presentation is that the reader, almost in spite of himself, identifies with the person in their experiences and develops a real appreciation for the way the subjects view their world of caste and class.”<sup>157</sup> This was precisely the authors’ intention. By humanizing the subjects and allowing especially white readers to identify with types of people with whom they would rarely if ever ordinarily identify, and by clarifying the social structures unfairly circumscribing their lives, Davis and Dollard helped to effect social change.

Black journals largely echoed the reviews of the white-dominated mainstream journals. Three exceptions are notable. One was the excessively negative review in *Opportunity*. The reviewer here considered the book a total failure, even calling for the omission of all of the case

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<sup>154</sup> Cottrell, Jr., review of *Negro Youth at the Crossways* and *Children of Bondage*,” 113.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>156</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, Nov. 17, 1941, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>157</sup> Cottrell, Jr., review of *Negro Youth at the Crossways* and *Children of Bondage*, 113.

studies, which comprised two-thirds of the book.<sup>158</sup> Davis conjectured that some personal dislike must have informed the unfair review, writing to Embree that “I don’t know whether the reviewer dislikes me or Dollard or the book worst – all three, I imagine!”<sup>159</sup>

The second exception was that black journals were more attuned to certain contributions of the book. Specifically, black scholars understood clearly the politics of representation in the United States that continued to portray all black people monolithically. The reviewer in the *Journal of Negro History* thus praised the book for “blast[ing] the absurdity of the ‘convenient ideology that all colored people are identical.’”<sup>160</sup> Indeed, the effort to explode stereotypes and to convey the complexity of the black experience was one that Davis, Frazier, and other black intellectuals had been engaged in for many years. Notably, that same reviewer also praised the realism of Davis and Dollard’s representation.<sup>161</sup> As he had aimed to do with his Negro-stoical literature, Davis refused to shrink from the realities of black life and instead focused on portraying those realities in a way that would explain and humanize black people.

The final exception is perhaps even more revealing. W. M. Brewer’s review in the *Journal of Negro History* rightly focused on the book’s implications for black people and for black social life. However, Brewer seemed only to have selectively read the book, and he said nothing at all about its emphasis on class. He focused instead on the debilitating effects of caste on the personalities of black youth. Brewer used the review to talk about the “cancerous effects of caste,” and how “caste barriers preclude...normal personality development,” producing

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<sup>158</sup> Banner, review of *Children of Bondage*, 319.

<sup>159</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, Oct. 29, 1940, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>160</sup> W. M. Brewer, review of *Children of Bondage*, by Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Journal of Negro History* 26 (January 1941): 113.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

instead “dwarfed characters and personalities.”<sup>162</sup> This rhetoric of “damage” would become prevalent in the postwar era and in the discourse surrounding *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), but contemporaries such as Brewer adulterated the principal arguments in *Children of Bondage* in order to classify it within that larger discourse.<sup>163</sup> Later social commentators and historians have followed contemporaries’ misreading of the book and have similarly classified it as part of the “damage” literature, later embodied by the publication in 1951 of Abram Kardiner’s and Lionel Ovesey’s *The Mark of Oppression*.<sup>164</sup>

In truth, *Children of Bondage* emphasized black youth as struggling under the weight of caste-and-class oppression, but not as permanently damaged by it. The heart of Davis and Dollard’s analysis actually emphasized the contingent nature of black social behavior. They implied that changing the environment—or the reward-and-punishment regime—would change individual behavior. Later summing up this underlying philosophy, Davis wrote: “We must always remember that man is a learner. No matter how deprived he may have been, he still possesses the highest of human capacities, the ability to improve himself by learning. Given the opportunity, he will learn his way up and out.”<sup>165</sup> The behaviorist learning framework within *Children of Bondage* thus lent itself to a portrait of black youth who were resilient and adaptable to varying conditions. To be sure, the book’s psychoanalytic emphasis on early childhood

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 113-14.

<sup>163</sup> Social scientists, of course, were not the only ones beginning to confront and debate ideas of racism and damage. Richard Wright’s searing novels, *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), and Sidney Meyer’s classic documentary film, *The Quiet One* (1948), which included commentary by James Agee, explored these same issues in other arenas.

<sup>164</sup> Robert K. Merton, “What It Costs to Be Denied,” *New York Times*, May 20, 1951; Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 86-87; John P. Jackson, Jr., *Social Scientists for Social Justice: Making the Case against Segregation* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 36. Daryl Michael Scott, on the other hand, makes clear in his authoritative study of damage imagery in American social science that *Children of Bondage* generally eschewed such emphases on damage. See Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 35-36, 53-54.

<sup>165</sup> Allison Davis, “The Culture of the Slum,” Allison Davis Papers, Box 77, Folder 18, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

socialization at times ran counter to this portrait by pointing to the enduring consequences of that training.<sup>166</sup> The contradiction here was inherent in the application of Freudian and behaviorist theories, which were partly incompatible. Nevertheless, the authors in the end applied psychoanalysis unevenly, and sometimes barely at all. Their behaviorist orientation, on the other hand, was the stronger message of the book, and it pointed to black youths' adaptability and their potential for change.

Allison Davis's involvement with the AYC project that resulted in *Children of Bondage* marked a fundamental turning point in his intellectual development and in his career trajectory. By seeking out and collaborating with John Dollard, Davis became part of the culture-and-personality school that scrutinized the processes of socialization in order to discern the relationship between the social structure and the individual. By combining Davis's social anthropology with Dollard's social psychology, the two scholars developed a pioneering brand of culture-and-personality thought, which they articulated most clearly in their social-science classic, *Children of Bondage*. Specifically, their injection of analyses of social stratification in the form of class and caste added an important material dimension to culture-and-personality studies. And yet, the book that emerged from this interdisciplinary collaboration was far more than merely a pioneering work of social science. It was a compelling document that humanized black youth whom most white Americans typically feared or despised. Since it was disseminated widely to white Americans outside of social science for more than three decades,

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<sup>166</sup> Alice O'Connor has made this point about *Children of Bondage*. Her claim, though, that Davis and Dollard's book "anticipated a more general trend in the literature by assessing psychological damage as a measure of social disadvantage, and by tracing its origins to the lower-class family," misses the larger implication of the book, which pointed not to damage but to the potential for change and adaptability. See O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 65.

the book's legacy is also part of a much larger American effort to fight race and class inequality and to understand individual behavior as framed by stratified social structures.

Having developed a sophisticated and innovative theoretical approach, Davis now looked to apply that approach to new fields. In the fall of 1939, he continued his leave from Dillard to complete his Ph.D. in anthropology under Lloyd Warner at the University of Chicago. At Chicago, he began associating closely with educationalists, who found his anthropological approach to learning useful in transforming educational practice. Indeed, important professors at Chicago understood the valuable contribution Davis was making to their interdisciplinary research program, so by the fall of 1941, as Davis neared graduation, they began looking for ways to hire him as faculty. However, they understood that appointing a black man as a professor at a predominantly white university was essentially unprecedented, and would provoke resistance. Nevertheless, as race relations shifted contours in the wartime context, other racial progressives allied with faculty at Chicago to mount a quiet, little-known campaign to appoint Davis. The story of that campaign and its consequences for both Davis's career and American race relations more broadly comes next.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Bending the Academic Color Line**

*In the present proposal we have an unusual chance to make possible a demonstration of friendly and effective cooperation between white professors and a brilliant and able Negro scholar and thus conspicuously to raise the ceiling of Negro opportunity.<sup>1</sup>*

--- Edwin Embree

In the fall of 1939, fresh off his fellowship at Yale's Institute of Human Relations, Davis enrolled in the University of Chicago's doctoral program in anthropology. Although he already had significant fieldwork experience, journal publications, and two books in the works, he knew the importance of having the Ph.D. As a black scholar, the credential was especially important for his work to be taken seriously within the academic community. And because Harvard apparently refused to award a second master's degree to students at that time, Davis's M.A. in English disqualified him from securing an M.A. in anthropology, even though he had completed all requirements for the degree.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Davis pursued doctoral work in order to free himself up from a heavy teaching and service load at Dillard. Taking three classes at Chicago afforded him more time to write up his previous research findings than teaching five classes at Dillard. Consequently, through the support of two more Rosenwald Fellowships, he followed his Harvard mentor, Lloyd Warner, to Chicago.

Also in 1939, Allison and Elizabeth welcomed their first child, Allison Stubbs Davis, Jr., to the family. Two years later, as Davis neared completion of his doctorate, the Davises had a second son, Gordon Jamison Davis. These were exciting times for the young Davis family, but

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<sup>1</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Edwin Embree to Edgar B. Stern, February 24, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>2</sup> L. S. Mayo to William A. Davis, September 16, 1931, Allison Davis Records, Harvard Alumni Directory, Harvard University Archives.

they were also filled with stress and uncertainty. The Davises did not know exactly where Allison would find work, or how much it would pay, or how suitable an environment it would be for raising children. In 1941, it was simply impossible to predict that the Davises would be able to settle in Chicago as their permanent home, and that Allison would be hired full-time at the University of Chicago, where he would spend the better part of the next four decades as a professor. Such an appointment of a black professor at a major white university was essentially without precedent at the time. For this reason, Davis's appointment to Chicago's Department of Education was immensely important, not merely in the annals of Davis family history, but for American history as well.

So in 1942, Allison Davis, a newly minted Ph.D., secured a three-year contract as an assistant professor of education at the University of Chicago. In his authoritative study, James Anderson stated that Davis's appointment made him "the first African American scholar of record to serve with full status in a predominantly white university in America."<sup>3</sup> This accomplishment was thus a civil-rights landmark in an era when similar desegregation landmarks were on the horizon—in the defense industries, in professional baseball, in education, in the courts, and in other arenas. The story of this little-known but significant case of desegregation makes clear how the efforts of individual actors and institutions coalesced with a rapidly changing American society to make this contract possible. At the same time, it exposes those

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<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to establish with certainty who was the first black person with a full-time appointment at a white university, and it depends partly upon how this particularly milestone is defined and measured. Anderson himself acknowledges that Julian H. Lewis became an assistant professor of pathology at the University of Chicago in 1922, but he argues that Lewis's was only a "nominal appointment" in which his primary employment was through Provident Hospital in Chicago. Anderson thus concludes that "All evidence points to Allison Davis's appointment in 1941 as the starting date for the employment of African American scholars in regular faculty positions at northern white universities." I follow Anderson's thinking here. Regardless, it is not of particular consequence whether or not it turns out that another black scholar was actually the first according to these criteria. James D. Anderson, "Race, Meritocracy, and the American Academy during the Immediate Post-World War II Era," *History of Education Quarterly* 33 (Summer 1993): 154.



forces that resisted Davis's appointment and constrained his career and life in Chicago in the 1940s. Davis's affiliation with Chicago was central to the trajectory of his research agenda, and it allowed his work to gain an authority and an audience that he never could have reached at a black college. This case of desegregation not only deepens our understanding of Allison Davis as a man and a scholar, but also of the modern civil rights movement more broadly. Specifically, Davis's appointment at Chicago reveals the importance of academia as a multifaceted terrain for racial change, including both scholarly production and physical racial integration. Perhaps even more, though, the appointment exposes the limits of the desegregation movement amid a society built upon racial inequality. Individual examples of desegregation such as Davis's were notable achievements, but they exposed the glaring continuity of racial affairs. Such cases, in other words, bent rather than broke the color line.

### **A Changing Racial Climate**

When Edwin Embree and Ralph Tyler moved to challenge the academic color line and appoint Allison Davis to the faculty of the University of Chicago in 1941, they were responding to an American society that was in flux and that was newly ripe for racial change. During the 1930s, environmentalist interpretations of racial difference such as Davis's *Deep South* and *Children of Bondage* displaced hereditarian ones in social science.<sup>4</sup> In American culture more broadly, too, the leveling effects of the Great Depression impressed upon many Americans the power of the environment to shape their destinies. The ideological justifications for racial inequality thus began slowly to break down.

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<sup>4</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 190-99.

Political movements aided this process, as leftists made racism a public issue as never before. Beginning in the 1920s, but erupting with the Scottsboro Boys case in 1931 and the Angelo Herndon case in 1932, the Communist Party USA linked racism to capitalist exploitation in a way that indicted America's entire economic and political system.<sup>5</sup> Communists argued that racism grew out of class exploitation, and they publicized how this translated into a permanently subordinate black nation-within-a-nation where Southerners denied African Americans basic economic, political, social, and legal justice. Communists united with socialists and liberals in a broad-based "popular front" movement that fought broadly for workers' rights and economic justice.<sup>6</sup> These movements helped to break down the color line in labor organizations, because many leftists perceived the potential power of interracial labor organizing and rejected the racial divisions within labor as products of capitalists' attempts to divide labor. That an interracial labor union such as the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union could form even in the Deep South in 1934 demonstrated the extent to which economic inequalities could challenge racial divisions.<sup>7</sup> All of these efforts eventually pushed the government to pass the National Labor Relations Act (1935), which put the federal government behind the drive to unionize workers into interracial, industrial unions as led by the Congress of Industrial Organizations, a federation of industrial labor unions.

International events served to further weaken the power of America's color line. The rise of fascism abroad, especially in the form of Nazism, gave racism a bad name and exposed the horrifying consequences of a racist ideology taken to its logical conclusion. As Hitler,

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<sup>5</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 106-33.

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Studies of the African Diaspora: The Work and Reflections of St. Clair Drake," in *Against All Odds: Scholars Who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Benjamin P. Bowser and Louis Kushnick (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 93.

Mussolini, and Franco embodied the main enemies of the day, the black press was particularly successful in linking domestic racism and lynch law with their activities.<sup>8</sup> At the time, Americans eagerly sought to differentiate their nation from fascism abroad and to locate a native culture that could resist its expansion both at home and overseas.<sup>9</sup> Many began extolling the virtues of America's democratic culture, to which *de jure* racial subordination became increasingly anathema, and to which headlines in black newspapers such as "Seven Days in Open Lifeboat Hell, but Seaman Finds U.S. Jim Crow Worse" became newly unsettling.<sup>10</sup> The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin provided Americans with a model for the type of racial egalitarianism that their country could embody. In those Games, many Americans cheered their own African-American sprinter, Jesse Owens, against the Aryan runners, and by doing so they cheered their own society for being more racially tolerant than Nazi Germany.

As the global crisis escalated, the conflagration that would later be dubbed World War II further changed the racial situation at home. Even before U.S. entry into the war in December 1941, wartime mobilization continued the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to urban centers across the country—a process begun during World War I and accelerated during the Great Depression. The Great Migration made the "Negro problem" a national rather than a Southern issue, and it provided a sufficiently powerful base for blacks to force political and economic concessions from the government, labor unions, and other institutions.<sup>11</sup> The most significant concession resulted from the March on Washington Movement led by A. Philip Randolph. As African Americans became increasingly organized, and as the U.S. government

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<sup>8</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 157-200.

<sup>9</sup> See Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> "Seven Days in Open Lifeboat Hell, but Seaman Finds U.S. Jim Crow Worse," *Afro-American*, August 1, 1943.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Robert Reed, *The Rise of Chicago's Black Metropolis, 1920-1929* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 9-33.

sought to tout its democratic values and downplay its country's racial subjugation, the Movement was able to pressure President Franklin D. Roosevelt into desegregating the defense industries in July 1941.<sup>12</sup> This victory was monumental not only in opening up hundreds of thousands of good jobs for African Americans, but also in symbolizing the growing power and resolve among blacks to secure racial justice through mass protest and other means. Meanwhile, the NAACP had won a major victory in *Gaines v. Missouri* (1938), in which the Supreme Court ordered the admission of a black man into the University of Missouri's law school.

Other practical realities combined with such progressive racial change to make education a particularly suitable field for desegregation efforts. First, there was a teacher shortage in higher education. Total college enrollment swelled 529% from 1900 to 1940, even though the larger population increased only 73%.<sup>13</sup> The postwar boom and the G.I. Bill would only exacerbate the teacher shortage, creating an urgent need to recruit scholars to fill positions within the rapidly expanding universities. Second, African Americans had gained graduate educations at unprecedented levels. "By the mid-1940s," according to James Anderson, "there were approximately 3,000 African Americans holding master's degrees and more than 550 with Ph.D.s," many of which were from the most elite American universities.<sup>14</sup> With such practical realities accompanying progressive trends in racial mores, new opportunities for desegregation emerged.

## Selecting a Test Case

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<sup>12</sup> James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, "Race, Meritocracy, and the American Academy," 157.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Edwin Embree was ever mindful of these larger changes in education and race relations, and he had, in fact, played an important role in fostering them. After becoming president of the newly reorganized Rosenwald Fund in 1928, Embree focused that foundation's monies on improving interracial relations and providing increased opportunities for African Americans. He expanded the Fund's program beyond building schoolhouses in the South to also include "aid to colleges for teacher training and Negro leadership, fellowships for promising Negroes and whites, research on Negro health and medical services, book subsidies for county and school libraries, appropriations for specific social studies, and contributions to agencies and individuals working in the field of race relations."<sup>15</sup> The fellowship program for outstanding black individuals was particularly important to him, for he believed in a "Talented Tenth" model of top-down change in which exceptional individuals could demonstrate the equal capabilities of African Americans and thus foment far-reaching racial change.<sup>16</sup> The list of recipients of Rosenwald fellowships is extensive, including such luminaries as W. E. B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Charles S. Johnson, Charles Drew, and many more. Such fellowships, furthermore, were instrumental in allowing talented but poor blacks to reach their goals, including Charles Drew's pioneering work on blood plasma, which saved thousands of lives.<sup>17</sup> One of the most enduring testaments to the significance of these Rosenwald fellowships was the sheer number of past fellows, including Kenneth and Mamie Clark, who played major roles in the NAACP's landmark desegregation case, *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Gilbert Belles, "Scope Note," 1968.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Perkins, *Edwin Rogers Embree: The Julius Rosenwald Fund Foundation Philanthropy and American Race Relations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 106.

<sup>17</sup> Edwin R. Embree and Julia Waxman, *Investment in People: The Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 134.

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Perkins, "Welcome Consequences and Fulfilled Promise: Julius Rosenwald Fellows and 'Brown v. Board of Education,'" *Journal of Negro Education* 72 (Summer 2003): 344-56.

Allison Davis emerged as one of Embree's favorite Rosenwald fellows. After Lloyd Warner introduced the two men and helped Davis win his first Rosenwald fellowship for study abroad in 1932, Davis and Embree maintained a close professional relationship.<sup>19</sup> Embree supported Davis's work as the head of the social sciences division at Dillard University from 1935 to 1939, and he helped Davis win another Rosenwald fellowship to subsidize his doctoral work at the University of Chicago from 1939 to 1941. Embree and the Fund also approved a grant to St. Clair Drake to work on the *Deep South* project, and they awarded a fellowship to Davis's younger brother, John Aubrey Davis, for doctoral work in political science at Columbia.<sup>20</sup> Once Allison Davis arrived at the University of Chicago in 1939, Embree's relationship with him grew even closer as they interacted personally, which was possible because the Rosenwald Fund's headquarters was located near the University of Chicago. Embree was thoroughly impressed with both Davis's collegiality and his professional achievements, and he understood that Davis's success was a powerful illustration of the success of the Rosenwald Fund's fellowship program. The fact that Davis had published two major social-science books (*Deep South* and *Children of Bondage*), had an impeccable record at institutions such as Harvard, the London School of Economics, Yale, and the University of Chicago, had contributed to Gunnar Myrdal's and the Carnegie Foundation's authoritative study of American race relations, and had proven himself to be an affable colleague and inspiring teacher at Dillard, Atlanta University, and the University of Chicago all made him an ideal candidate for desegregating

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<sup>19</sup> The correspondence between Davis and Embree demonstrates the closeness of the relationship and the mutual respect the two men had for one another. See Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>20</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, St. Clair Drake Fellowship File, Box 409, Folder 1; Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, John Aubrey Davis Fellowship File, Box 406, Folder 4.

academia. Yet the question of exactly how and where the Rosenwald Fund could help to challenge the academic color line remained unclear.

Conditions at the University of Chicago, however, soon coalesced to make the appointment of the first full-time black faculty member at a white university a real possibility. While completing his doctoral work at Chicago from 1939 to 1942, Davis became closely involved with faculty in the anthropology, sociology, psychology, and education departments. He quickly won their approval, and the Department of Education even appointed him as a lecturer in 1940, making him the first black teacher at Chicago.<sup>21</sup> In that role, he demonstrated his ability to be an effective teacher of both white and black students.<sup>22</sup> Chicago's faculty on the interdisciplinary Committee on Human Development, in particular, prized Davis's ability to offer a social-anthropological analysis of the processes of socialization. Ralph Tyler, the new chair of the Department of Education, was looking for a faculty member with this perspective in order to conduct research into the problems of the rural and urban poor.<sup>23</sup> With faculty such as Lloyd Warner, Robert Havighurst, and Robert Redfield all recommending Davis, Tyler began work in 1941 to appoint him at Chicago.

As Tyler was well aware, however, appointing an African American to the faculty would be no simple matter, even with faculty support. He thus began consulting with Embree and the Rosenwald Fund to consider how to go about securing the appointment.<sup>24</sup> Embree not only

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<sup>21</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis Resume, 1941, Box 406, Folder 5; Michael R. Hillis, "Allison Davis and the Study of Race, Social Class, and Schooling," *Journal of Negro Education* 64 (Winter 1995): 34.

<sup>22</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Edwin Embree to Edgar B. Stern, February 24, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>23</sup> Morris Funder, *Educating America: How Ralph W. Tyler Taught America to Teach* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 44.

<sup>24</sup> It is not clear who first approached whom regarding Davis's appointment to Chicago. Alfred Perkins in his book on Embree argues that it was Embree's idea. Morris Funder in his book on Tyler suggests that it was Tyler who

found Davis to be an ideal candidate; he also believed the University of Chicago was an ideal school because it was so prestigious, because it had close ties to the Rosenwald Fund, and because it was also private and thus not as subject to political considerations as public schools.<sup>25</sup> Having found the right candidate and the right school, Embree joined with Tyler in trying to bring the appointment to fruition. In this case, Embree perceived “an unusual chance to make possible a demonstration of friendly and effective cooperation between white professors and a brilliant and able Negro scholar and thus conspicuously to raise the ceiling of Negro opportunity.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the appointment would be a breakthrough, for, prior to Davis, African Americans had only secured temporary or part-time positions in white universities across the country. Jim Crow in the South and institutional racism in the North had ensured that result.

### **The Fight for the Appointment**

Near the end of 1941, then, the Rosenwald Fund began working closely with faculty at Chicago to appoint Davis. Lessing Rosenwald, the son of Julius Rosenwald and a trustee of the Rosenwald Fund, wrote to the president of the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins, regarding “the propriety of a grant by the Fund to the University for Allison Davis.”<sup>27</sup> Lessing Rosenwald made clear to Hutchins his desire that the University appoint Davis. The fact that the

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approached Embree. The question is actually rather insignificant, since it is clear that both parties were of like minds on the issue, and Chicago faculty had a close and fluid relationship with the Rosenwald Fund. The idea probably generated organically among these men.

<sup>25</sup> Perkins, *Edwin Rogers Embree*, 209

<sup>26</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Edwin Embree to Edgar B. Stern, February 24, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>27</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Robert M. Hutchins to Lessing Rosenwald, January 13, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.



school was such a beneficiary of the Fund's philanthropy was not lost on Hutchins, especially given the Fund's substantial gift to the university for its recent Fiftieth Anniversary Campaign.<sup>28</sup> Hutchins, for his part, was a longtime friend of Embree and a trustee on the Rosenwald Fund who observed that Davis's appointment was "an object that I admit is a good one."<sup>29</sup> Hutchins thus decided to back the Davis appointment and present it to the University's board of trustees, but he knew he had to tread carefully in order to orchestrate the move. Because of the controversy involved in appointing a black faculty member, Hutchins believed that the board of trustees might use the financial constraints imposed on the university by World War II as an excuse to reject the proposition. He thus wanted the Fund to subsidize the appointment in order "to present the matter squarely to the trustees on its merits, without the possibility of any discussion as to financing or other matters which might be used to avoid the issue."<sup>30</sup> With Embree and Lessing Rosenwald promising financial support, Hutchins presented the appointment and the board approved it, contingent upon the Rosenwald Fund's agreement to underwrite most of the costs.

The Rosenwald Fund's ability to subsidize Davis's appointment was jeopardized, however, when controversy arose among the Fund's board of trustees, which needed to approve the allocation of funds. One trustee in particular, Edward B. Stern, voiced his opposition and obstructed the process.<sup>31</sup> Stern was a wealthy businessman and philanthropist in New Orleans who had married one of Julius Rosenwald's daughters, Edith Rosenwald Sulzberger, and had

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.; Perkins, *Edwin Rogers Embree*, 209.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Edgar B. Stern to Edwin Embree, Feb 9, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

become active in African-American issues in the 1920s.<sup>32</sup> He served on the board of trustees of the Tuskegee Institute and was a member of the Committee on Interracial Cooperation, though his most significant philanthropic activities centered on his role at all-black Dillard University, where he served as president of the board of directors. Stern was a white Southern liberal who supported black uplift only within the framework of segregation, and so even though he gave generously of his time and money to support Dillard University for over thirty years, he was unwilling to support Davis's appointment at Chicago because it challenged segregation.<sup>33</sup>

Stern's arguments against the Fund's support for Davis's appointment were revelatory about the attitudes of many Americans, especially white Southerners, towards desegregation. Stern called the move "a new and radical departure in racial relations" to promote a change that he believed had to come about "naturally" and not through Fund intervention.<sup>34</sup> Stern believed that segregation was natural, so he portrayed those who were attempting to undermine it as dangerous radicals. Stern also suggested that Davis was not qualified for the job, and that he was only being selected because he was black. Stern said, "the purpose of this move is to have Davis join the Chicago Faculty, not in spite of the fact that he is a Negro but because he is a Negro."<sup>35</sup> Ignoring the realities of racial discrimination that prevented even qualified blacks from gaining access to mainstream institutions, Stern evoked a sense of reverse discrimination in Davis's selection, all the while dismissing Davis's clear qualifications for the job according to all standard measures. Finally, Stern argued that the practical effects of Davis's appointment would

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<sup>32</sup> Joe M. Richardson, "A White New Orleans Philanthropist Helps Build a Black University," *Journal of Negro History* 82 (Summer 1997): 328-29.

<sup>33</sup> Richardson, "A White New Orleans Philanthropist Helps Build a Black University," 331-33.

<sup>34</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Edgar B. Stern to Edwin Embree, Feb 10, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

actually be counterproductive and deleterious to race relations in the U.S. Rather than demonstrating the ability of African Americans to serve as valuable scholars in white universities, Stern contended that the Fund's subsidy of Davis would only demonstrate the power of the Fund over the University of Chicago, which could not afford to reject the offer because of the University's financial dependence on the Fund. The fallout from the move, Stern claimed, would be to undermine public support for the Fund and jeopardize its ability to carry out its other programs, such as building schools in the South. In a way that was clearly rationalizing his segregationist stance, he concluded that Davis and other black scholars would in reality do more good for their race by holding positions in black colleges.

Stern succeeded in preventing the Fund's immediate approval of the subsidy and in halting any decision-making until the next board meeting, which was two months later in April 1942.<sup>36</sup> He also succeeded in rallying other opposition, including that of Adele Levy, another of Julius Rosenwald's five children, who was "inclined to agree with Mr. Stern against the appointment of Mr. Davis to the University of Chicago Faculty."<sup>37</sup> Still, Stern and Levy were in the minority, and their opposition only further galvanized Embree to secure the subsidy.

Embree immediately began undermining Stern's objection to the board of trustees, calling it "grievously wrong."<sup>38</sup> In a letter to Stern, Embree took issue with Stern's central point that the appointment would be good only if it occurred naturally from the university and not with Fund support. Embree first rejected Stern's premise and explained how the idea of the appointment did originate naturally from within the University of Chicago, where faculty from

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Cross Reference Record, Feb. 9, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>38</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Edwin Embree to the Trustees of the Rosenwald Fund, Feb. 9, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

the anthropology, sociology, and education departments all supported it. He thus made the argument that the only obstacle was financial given the wartime context. This was not entirely correct, but he knew that Stern would read any opposition to the appointment not as racism to be confronted, but as evidence of the need to let the situation resolve itself on its own. Embree then argued on principle, however, that it was the distinct and important role of foundations to foment positive social change. He wrote, “The whole purpose of foundations is to bring about higher standards and wiser practices than would occur in the normal course of events. In some cases foundations start movements that might not otherwise get started at all. In all cases they hasten these movements.”<sup>39</sup> He carried Stern’s argument to its logical conclusion. If the Fund should not intervene in this case, then it should not intervene in any case, including building schools in the South, because those activities were also not occurring “naturally.” In the end, Embree did not have to convince most of the trustees, who included racial progressives such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Charles S. Johnson, because most of them supported the appointment.

Even Howard Odum supported the appointment, and in doing so he revealed as much about the state of race relations in the United States as did Stern in his objection. Like Stern, Odum was a gradualist on the race question, and he supported increased economic and educational opportunities for African Americans only within the framework of segregation.<sup>40</sup> With the onset of World War II, however, he began to change his position. He explained his evolving mindset in a letter to Embree:

More and more it must be clear that this great field of race relations and what we call the problem of the Negro in American life is no longer merely a southern problem. It is a

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<sup>39</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Edwin Embree to Edgar B. Stern, February 24, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>40</sup> Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 97.

national problem; it is more specifically what we call a regional-national problem, which means that not only the South, but other regions, working through our broader principles and practices of American democracy, must cooperate, not merely in fine statements, but in making practical ways and means available to implement the thing we are talking about. It will mean a great deal to the Negro and to the nation at large to have a major university say to the world that it is putting into practice and into administrative channels procedures whereby this opportunity for participation in American professional life may become real. For the new generation of southerners who are working toward an increasingly larger participation of the Negro in cultural and economic life, such a move would clear up a situation which results in the common assertion: 'Why should we expect southern universities to do more when universities in other regions do less?'<sup>41</sup>

The immense social changes wrought by the Depression and the war clearly shaped Odum's position. He saw how the war further made race relations a national issue, and he observed the growing political power of African Americans, who began mounting a "Double V" campaign—victory against fascism at home and abroad—during the war. In this context, he discerned the importance of offering blacks avenues to participate in mainstream American life and to break with segregation. Amid a growing and more radical black civil rights movement, suddenly the appointment of an esteemed black professor at a white university no longer seemed so challenging. In fact, as Odum saw it, the appointment could serve to defuse black militancy and prevent more radical changes within American race relations.

With men such as Odum now supporting the appointment, the Rosenwald Fund's board of trustees finally agreed in April 1942 to subsidize two thirds of Davis's salary for his three-year contract as an assistant professor of education at Chicago.<sup>42</sup> With the subsidy in place, Chicago officially appointed Davis in that same month. One hurdle had been surmounted. The fact, though, that Chicago appointed Davis to the Department of Education rather than to the

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<sup>41</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Howard Odum to Edwin Embree, March 12, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>42</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Docket from the Rosenwald Fund Board Meeting, April 10, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

Department of Anthropology, the field of his Ph.D., warrants further consideration. Scholars have not fully understood this disciplinary shift. Michael Hillis, for example, portrays Davis's move to education as more ambiguous and serendipitous than it was.<sup>43</sup> Bruce Kuklick attributes the change to an entrenched disciplinary racism within mainstream social science.<sup>44</sup> Such racism, he argues, barred Davis from joining Chicago's anthropology department. Education, he maintains, was a less esteemed field and hence more open to accepting a black faculty member. Kuklick thus implies that Davis's disciplinary shift stemmed mainly from his desire to gain employment at Chicago in whatever way possible. Though Kuklick may be right that there was more entrenched racism within anthropology, both interpretations miss how Davis's turn to education was a logical outgrowth of his intellectual development. Davis's initial graduate studies and fieldwork were in social anthropology, but by 1935 he was already involved in the culture-and-personality school, which combined anthropology, psychology, and psychiatry.<sup>45</sup> His focus on the processes of socialization led him logically into the field of education, which he participated in as a graduate student at Chicago and as a staff member of the Division of Child Development of the American Council on Education. Davis even briefly accepted a position as head of the Department of Education at Atlanta University before taking the position at Chicago.<sup>46</sup> Davis's appointment as a professor of education at Chicago, then, was logical, predictable, and more than a product of disciplinary racism.

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<sup>43</sup> Michael R. Hillis, "Allison Davis and the Study of Race, Social Class, and Schooling," *Journal of Negro Education* 64 (Winter 1995): 34.

<sup>44</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *Black Philosopher, White Academy: The Career of William Fontaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 84.

<sup>45</sup> For a concise overview of the culture-and-personality school, see Joanne Meyerowitz, "'How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives': Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Thought," *Journal of American History* 96 (March 2010): 1057-1084.

<sup>46</sup> "Biographical Note," Guide to the Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

## Being Tested at Chicago

Gaining Davis's initial appointment into Chicago's interdisciplinary Department of Education, however, was only the beginning of the integration process. The success of this "demonstration" project depended above all on Davis's ability to succeed while at Chicago. This was not easy given the increased pressure, disproportionate expectations, and outright racism Davis encountered. In terms of outright racism, Davis was, for instance, barred from the faculty Quadrangle Club—where most of the faculty regularly ate lunch—for his first six years at Chicago.<sup>47</sup> He was also subject to racism within the larger community, where real estate agents denied him housing in the Kenwood neighborhood where many Chicago professors resided.<sup>48</sup> Not until 1956, which was several years after the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) that racially restricted covenants were unconstitutional, did the Davises finally move into the Kenwood neighborhood.<sup>49</sup> Like the other 350,000 African Americans packed into Chicago's black belt on the Southside, Davis and his family also faced local discrimination and de facto segregation in employment, housing, medical services, financing, entertainment, and education.<sup>50</sup> Both of his sons, owing to the light skin color that made their racial status ambiguous, faced the cruel realities of getting assaulted by both whites and blacks who misidentified them.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, racism affected Davis's ability to carry out his research projects. For example, white administrators in the Southwest refused to help Davis in his study

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<sup>47</sup> Morris Finder, "Davis, Allison," *American National Biography Online*, <http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-01164.html> (accessed October 27, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> The JBHE Foundation, "The Talented Black Scholars Whom No White University Would Hire," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 58 (Winter 2007/2008): 81.

<sup>49</sup> Gwenda Blair, "In Traditional Chicago, The Politics of Fitting In," *New York Times*, November 6, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Enoch P. Waters, *American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press* (Chicago: Path Press, 1987), 69-73.

<sup>51</sup> Elisabeth Bumiller, "Lincoln Center Homecoming for Jazz Lover," *New York Times*, August 21, 1998; Blair, "In Traditional Chicago."

of the acculturation of minority peoples in that region. They reasoned that “it would be like playing with dynamite if a Negro were to undertake such a study in New Mexico as you suggest,” because “minority groups are extremely sensitive.”<sup>52</sup>

These early years at Chicago were particularly difficult for Davis. To be sure, Chicago did have its thrills for African Americans. Davis’s son, Gordon Davis, later recalled his father’s love of black culture and music, for which Chicago was a mecca. He remembered how “his father once decreed that Louis Armstrong playing ‘West End Blues’ ‘may be the greatest thing American civilization has ever produced.’”<sup>53</sup> Still, the blatant racial exclusion took its toll, though perhaps not as much as the more pervasive, pedestrian racism Davis faced. Davis had to deal with colleagues, staff, and local residents who thought he did not belong there, and who believed that he was getting special treatment as a black person, as Edward Stern had asserted. Davis confided to Ralph Tyler, “In my kind of a situation, it is not easy to feel even moderately secure, and especially is this tension present when the minority-group member seeks to ‘compete.’ ... I am absolutely certain that had it not been for your encouragement, I would have had an unhappy, instead of a very satisfying life here.”<sup>54</sup> Sympathetic colleagues such as Tyler, Redfield, and Warner helped Davis cope, but he still had to deal with a university that was tepid about his presence. Shortly before his appointment, he received a letter from the University stating that

the University cannot assume responsibility for Mr. Davis’s personal happiness and his social treatment. It is quite probable that some members of the Quadrangle Club would object to his being invited to membership, and that other types of embarrassing personal-

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<sup>52</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Lloyd S. Tireman to Allison Davis, Nov. 10, 1943, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>53</sup> Bumiller, “Lincoln Center Homecoming for Jazz Lover.”

<sup>54</sup> Allison Davis to Ralph Tyler, May 1948, Tyler, Ralph W., Papers, Box 8, Folder 6, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.



social incidents will occur. The University can assume only responsibility for his professional treatment.<sup>55</sup>

In an outside world constantly reinforcing his sense of racial difference and racial inferiority, and in an institution less than fully supportive of him, Davis had to continually fight just to maintain a sense of dignity.

Racism further affected Davis's career by warping the very standards of success used to measure his achievements. A white scholar at Chicago with Davis's extensive publication record, his successful teaching and service efforts, and his involvement in innovative research projects sponsored by major foundations would have been considered a huge success and would have faced no difficulty in gaining tenure. This was not so with Davis. Despite his achievements, he had to fight to get reappointed at Chicago after the three-year Rosenwald subsidy expired. Chicago again refused to reappoint him in 1945 without external funding, citing financial duress from the war. Once more Ralph Tyler, Davis himself, and others intervened to push the Rosenwald Fund to further support Davis financially, now by playing up his many accomplishments at Chicago.<sup>56</sup>

### **Making the Appointment a Success**

Luckily, playing up Davis's achievements was not difficult, for Davis was exceptionally productive in his early years at Chicago. Between 1942 and 1945, he published or had accepted for publication eight scholarly articles to go along with his two highly regarded books; he taught

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<sup>55</sup> "Appointing of Dr. Allison Davis to the University Faculty." Letter to William Allison Davis, December 5, 1941, MS, Chicago, IL, 60637, <http://vimeo.com/37019456> (accessed September 6, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Ralph Tyler to Edwin Embree, February 19, 1945 and March 29, 1945, Allison Davis to Edwin Embree, Feb. 13, 1945, Box 182, Folder 6.

courses that were well-attended by students of all racial groups; he collaborated on and led interdisciplinary research projects that won foundation support from the General Education Board and the Rosenwald Fund; and he consulted with local schools and teachers on how to practically implement his ideas regarding socialization and the school.<sup>57</sup> As a result, Chicago agreed to hire Davis for another three-year appointment as long as the Fund contributed one-third of the expenses for Davis's salary and work.<sup>58</sup> With this arrangement worked out, Davis was able to stay on at Chicago and continue his impressive research, teaching, and consulting.

By 1947, when Davis was up for tenure, the national civil rights scene looked very different. A series of lynchings of African Americans in the South in 1946 garnered national attention and sparked organized protest.<sup>59</sup> President Harry Truman responded by forming the President's Commission on Civil Rights, which presented its report, *To Secure These Rights*, in 1947. The report made clear how liberals had in only a few short years come to adopt an ambitious civil rights program as part of their agenda. The report called for anti-lynching legislation, an end to poll taxes, desegregation of the armed forces, a permanent Fair Employment Practice Act, the abolition of restrictive covenants in housing, the general "elimination of segregation, based on race, color, creed, or national origins, from American life," and many other significant reforms.<sup>60</sup> Recognizing the increasing political clout of African Americans and the prevailing civil rights sentiments among liberals, Truman endorsed the report's recommendations in his successful bid for the presidency in 1948. Congress effectively

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<sup>57</sup> For more details, and for the listing of Davis's publications, see Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Ralph Tyler to Edwin Embree, March 29, 1945, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>58</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Dorothy A. Elvidge to Robert Hutchins, April 27, 1945, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>59</sup> Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience*, 274-75.

<sup>60</sup> President's Commission on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), 157, 160, 162, 166, 169.

stymied most civil rights reforms during Truman's next term, but there was a clear mobilization for progressive changes in American race relations. In such a new context, Chicago had few qualms about awarding Davis tenure in 1947 and promoting him to full professor in 1948—both of which were racial landmarks.

Because Davis became part of a wealthy, esteemed, and well-connected institution, his appointment at Chicago had far-reaching consequences. Davis knew well that his appointment “made it possible for me to do things which I could not have done at a small black college.”<sup>61</sup> The next few chapters will track the nature and impact of Davis's work at Chicago, but it is clear that the larger foundation support, lighter teaching load, and the greater authority of scholarship produced at Chicago all combined to extend the reach of Davis's progressive ideas on social stratification, socialization, and the school.

Davis's appointment at Chicago also had other significant effects. As was the main aim, Davis demonstrated to white colleagues, white students, and to the nation as a whole that an African American was capable of being a first-rate scholar who could collaborate effectively with whites. As Davis had done throughout his life, he managed to win white support for his abilities. For a man who forged close friendships with white Southerners at Williams College, it was not necessarily surprising that Davis was also an effective teacher of white Southern students.<sup>62</sup> The significance, though, of a major research university endowing a black man with such a prominent position, which carried with it such authority, was considerable. Entering white students now had an example of a brilliant, articulate, caring black teacher to belie the

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<sup>61</sup> Allison Davis quoted in Barbara P. Turner, “Profile of Allison Davis; The Man and His Research,” *Education at Chicago 2* (Autumn 1972): 24.

<sup>62</sup> On Davis as a successful teacher of southern white students, see Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Ralph Tyler to Edwin Embree, March 29, 1945, Box 182, Folder 6.

prevailing racist and stereotypical thinking of the day. That white colleagues could have a black colleague they liked and respected, and that white students could have a black teacher and mentor they admired, were both important, if difficult to quantify, forces for progressive social change.<sup>63</sup> The fact that three of Davis's students took up his ideas and headed education departments across the country testifies to his influence as a teacher and a mentor.<sup>64</sup>

The effect of Davis's appointment on the black community was at least as significant. Davis's prestigious post at Chicago symbolized the racial change that was occurring across the U.S. and which opened up new possibilities for black people's lives. Surprisingly, the black press did not make much of the initial appointment itself. Both the *Chicago Defender* and the *Afro-American*, for example, buried their brief announcements on the seventh and ninth page of their papers, and they said nothing of the racial barrier that Davis had crossed.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, Davis's position was a visible one to African Americans across the country who saw it as a sign of hope and inspiration. The black press, including the *Chicago Defender*, the *Chicago Bee*, the *Afro American*, and other organs, did in fact ensure this visibility by publicizing Davis's achievements to a wide black audience.<sup>66</sup> African Americans wrote to Davis conveying their pride in his accomplishments. For instance, a black teacher from South Carolina named Jesse E. Weston wrote to Davis: "I learned that you are the only colored Professor at Chicago University which I am very proud of the fact. I am contacting you because I am colored. I have been

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<sup>63</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Edwin Embree to Edgar B. Stern, February 24, 1942, Box 182, Folder 6.

<sup>64</sup> Dallas L. Browne, "Across Class and Culture: Allison Davis and His Works," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, eds. Ira E. Harrison and Faye Harrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 173.

<sup>65</sup> "Davis Made Professor at U. of C.," *Chicago Defender*, June 13, 1942; "Davis Gets Teaching Post at U. of Chicago," *Afro-American*, June 20, 1942.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance: "Goes to Yale," *Afro American*, February 11, 1939; Editorial, "Testing the I.Q. of the Test Takers," *Chicago Defender*, July 7, 1945; "U. Of C. Project To Devise IQ Test Fair To All Groups," *Chicago Defender*, July 14, 1945; "Davis to Revise Intelligence Tests," *Chicago Bee*, July 7, 1945.

reading about you in the Afro American, and I feel that if you can help me that you will.”<sup>67</sup>

Weston went on to ask that Davis help him get into graduate school at Chicago, thus showing how Davis’s position was not only a symbolic achievement for blacks but also a tangible one that could be used to advance blacks’ practical interests in education and other fields. Davis’s desegregating appointment at Chicago was therefore significant to African Americans both as a symbol and as a practical tool to transform social science and help more African Americans gain access to higher education. In all of these ways, Davis’s integrating appointment reflected the significance of academia as both a physical and intellectual terrain of the larger black freedom struggle.

### **The Limits on Racial Change**

Despite both the practical and symbolic significance of Davis’s appointment, his story highlights the continuity in race relations as much as the change. To be sure, Davis’s appointment established an important precedent that some progressive universities soon followed. Fred G. Wale, the director of education at the Rosenwald Fund, sought to build upon the success of the Davis appointment to push more Northern universities to hire the hundreds of highly-qualified black academics looking for work in the North.<sup>68</sup> From 1945 to 1947, he corresponded with six hundred university presidents, providing them with a list of hundreds of exceptionally-talented black scholars that included the likes of Robert Weaver, E. Franklin Frazier, Charles Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Horace Cayton, W. Montague Cobb, Ralph Bunche,

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<sup>67</sup> Jesse E. Weston to Allison Davis, September 16, 1945, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>68</sup> Fred G. Wale, “Chosen for Ability,” *Atlantic Monthly* 180 (July 1947): 81-85.

Abram Harris, Rayford Logan, John Hope Franklin, and many more. A few presidents were actively interested in hiring black candidates, so between 1945 and 1946, twenty-three blacks on the list secured full-time employment at northern white universities, while twenty-seven more gained temporary appointments.<sup>69</sup> Roosevelt University in Chicago led the way here, hiring four full-time black scholars, including Davis's former student and colleague, St. Clair Drake.

Nevertheless, the real legacy of Wales's campaign was to highlight the institutional racism within the academy that defeated efforts to appoint black scholars. Of the six hundred university presidents that Wales contacted, four hundred of them refused to even reply to him. Of the two hundred who did reply, most of them professed principles of meritocracy while at the same time refusing to practice them in the case of black scholars. Because they could not challenge the black scholars' scholastic achievements, they justified these scholars' exclusion on the basis of criteria such as "'institutional needs,' 'geography,' 'population,' and 'local community attitudes.'"<sup>70</sup> Almost all of them ignored Wales's request to hire black scholars, although many of them boasted of their institutions' hiring of black people in nonacademic roles, such as library assistants. In the end, few appointments were made, yet university presidents had managed to affirm meritocratic principles while actually legitimating the traditional exclusion of black people from the academy.

A generation later, Allison Davis and John Hope Franklin exposed how little had actually changed within higher education. They observed how those few blacks who managed to gain faculty positions at white universities continued to be kept part-time or without tenure.<sup>71</sup> As with

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<sup>69</sup> Anderson, "Race, Meritocracy, and the American Academy," 173.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>71</sup> Allison Davis quoted in Turner, "Profile of Allison Davis," 23-24; John Hope Franklin, "The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar," in *Soon, One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes, 1940-1962*, ed. Herbert Hill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 71.

the case of desegregation in other arenas, the process occurred slowly and intermittently, and it sparked organized opposition. In the field of K-12 education, for instance, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board* (1954) that *de jure* segregation was unconstitutional, yet desegregation did not proceed until the social protest of the civil rights movement forced integration. Even then, the decision could not touch educational segregation by residence and income, nor could it prevent white flight to private schools, which became new vehicles for race and class segregation.<sup>72</sup> Within higher education, it was not until the 1970s that the Black Power movement forced academia to substantively change by hiring more black professors and by offering courses in African Studies and African-American history.<sup>73</sup> Even so, fifty years after Davis's initial appointment, the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* found that the University of Chicago had only nine black professors with tenure out of a total of 719 tenured faculty, and that such underrepresentation was the national norm.<sup>74</sup>

Those African Americans such as Davis who managed to gain faculty positions in higher education, furthermore, remained constrained by the larger institutional racism of the universities and the foundations, which set limits on the type of scholarship they could undertake and disseminate. The fact that the foundations and universities froze out black radicals such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Oliver Cox, who in spite of their brilliance struggled to gain an audience for their work and even to maintain employment at black colleges, shows the limits placed on all black scholars.<sup>75</sup> African Americans such as Davis who managed to enter the mainstream did so with

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<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>73</sup> Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

<sup>74</sup> The JBHE Foundation, "Black Heritage Award for an African-American Educator," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 3 (Spring 1994): 23.

<sup>75</sup> On Du Bois, see Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience*, 25-27. On Cox, see Christopher A. McAuley, *The Mind of Oliver C. Cox* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

clear constraints. They had to muffle their radicalism, play up their objectivity, make close alliances with authoritative white faculty and foundation officers, and choose research projects that the foundations deemed permissible.<sup>76</sup>

Davis managed to negotiate these constraints well, and his progressive ideas on education and social stratification reached a wide audience. Davis encountered racism, though, in having his contributions subsumed under those of the white scholars with whom he typically co-authored his major books and articles. Despite being the senior author on many of these works, including *Children of Bondage* and *Father of the Man*, Davis was denied the credit he deserved because of institutional racism. Here is an example of the double bind that Davis and other African-American scholars faced: blacks needed the approval of powerful white scholars for their work to gain authority, but the process of collaboration resulted in black scholars' contributions being slighted. Davis ended up choosing such collaboration in order to reach a wider audience and to effect change, if in less conspicuous ways, at powerful institutions such as the University of Chicago. The result, however, is that few people then or now have been aware of his important contributions. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's failure to mention Davis with regard to black scholars' contributions to the "culture of poverty" debates of the 1960s, as St. Clair Drake pointed out, clearly signaled how Davis's many contributions to the study of lower-class culture did not establish him as an authority in this field, even though he was clearly an expert.<sup>77</sup> As Drake stated it, "I am led to wonder if co-authorship with white scholars may not work to the disadvantage of their Negro colleagues."<sup>78</sup> Of course, even allying himself with authoritative

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<sup>76</sup> For an excellent study of the dilemmas of the black scholar in this period, see Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

<sup>77</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Poverty, Sociology, and Finks," Excerpt from *Commentary* magazine. Allison Davis Papers, Box 1, Folder 12, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



white scholars at Chicago could not prevent his ideas from being marginalized within a postwar context in which notions of class seemed increasingly anathema to many Americans, and in which the testing boom marginalized Davis's and the Committee on Human Development's ideas on alternative conceptions of intelligence.<sup>79</sup> Davis's iconoclasm and the racial politics of the academy thus help to explain why Davis the pioneer has faded from view.

Ultimately, then, though Davis's desegregating appointment was an important barometer of and progenitor for social change, it did little to overcome the institutional racism within the academy or the wider society. Indeed, it was especially the larger class inequalities within the U.S. that militated against more fundamental change. Even while Davis was able to work at Chicago, persistent race and class inequalities combined to ensure that "most blacks in Chicago could aspire to do nothing higher than a job working as a Pullman porter or a civil servant in the post office."<sup>80</sup> Class barriers thus prevented African Americans from gaining access to higher education even when racial barriers began to erode.

In the end, the story of Davis's appointment at Chicago offers a revealing case study of desegregation and the anatomy of social change. As a confluence of international and domestic factors relating to the Great Depression, international fascism, and World War II challenged elements of America's racial hierarchy, new space was created for progressive forces to foment racial change. Liberal individuals and institutions with access to social power, such as Edwin Embree of the Rosenwald Fund and Ralph Tyler of the University of Chicago, seized upon this new space to bend the academic color line within higher education. With the type of careful

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<sup>79</sup> Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Educational Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 156-57.

<sup>80</sup> JBHE Foundation, "Black Heritage Award for an African-American Educator," 23.

planning and strategic maneuvering that foreshadowed Branch Rickey's staging of Jackie Robinson's entry into professional baseball, Embree and Tyler were successful in securing Davis's appointment at Chicago and in galvanizing larger racial change.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the degree to which they had to methodically plan the maneuver, the extent of the resistance they faced, the discrimination Davis had to deal with at Chicago, and the glacial pace with which other full-time black appointments occurred, all reveal the power of entrenched interests and the limits on social change. Furthermore, Davis was exceptional, and hence he was an exception that proved the general rule of racial inequality. A close look at his appointment at Chicago reveals less the relentless march forward of racial justice in the twentieth-century United States, and more the fact that individual achievement is a poor measure of group success. Davis spent his career elucidating the systems of racial and class oppression that delimited the lives of people of color and of the poor. He, more than others, would have wanted people to see his story as a reminder of the tenacity of racial inequality even amid progressive racial change.

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<sup>81</sup> For the careful staging of Jackie Robinson's entry into professional baseball, see Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

## **Chapter 8**

### **Class Cultures and Applied Anthropology at Chicago**

*Because the slum individual is usually responding to a different physical, economic, and cultural reality from that in which the middle-class individual is trained, the slum individual's habits and values also must be different if they are to be realistic. The behavior which we regard as 'delinquent' or 'shiftless' or 'unmotivated' in slum groups is usually a perfectly realistic, adaptive, and – in slum life – respectable response to reality.<sup>1</sup>*

--- Allison Davis

Davis's affiliation with the University of Chicago transformed his career. The association began while Davis was a doctoral student in anthropology, but even then Davis was quickly viewed as more of a colleague than a student. From 1939 to 1942, Davis's coursework rounded out his formal training in anthropology, but more consequentially, he became involved most closely with the educationalists at Chicago. Chicago was renowned for its interdisciplinary social-scientific research programs, and educationalists there drew eclectically from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and other fields. So even as a graduate student, Davis's extensive and innovative training in both social anthropology and culture-and-personality positioned him to contribute as much as any faculty member to the research programs in the education department and in interdisciplinary programs such as the Committee on Human Development. Indeed, faculty members at Chicago realized this, so they worked hard to orchestrate Davis's faculty appointment in 1942, immediately after his graduation. As a result of their success, Davis joined an impressive group of scholars, including Lloyd Warner, Ralph Tyler, Robert Redfield, Robert Havighurst, and many others, to develop pioneering research on human development and education.

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<sup>1</sup> Allison Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 10-11.

Davis's contributions to the fields of human development and education were part of the burgeoning field of applied anthropology. In the 1940s, Davis brought his culture-and-personality framework to bear on a wide variety of issues within human development, relating to the family, the workplace, the ethnic group, and the school. Davis's distinct contributions to these fields grew logically out of the culture-and-personality framework he devised alongside John Dollard and others at Yale's IHR. Specifically, as in *Children of Bondage*, Davis explored how racial caste and, above all, class shaped the socialization and learning patterns of Americans. In this period, he began to refer to distinct "class cultures" as shorthand for the vast differences between the learning environments of the lower class and the middle and upper classes. He worked with other colleagues at Chicago to apply this rich framework to an array of institutions, all with an eye to providing practical guidance for reforms, such as how parents should rear children, how employers should treat workers, and how teachers should instruct students. The primary audience for this work was thus middle-class, but the aims were more radical. Davis wanted middle-class Americans not merely to understand the existence of a rigid class system in the United States and how it created significant cultural differences, but also to question their own class biases and to discern the strength and humanity within lower-class Americans. He had his work cut out for him, for most Americans in the postwar period began to see class as an irrelevant framework in the United States. Once again swimming against the tide, Davis offered an important countervailing voice within American society, though his iconoclasm would also help to marginalize his contributions.

### **The University of Chicago**

Davis's doctoral training in anthropology at Chicago was not especially formative, but it was still consequential. Davis's primary fields were "ethnology, sociology, and recent anthropological literature."<sup>2</sup> He felt at home in a department still pervaded by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalist social anthropology, and he combined that tradition with insights from American cultural anthropology, especially as practiced by Robert Redfield. Redfield wrote of Davis: "No other Negro student who has ever worked with me has to so great a degree aroused my respect or created confidence in his ability."<sup>3</sup> Redfield's influence, as well as the general milieu at the University of Chicago, encouraged Davis to begin employing the concept of "culture" in his work.<sup>4</sup> Of course, social scientists in all fields began adopting the Boasian concept of culture in these years, prompting economist Stuart Chase to call it "the foundation stone of the social sciences" in 1948.<sup>5</sup> Whereas in *Children of Bondage* Davis avoided invoking the culture concept and referred instead to diffuse concepts such as "mores" and "modes" and "ways," by the early 1940s he began to use it in reference to "class cultures." At the same time, Davis also revealed Redfield's influence in other ways, such as his growing interest in ethnic cultures, national cultures, and, above all, in the processes of acculturation,

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<sup>2</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis, Application for Fellowship Renewal, 1940, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>3</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Robert Redfield, Letter of Support for Allison Davis's Fellowship Renewal, 1940, Box 406, Folder 5.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in a methods course in cultural anthropology, Redfield exposed Davis to Margaret Mead's culture-and-personality emphases on socialization as well as Ruth Benedict's conception of a "culture-pattern," which used "culture" as the primary social structure. Allison Davis, "A Criticism of 'Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies,'" November 30, 1939, Allison Davis Papers, Box 12, Folder 8, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>5</sup> George W. Stocking, Jr., "The Scientific Reaction Against Cultural Anthropology, 1917-1920" in *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 300. The literature on the culture concept is voluminous. See, for example: A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1963); Richard E. Sykes, "American Studies and the Concept of Culture: A Theory and a Method," *American Quarterly* 15 (Summer 1963): 253-270; Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., "Clio and the Culture Concept: Some Impressions of a Changing Relationship in American Historiography," *Social Science Quarterly* 52 (September 1972): 297-320; Fred Matthews, "Social Scientists and the Culture Concept, 1930-1950: The Conflict Between Processual and Structural Approaches," *Sociological Theory* 7 (Spring 1989): 87-101.

whereby people learn the values and behaviors of a different culture. Here again Edward Sapir's influence within the culture-and-personality school was deep, for Redfield had first conceptualized the study of acculturation through the influence of Sapir and his study of Native Americans.<sup>6</sup>

Davis also sharpened his understanding of linguistics while a doctoral student at Chicago. In a linguistics course in the spring of 1940, he studied closely the works of Edward Sapir. In his final exam for that course, he wrote extensively about Sapir's ideas on language, especially relating to the sophistication of "primitive" language, which most scholars continued to see as simplistic and indicative of a less-civilized people.<sup>7</sup> Davis later employed Sapir's insights to critique intelligence tests in his *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*:

The late Edward Sapir is generally regarded by students of language as the most able comparative linguist of our times. Sapir denied explicitly that our so-called 'advanced' European languages really showed any greater complexity, or intellectual ability, than the languages of many primitive peoples. His scientific judgment is a necessary antidote to the almost universal academic views that facility with standard English is a mark of superior intelligence. Many American Indian languages are equally complex!<sup>8</sup>

Essentially, Davis applied Sapir's insights into the languages of primitive peoples to those of modern, marginalized groups. Davis was thus able to understand the languages of lower-class and lower-caste peoples as sophisticated, and as equal to all others. Ranking languages into hierarchies made no sense, Davis believed, for all languages were perfectly-suited to the needs to the people using them. Variations in form and style merely reflected the different environments in which languages developed.

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<sup>6</sup> Regna Darnell, *Edward Sapir: Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 303; Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville Herskovits, "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation," *American Anthropologist* 38 (Jan.-Mar. 1936): 149-52.

<sup>7</sup> Allison Davis, "Final Examination, Anthropology 228," Spring 1940, Allison Davis Papers, Box 11, Folder 14 Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, 83.

Still, Davis's doctoral coursework at Chicago was the least of his priorities. Davis already had a mature research agenda combining social anthropology, social psychology, and psychoanalysis. One wonders how Davis even found the time to complete his coursework, engaged as he was with his other research projects. In particular, he continued work on drafting *Deep South*, on promoting *Children of Bondage*, on devising his report to Gunnar Myrdal, on developing numerous articles based upon all of this research, and on working as a research associate in the Center for Child Development. He also held teaching appointments in the education departments of Chicago and Atlanta University, presented his research at numerous conferences and research institutions, and briefly edited the black journal *Phylon*, which W. E. B. Du Bois had founded at Atlanta University in 1940.<sup>9</sup>

In the end, Davis was most influenced by the "educationalists" at Chicago, including Daniel Prescott and Ralph Tyler. Davis collaborated with a wide range of social scientists to improve teacher education through the American Council on Education's Commission on Teacher Education.<sup>10</sup> Lloyd Warner wrote of Davis's involvement in this regard: "I hear very high reports of his contributions. I know they want him back. I believe he is doing a great deal of good on synthesizing the Chicago educationalist group to realizing the necessity of understanding the culture in which a school has to operate."<sup>11</sup> Davis found that his intellectual agenda fit well within the interdisciplinary environment at Chicago.

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<sup>9</sup> Davis planned a course in 1940 called "The Social Orientation of the Child," where he synthesized his interdisciplinary approach to the field of education. See Allison Davis, "Social Orientation of the Child, Course Outline, 1940," Allison Davis Papers, Box 15, Folder 3, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>10</sup> Special to the *New York Times*, "Educators Study Aids to Teachers: Meet at Chicago to Open 3 Year Collaboration Program To Improve Schools," *New York Times*, October 8, 1939.

<sup>11</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Lloyd Warner, Letter of Support for Allison Davis's Fellowship Renewal, 1940, Box 406, Folder 5.

Chicago's Department of Education had a long tradition of drawing from the social sciences. When Charles H. Judd became head of the Department in 1909, he worked to "dismantle [John] Dewey's edifice."<sup>12</sup> He moved the Department's focus away from teacher training and the laboratory schools, and he made education more "scientific" by establishing a graduate department that focused on research and drew faculty from the social sciences. When Ralph Tyler took over as head of the Department in 1938, he continued this mission. He reorganized the Committee on Child Development, enlarging it to the Committee on Human Development (CHD) and making it more interdisciplinary.<sup>13</sup> The CHD then drew from faculty and methodologies within anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, and other fields, thus ensuring that educational research at Chicago would be closely tied to the larger social order.<sup>14</sup>

Ralph Tyler had a long record of leading progressive efforts within education. He was a major player in the Progressive Education Association of the 1930s, which he used to broadcast the progressive research coming out of the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station. At the Iowa Station, Kurt Lewin and George Stoddard, for instance, demonstrated the role of the environment in shaping educational success and IQ scores.<sup>15</sup> Tyler also challenged traditional assumptions about educational purpose, pushing teachers to formulate teaching objectives and to use assessments to measure their own effectiveness rather than to measure their students' innate abilities or mere acquisition of information.<sup>16</sup> When Tyler left Ohio State and took over at Chicago, he began assembling a first-rate group of theorists to continue his liberal efforts. He

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 150-51.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the "second" Chicago School of Sociology and its interdisciplinary efforts in this period, see Gary Alan Fine, ed., *A Second Chicago School? The Development of a Postwar American Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Lagemann, 134-39.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 139-44.



brought in the like-minded Robert J. Havighurst of the General Education Board, and he sought out close collaboration with Lloyd Warner. After helping to secure Davis's appointment to the Department of Education in 1942, Tyler had, in Havighurst's recollection, assembled a "critical mass" of social scientists at Chicago ready to continue progressive trends within education.<sup>17</sup>

Much of the Department of Education's most important work during this era stemmed from its involvement with the interdisciplinary CHD. The CHD focused on two central questions: "(1) How does development of human beings take place? (2) What is a good environment for the favorable development of human beings?"<sup>18</sup> Its research program stressed studying individuals over long periods of time, examining the physical, mental, and social elements of human development, and emphasizing the social or environmental role as heavily as the other factors.<sup>19</sup> For empirical evidence on environmental influences, the CHD drew from comparative social-anthropological research on communities throughout the country. Specifically, they used Warner's "Yankee City" studies of Newburyport, Massachusetts; Davis's "Deep South" study of Natchez, Mississippi; and Buford Junker's "Hometown, USA" study of Dowagiac, Michigan. The CHD's goal, though, was to settle upon yet another community through which to intensively study all of the processes of human development. They selected the small town of Morris, Illinois, and their work there eventually produced a wide range of publications on various elements of human development.<sup>20</sup> In 1945, the CHD launched another

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<sup>17</sup> Robert J. Havighurst, "Chicago: 1935-1960," in "W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist," by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. Warner, W. Lloyd. Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, page 9.14, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph W. Tyler, "What is the Committee on Human Development?" Tyler, Ralph W., Papers, Box 11, Folder 12, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>19</sup> Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, "Human Development and Intergroup Education," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 18 (May 1945): 536.

<sup>20</sup> The list of books includes: W. Lloyd Warner, *Social Class in America* (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1949); W. Lloyd Warner, *Democracy in Jonesville* (New York: Harper, 1949); August de Belmont Hollingshead, *Elmtown's Youth: The Impact of Social Classes on Adolescents* (New York: J. Wiley, 1949); Robert J. Havighurst,

research program in the larger city of Rockford, Illinois to supplement work conducted in Chicago. Here again, University of Chicago faculty and graduate students conducted diverse studies, but as I will discuss in the next chapter, their work on intelligence testing was the most outstanding.

Warner's social-class framework guided all of the CHD's efforts.<sup>21</sup> In the early 1940s, faculty and students at Chicago began to clamor for a course on how the CHD's community research could inform the study of education. Warner and Havighurst began offering a seminar on social class and education called "Social Status and Learning." They eventually developed this material into an important book, *Who Shall Be Educated?* (1944). This book synthesized the CHD's interdisciplinary efforts as they applied to education. Above all, the authors rooted the school in the social order, and they analyzed the role it played as an institution in society. They argued that rather than being a major tool for social mobility, schools primarily reflected and reinforced the inequalities of the social-class system.<sup>22</sup> In the end, the book issued a passionate call for a more democratic and egalitarian educational system. It did this by way of focusing on the inherently undemocratic, unequal, and class-biased nature of the nation's schools.

Building from Warner's social-class schema, the authors mirrored Davis's thought in typing the schools as thoroughly middle-class institutions that discriminated against lower-class

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*Adolescent Character and Personality* (New York: J. Wiley, 1949); Robert J. Havighurst, et. al., *The American Veteran Back Home* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1951); Kenneth Eells, et. al., *Intelligence and Cultural Differences: A Study of Cultural Learning and Problem-Solving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Robert J. Havighurst, *Human Development and Education* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1953); Robert J. Havighurst and Ruth Albrecht, *Older People* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1953); Robert F. Peck and Robert J. Havighurst, *The Psychology of Character Development* (New York: J. Wiley, 1960); and Robert J. Havighurst, et. al., *Growing Up in River City* (New York: J. Wiley, 1962).

<sup>21</sup> Havighurst, "Chicago: 1935-1960," 9.14. See also: W. Lloyd Warner, "Memorandum for the Committee on Human Development," Tyler, Ralph W., Papers, Box 12, Folder 5, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>22</sup> W. Lloyd Warner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Martin B. Loeb, *Who Shall Be Educated? The Challenge of Unequal Opportunities* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), xi-xii.

pupils. They explained how curricula reinforced class differences by tracking middle- and upper-class students into academic and commercial courses, while placing lower-class students in vocational classes.<sup>23</sup> They argued that this occurred because teachers and school administrators were overwhelmingly middle-class themselves (over 95%), leading to a failure to appreciate the abilities and understand the behavior of lower-class students. The actual subject matter, moreover, was alien to the experiences of lower-class youth. Middle-class students were better prepared for the school's excessively academic focus on language, reading, and arithmetic because their parents taught them these skills early on and used more sophisticated language at home. Lower-class children thus started at an immediate disadvantage in gaining school skills, and teachers' use of class-biased intelligence tests, which measured class training more than native ability, only legitimated the consignment of lower-class students to vocational courses.<sup>24</sup> What is more, the behavior patterns of lower-class children were very different from, and often anathema to, middle-class standards. Rather than understanding the cultural environments of lower-class pupils that rewarded and modeled more aggressive behavior, teachers perceived these students' behaviors as reflective of innate deviant dispositions that were poorly suited for classroom learning.

## **The Family**

It was in the context of this rich intellectual environment at Chicago that Davis applied his own culture-and-personality framework to the family, the workplace, and the school. One of Davis's first research projects examined the family, which he understood to be the most

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 81.

important socializing agent because the infant and small child experienced it as a “microcosm of society.”<sup>25</sup> The family, he argued, “teaches the basic human behaviors and feelings,” and it “humanizes (or socializes) man by teaching him the cultural solutions to the basic problems of group living: how to survive as an individual, how to help perpetuate the group, how to win the group’s approval by learning its culture.”<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, social scientists knew little about the child-rearing practices of American parents, because they occurred within the privacy of the home. Indeed, Davis and Robert Havighurst called the family the “unknown country of human development.”<sup>27</sup>

Davis and Havighurst thus launched a study into the socialization patterns of families within Chicago. They analyzed both black and white middle- and lower-class families. Specifically, they interviewed 100 middle-class mothers, including 50 whites and 50 blacks, and 102 lower-class mothers, again split equally between white and black. The interviewers asked them 200 questions over the course of one and a half to three hours. They combined these interviews with “intensive study of children in their families” over the course of nine months to two years, where “these children were observed and studied in their homes.”<sup>28</sup> Essentially, this project was a clear extension of the *Children of Bondage* project, but with the novelty of studying white as well as black families, and being set in Chicago rather than the South.

Though it was not theoretically innovative, the family research did reveal how Davis brought his culture-and-personality framework to research at Chicago. Havighurst helped Davis continue his neo-Freudian investigations into early childhood socialization, which included

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<sup>25</sup> W. Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, *Father of the Man: How Your Child Gets His Personality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), 33.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

Davis's analysis of class as a type of culture where huge differences existed between the middle and lower classes. The book that emerged out of this project, *Father of the Man* (1947), was in fact most important for delineating vast social, economic, and cultural differences between those two classes.<sup>29</sup> Stating this strongly in an article in the *American Sociological Review*, Davis and Havighurst contended that "a detailed understanding of American social-class cultures and motivational patterns is now a *sine quo non*" of studying the child's socialization, for social class "determines not only the neighborhood in which he lives and the play-groups he will have, but also the basic cultural acts and goals toward which he will be trained."<sup>30</sup> They continued: "The social-class system maintains cultural, economic, and social barriers which prevent intimate social intermixture" across classes.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, since "human beings can learn their culture only *from other human beings*," these barriers create different cultures for people of different social classes.<sup>32</sup> The "*pivotal meaning of social class*," then, "is that it defines and systematizes different learning environments for children of different classes."<sup>33</sup>

The research findings of the family research lent further empirical support to many of Davis's earlier arguments. First, *Father of the Man* stressed class over race in dictating a particular child's socialization. As Ralph Tyler said to Edwin Embree, "This study shows that the methods of child rearing are more alike between whites and Negroes of the same class than they are between lower class and middle class families of the same race."<sup>34</sup> To be sure, the authors did find some differences along racial lines through their comparisons between the

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<sup>29</sup> See especially Chapter 3 of Davis and Havighurst's *Father of the Man*.

<sup>30</sup> Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, "Social Class and Color Differences in Child-Rearing," *American Sociological Review* 11 (December 1946): 699.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Ralph Tyler to Edwin Embree, March 29, 1945, Box 182, Folder 6.

socialization patterns of blacks and whites of the same class. Specifically, they found blacks to be “much more permissive than whites in the feeding and weaning of their children,” but stricter in terms of toilet-training.<sup>35</sup> The authors found this “very interesting,” but they failed to explain any larger significance of this finding.<sup>36</sup> Second, Davis and Havighurst found that the caste system existed within the North as well as the Deep South. They pointed to Chicago’s “highly organized residential segregation of Negroes” and its “highly segregated system of so-called ‘public’ schools” as indicators of a caste system.<sup>37</sup> Just as Davis had argued in *Children of Bondage*, the authors argued that caste was most important in consigning most blacks to the lower class.

Although Davis and Havighurst published findings from this research in academic journals, *Father of the Man* itself targeted a popular audience. Houghton Mifflin, rather than an academic press, published the book. Davis wanted the middle-class readers of this manuscript to glimpse the assumptions they made about their own cultural training, and he wanted them to discern the hugely different environments shaping lower-class, or “slum,” behavior. One goal here was consistent with all of his class-cultural analyses in the 1940s: he wanted to demonstrate how lower-class behavior was realistic and adaptive to the wider lower-class environment. Davis’s other goal was to make middle-class readers perceive the middle-class perspectives framing their own beliefs and behaviors, which would then allow them to question not only their beliefs about the lower class, but also their confidence in the superiority of their own ways. For instance, Davis and Havighurst urged readers to less rigorously socialize their children and to avoid constantly supervising their behaviors and instilling anxiety in them at every turn. The

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<sup>35</sup> Davis and Havighurst, “Social Class and Color Differences in Child-Rearing,” 709.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 708.

<sup>37</sup> Davis and Havighurst, *Father of the Man*, 84.

authors even provided practical child-rearing advice to parents at the end of each chapter. This advice above all emphasized that parents should model the behaviors they want their children to learn, because children learned best through imitation.<sup>38</sup> The book amounted to a clear exposition of Davis's progressive ideas at the time, but it had little new to contribute theoretically and was probably still too academic and complicated for the average parent.

*Father of the Man* received fewer reviewers than did Davis's other books, although various newspapers reported its general findings.<sup>39</sup> *Parents' Magazine* gave the book an honorable mention for its annual "best book on child guidance" award.<sup>40</sup> The substantive reviews it did get were similar to those of *Children of Bondage*. One reviewer praised the book's popular style and "skillful integration of the anthropological, psychological, and psychoanalytic points of view."<sup>41</sup> Anthropologist John Whiting made clear how Davis's and Havighurst's major contribution was to highlight the class divisions within American culture at a time when most social scientists were equating American culture with middle-class culture, and hence finding national cohesion while ignoring many segments of society.<sup>42</sup> But while Whiting found value in their approach, many other did not. Chicago School sociologist Ellsworth Faris spoke for the critics when he issued a harsh review of *Father of the Man* in the *American Journal of Sociology*. On the one hand, he repeated criticisms of the authors' Freudian overemphasis on early childhood socialization and their use of a simplistic behaviorist psychology. Even more

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>39</sup> "Conant 'Dares' Scientists to Urge Social Research," *Daily Boston Globe*, December 28, 1947; "SCIENCE FINDS BULLIES ARE THE 'SOFTIES': Middle Class Is More Spartan," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 30, 1947.

<sup>40</sup> Harry Hansen. "Magazine of BOOKS: Robert A. Millikan Plans to Publish Autobiography [sic]," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 25, 1948.

<sup>41</sup> Alfred L. Baldwin, review of *Father of the Man: How Your Child Gets His Personality*, by W. Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst," *Quarterly Review of Biology* 22 (December 1947): 369.

<sup>42</sup> John W. M. Whiting and Irvin L. Child, *Child Training and Personality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 66-67.

important, however, Faris rejected the authors' treatment of slum society as a "culture," and one that was not wholly inferior to middle-class culture. He wrote: "much of what is here called 'culture' is termed disorganization in the vocabulary of the sociologist."<sup>43</sup> Faris thus rebuffed Davis's and Havighurst's attempt to portray lower-class life as an integrated culture that had its own virtues. This review exposed how radical and challenging Davis's ideas were at the time.

## **The Workplace**

Davis soon extended his class-as-a-culture analysis from the family to the workplace. Here again he targeted a middle-class audience, in this case industrialists and business managers. His work in this arena grew out of his membership in the Committee on Human Relations in Industry (CHRI) at Chicago. The idea for the CHRI came from Burleigh Gardner, who had completed his Ph.D. at Harvard after collaborating on the research for *Deep South*, and who had then worked with Western Electric Company in the late 1930s before becoming a professor of business at the University of Chicago. Founded in 1943, the CHRI first focused on "studying and resolving the racial problems which they anticipated when blacks from the South entered wartime industry in the Chicago area."<sup>44</sup> The primary focus of the CHRI, however, soon became the practical application of Warner's class framework to industrial relations. Davis joined with Gardner, Warner, Havighurst, William Foote Whyte, Everett C. Hughes, and others on the CHRI, and they secured numerous corporate sponsors. For each sponsor, CHRI members

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<sup>43</sup> Ellsworth Faris, review of *Father of the Man: How Your Child Gets His Personality*, by W. Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst," *American Journal of Sociology* 53 (March 1948): 401.

<sup>44</sup> Burleigh Gardner, "Human Relations in Industry and Social Research: 1940-1960," in "W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist," by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. Warner, W. Lloyd. Papers, Box 5, Folder 6, page 10.2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.



“planned a special study which addressed some problem of interest to the company.”<sup>45</sup> One result of these efforts was a study of the restaurant industry, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry* (1948).<sup>46</sup>

In the mid-1940s, the CHRI also planned a series of lectures that were eventually published in the book *Industry and Society* (1946).<sup>47</sup> Both Committee members and non-Committee members, such as Chester Barnard and Mark Starr, presented on topics related to social class and industry. Hundreds of audience members—mainly business people—attended each lecture. The lectures shared a

well-integrated point of view and methodology. We see the society and any of its segments, whether a neighborhood, a factory, or a work group, as having a social structure comprised of the relations among individuals. While there are obviously those individual differences which we call ‘personality,’ much of the behavior whether in acts or talk or thinking is an expression of the place of the individual in the social system rather than an expression of his own unique personality pattern. The primary interest in this research is directed to the understanding of the social structure and the way in which it controls and molds the individual. In order to study this we rely almost completely on interviews and observation, which means that the research people must actually go out into factories and homes. Thus the analysis and understanding grow out of an intimate knowledge of the way the people actually act, think, and feel.<sup>48</sup>

*Industry and Society* thus brought Warner’s social-anthropological framework to bear on industrial relations, both in its theoretical emphasis on social class and its methodological focus on participant observation and interviewing.

Allison Davis’s contribution to the anthology was an essay called “The Motivations of the Underprivileged Worker.” In this little-known essay, Davis presented his progressive ideas on lower-class workers to middle-class business people. His essay was based upon his own

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 10.4.

<sup>46</sup> William Foote Whyte, *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>47</sup> “Lecture Conferences on Labor Relations to Begin June 27,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 11, 1945; “U. of C. Lecturer to Begin a Series on India Friday,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 15, 1945.

<sup>48</sup> William Foote Whyte, ed., *Industry and Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1946), 3.

research as well as that of his colleagues, and, in all, the research examined 600 families, including 400 lower-class ones. Davis argued that lower-class behaviors that managers typically regarded as “‘innate’ perversity,” such as “‘shiftlessness,’ ‘irresponsibility,’ absenteeism, and...quitting the job,” were “in fact *normal responses* that the worker [had] learned from his physical and social environment.”<sup>49</sup> He insisted, moreover, that “these habits constitute a system of behavior and attitudes which are realistic and rational in *that environment* in which the individual of the slums has lived and in which he has been trained.”<sup>50</sup> From this decidedly progressive position, Davis then explained in detail how the behaviors of lower-class workers were logical responses to the social and economic environments of their lives.

Davis first made clear that the lives of lower-class people were ones of deprivation. He explained the crowded, “miserable housing,” the “recurrent homelessness,” the malnutrition, and the much higher rate of disease, especially tuberculosis.<sup>51</sup> This environment denied the lower-class worker the sleep and health necessary for consistent work, and it crippled his or her ability to invest in long-term, middle-class goals, such as forming a home with a partner. Indeed, Davis argued that middle-class goals of long-term planning and educational training were unrealistic for most lower-class workers, since those goals first demanded a “minimum of *physical security*.”<sup>52</sup> The lower-class worker had to focus instead on mere survival and thus “narrow, limit, and shorten his goals with regard to the care, nutrition, education, and careers of his

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<sup>49</sup> Allison Davis, “The Motivations of the Underprivileged Worker,” in *Industry and Society*, 86.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-96.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

children.”<sup>53</sup> Such a worker, in turn, pursued the satisfactions that were within reach, which often centered on “visceral, genital, and emotional gratification.”<sup>54</sup>

Davis also explained how lower-class patterns of behavior were not simply dysfunctional products of poverty. Rather, they were often impressive adaptations to oppression that allowed individuals to survive and to secure the more immediate rewards that were realistic for them. For example, Davis described how the larger families of the lower class functioned as a “*protective circle*” that shielded them from chronic economic insecurity.<sup>55</sup> This was especially true for black lower-class families, who suffered much greater oppression and whose average family had 4.9 children, versus 3.3 of the white lower class and 2.2 of the middle class.<sup>56</sup> The larger network of friends and family helped to ensure that the lower-class person could find a place to stay even when he or she was unemployed and displaced. Rather than being “disorganized” as Chicago School sociologists maintained, the large family, including both kin and non-kin groups, was for Davis a resource. These communal groups practiced an “organized, cooperative system of sharing,” in which household members shared “food, money, clothes,” beds, and work.<sup>57</sup>

Davis did not shrink from discussing plainly those lower-class behaviors most stigmatized by the middle class. He acknowledged, for instance, how lower-class workers would sometimes spend their entire paychecks within a couple of days on drinking and carousing, and would then have to rely on loans from friends for practical needs such as food and shelter until the next paycheck came. Most middle-class people simply could not understand behavior such

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 93.

as this, which so violated the middle-class ethic of working hard, saving, and delaying gratification. But Davis elucidated how middle-class people *learned* that ethic through their own privileged upbringing. In the very different lower-class environment, workers learned to survive and to see education and delayed gratification as offering unrealistic avenues for social mobility. Though he did not discuss it here, this was especially the case for African Americans, whom he saw as penned in by the caste system. As a result, workers took advantage of the physical pleasures and social gains available to them through carousing and treating their friends to drinks. Davis also explained how “This behavior was part of a practical cultural system,” in which each worker shared his paycheck with a couple of friends who would later support him when their paychecks came. In this way, the workers “actually had developed a system of getting money every Friday or Saturday, instead of only every second week, on payday.”<sup>58</sup>

To make workers more consistent and efficient, Davis thus prescribed particular solutions to his middle-class audience of business professionals. Above all, he pointed to the necessity of offering real and substantive economic opportunities for the lower class. He wrote: “we must offer the underprivileged worker real rewards,” including a “permanent, decent home” and a “steady job and good wages.”<sup>59</sup> Only then would it be possible to raise a worker’s cultural goals, or “his ceiling of aspiration for education, for respectability, for skills, and for better training.”<sup>60</sup> As in his earlier work, then, Davis thus put the onus for change on the wider environment, and particularly on the social-class system. Again he portrayed lower-class behavior as a rational, realistic response to the lower-class learning environment. This allowed him to depict lower-class people as active in adjusting to their environment and as capable of change should their

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 94.

circumstances change. Though this essay was his only publication that focused on industrial relations, it revealed the potential progressive application of Davis's class-as-a-culture discourse to the workplace.

While Davis and Warner sought to highlight the unfair and damaging nature of America's class system in the hopes of fomenting social reform, businesspeople had other interests in such research. Many of them may have been sympathetic to social reform for humanitarian reasons, but, in the end, they were driven most by maximizing profit and solidifying their position in the marketplace. Accordingly, they ignored the more radical implications of Davis's and Warner's class analysis, which included granting workers more control over the workplace and redistributing wealth to alleviate social inequality, and they instead exploited sociological knowledge for their own gain. In particular, businesspeople looked to Warner's social-class framework as a way to more effectively market their products. Warner's emphasis on social status and participation, rather than on inherent conflicts over the means of production, suited their interests. They utilized his six-part class system, with its descriptive details about each class's interests and goals, in order to better market to each segment of the marketplace. As historian Olivier Zunz explains:

For merchandisers, the bulk of the market resided in Warner's fourth and fifth classes which 'constitute, together, about 65 percent of the population in a typical community and make up a great concentration of the nation's purchasing power.' Marketers were busy turning Warner's [lower-middle class] into enthusiastic buyers. They recognized the third of the population in the '[upper-lower-class] category' as the core of an expanding mass market. Above them, the top three classes were the 'so-called 'quality market.' The 25 percent at society's bottom were unpredictable.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Olivier Zunz, *Why the American Century?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 102.

When the *Journal of Marketing* “heralded Warner’s 1948 book *Social Class in America* as ‘the most important step forward to market research in many years,’” it made clear the ways in which businesspeople engineered Warner’s ideas for their own ends.<sup>62</sup>

Intent upon disseminating his ideas about America’s social-class system, Warner at times aided industry’s appropriation of his research results. For instance, he informally tutored Pierre Martineau, the director of research in the *Chicago Tribune*’s marketing division in the 1950s, about social class in America.<sup>63</sup> Martineau then published articles such as “Social Classes and Spending Behavior” in the *Journal of Marketing*, and books such as *Motivation in Advertising*, which instructed marketers how to exploit class divisions to maximize sales.<sup>64</sup> Burleigh Gardner went even further. He regularly consulted with business, and in 1946 he resigned from the University of Chicago to consult full-time through the organization he founded, “Social Class, Incorporated.”<sup>65</sup> More than Warner, he seemed to buy into the then-predominant idea that class inequalities could be mitigated through mass consumption, and that enlightened businesspeople could effect real social change. Unfortunately, the net effect of Warner’s and Gardner’s consulting efforts was to shore up corporate profits and to promote class consciousness only among businesspeople, who then shielded that consciousness from consumers and instead sold the idea of a classless society back to them. Amid all of this, Davis’s more radical ideas on class, like those of C. Wright Mills, largely fell upon deaf ears.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 103.

<sup>64</sup> Pierre Martineau, “Social Classes and Spending Behavior,” *Journal of Marketing* 23 (October 1958): 125-29; Pierre Martineau, *Motivation in Advertising: Motives That Make People Buy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957), 164-65.

<sup>65</sup> Burleigh Gardner, “Human Relations in Industry and Social Research: 1940-1960,” in “W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist,” by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. Warner, W. Lloyd. Papers, Box 5, Folder 6, page 10.8, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

## **Intercultural Education**

As part of the Department of Education at Chicago, Davis naturally focused most of his energies on the schools. One of his most important projects scrutinized the processes of acculturation, or how schools socialized children and taught them particular values and behaviors. As before, Davis brought his class-cultural analysis to this research, showing how schools favored middle-class students and often failed to acculturate lower-class pupils. But more than in other areas of his research, Davis's approach to education was shaped by larger trends within educational discourse during and after World War II. Above all, a widespread and lavishly funded "intercultural education" movement swept the nation, so Davis worked within the movement to further his own objectives. At times, his aims overlapped with those of intercultural educators, but other times he found them too conservative and naïve. Davis thus tried to harness the liberal impulses within the movement while pushing it in more progressive directions.

Intercultural education was a response to the widespread racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts in interwar America. The movement grew out of the turmoil of the 1920s. Liberals were bothered by the anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, and anti-black sentiment pervading the country, so many responded by organizing, for instance, a Cultural Gifts Movement that celebrated ethnic and religious diversity. In the 1930s, cultural divisions merged with class divisions to, in many Americans' minds, fundamentally challenge the ability of American democracy to sustain itself. In the wake of fascism abroad and another looming global conflagration, it seemed more important than ever to shore up American democracy as a viable alternative to the totalitarian regimes on the rise in Europe. An environment of cultural

nationalism that persisted into the Cold War made Americans far more critical of anti-democratic tendencies within their own culture with regard to ethnic, racial, and religious minorities.

Laboring to establish their nation as the opposite of fascistic and totalitarian regimes, in which racism at times exploded into genocide, Americans became newly opposed to intolerance and discrimination. Liberals exploited this new context to combat prejudice and to help to allow each individual to participate in American democracy as a full citizen.

The intercultural education movement of the 1930s and 1940s took numerous forms. By historian Walter Jackson's accounting, "The number of organizations across the country working to fight ethnic hostility and to champion the American creed jumped from roughly 300 in 1945 to more than 1,350 by the end of the decade."<sup>66</sup> Local activists followed the lead of organizations such as the Commission on Intercultural Education, which the Progressive Education Association formed in 1937. One of the Commission's programs was called "Education for Democracy," and it celebrated the contributions of immigrants to American society. While growing numbers of Americans openly condemned racial prejudice and discrimination, including religious leaders within organizations such as the Federal Council of Churches, intercultural educators "developed public school programs, teacher education courses, adult education forums, pamphlets, religious programs, discussion groups for businesses and unions, films," and other means to wage the battle against intolerance.<sup>67</sup> Anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker was one such educator who applied her expertise of race relations to develop a unit for high school

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<sup>66</sup> Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 281.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



students called *Probing Our Prejudices* (1944). Davis was directly involved in this type of work, reading and providing Powdermaker with feedback for her book.<sup>68</sup>

William Vickery's and Stewart Coles's *Intercultural Education in American Schools* (1943) laid out the intercultural approach. The authors argued that ethnic, religious, racial, and socio-economic conflicts plagued the United States, and they—like essentially all intercultural educators—argued that the United States needed to reduce intergroup conflicts and tensions. Few people at that time wanted to acknowledge that conflict could also be good and lead to social progress. The authors argued that the way to reduce group conflict was to eradicate prejudice and discrimination through education. In the foreword, William Kilpatrick wrote: “the problem *is* essentially an educational problem, since all the prejudices involved in it have been acquired by each individual during his lifetime.”<sup>69</sup> The school, therefore, must “mitigate some of the present evils by teaching the young to see the unjust pain which certain of their present thoughtless practices and prejudices inflict on their fellows.”<sup>70</sup> Vickery and Cole then proceeded to speak at length about the different minority cultures within American society, and about the means to successfully foster intercultural engagement and understanding. In ways that would shape Davis's own ideas, they made the case for student-centered classrooms focused on discussion, for social studies teachers taking the lead in the schools, and for the cultivation of critical thinking among students—all with the goal of strengthening democracy.<sup>71</sup>

As much as Davis would adopt and build from the pedagogical aims and techniques of intercultural educators, he found their focuses on prejudice and education problematic. Indeed,

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<sup>68</sup> Hortense Powdermaker, *Probing Our Prejudices: A Unit for High School Students* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), vi.

<sup>69</sup> William Heard Kilpatrick, foreword to *Intercultural Education in American Schools: Proposed Objectives and Methods*, by William E. Vickery and Stewart G. Cole (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943), xiii.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>71</sup> Vickery and Cole, 67, 109-113.

as St. Clair Drake recalled, he and Davis emerged from their research for *Deep South* believing that the idea of prejudice was essentially “meaningless.”<sup>72</sup> The concept typically portrayed racism as some fixed, “acquired” trait that existed within the minds of individuals. That interpretation missed how racism was structural in nature and tied to particular social realities and power dynamics which were at the root of racist behavior. Moreover, Davis and Drake saw how people’s ideas often failed to match up their behaviors. This suggested that ideas were less important for determining social behavior than were the particular circumstances in which people acted. Indeed, they had observed firsthand how Natchez residents and other Americans ignored or adapted caste strictures when it was in their interest to do so, and this would become increasingly the case when black people had more social power. In light of such insights, Davis wanted to change the environment and power dynamics in which Americans interacted with one another, rather than simply try to teach people not to be prejudiced.

Resisting the emphases on prejudice and education would be difficult. The idea that prejudice was a problem in white people’s minds, and that it could be educated away for intergroup harmony, was prevalent at the time. Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* had helped to solidify that emphasis within American culture, and in subsequent years the foundations were unwilling to fund studies focused on black people and structural inequalities, choosing instead to lavish funding on studies of prejudice.<sup>73</sup> As a result, psychological and psychoanalytic studies of prejudice pervaded postwar America.<sup>74</sup> Books such as Robin M. Williams’s *The Reduction of Intergroup Tensions* (1947), Theodor Adorno et al.’s *The*

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<sup>72</sup> St. Clair Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship: W. Allison Davis and *Deep South*,” in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1974), 53.

<sup>73</sup> Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience*, 285.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas F. Pettigrew, *The Sociology of Race Relations: Reflection and Reform* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 133.

*Authoritarian Personality* (1950), Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey's *The Mark of Oppression* (1950), and Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954) dominated the intellectual landscape. Although these works were sophisticated and innovative, they largely ignored the social-structural nature of racism. At times their emphasis on the intractability of prejudice ran counter to the optimism among intercultural educators, and yet these authors' focus on prejudice among white people reinforced the idea among intercultural educators that education was the way to change society. As Robin M. Williams, Jr. stated it: "What is needed here is not something the government can do for us—no new political credo nor even, for the most part, new laws—but a new social code, one that shall animate our continuous behavior, a social code worthy of a civilized people that believes in its own democracy."<sup>75</sup>

Though Davis saw the larger emphases on prejudice as misguided, he seized upon the liberal moment to further attack social inequality. Davis, Warner, and other Chicago faculty members pushed the intercultural educators to see that class stratification was significant within the United States, and that it, too, translated into cultural differences that provoked prejudice and discrimination, in this case toward lower-class people.<sup>76</sup> By wedding discrimination to social class, Davis labored to ground the psychological thinking on prejudice within the larger social context. To be sure, Davis took part in the efforts to eliminate class—and hence race—prejudice among school personnel, which he saw a significant way to foment positive social change. But implicit within all of his critiques of class bias was the notion that class stratification itself was the underlying problem. So as he worked within intercultural education, he also subtly challenged the mainstream thinking within the movement.

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<sup>75</sup> R. M. MacIver, ed., *Group Relations and Group Antagonisms* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), vii.

<sup>76</sup> Vickery and Cole, 22.

Davis entered into the fray on issues of intercultural education through his project on acculturation in the schools. Due especially to wartime exigencies, Davis struggled to carry out much of the research for this project, only managing to effectively study schools in California and Hawaii, and then only for a few months each. Still, the work was essential in informing Davis's ideas on the school in the social order, and his work did find an audience through his teaching, his public talks, and through the publication of *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* and numerous scholarly articles.<sup>77</sup>

Davis's acculturation project was an original and logical extension of his previous work. He followed Redfield, Edward Sapir, Ralph Linton, and Melville Herskovits in defining acculturation as "the learning of a culture different from that of one's birth group."<sup>78</sup> He, too, saw acculturation as a subset of socialization, which was simply "the life-long process through which the human organism learns a culture, or possibly several cultures."<sup>79</sup> But where those pioneering theorists of acculturation focused on ethnic and national cultures, Davis again emphasized class cultures. His project was new in its examination of acculturation in the particular field of education, and in its focus on the role of schools in either aiding or obstructing

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<sup>77</sup> One example of a presentation Davis gave on this material is at the Institute for the Society for Social Research in August 1944. "23d Annual Institute for Social Research to Open Tomorrow," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 3, 1944.

<sup>78</sup> Allison Davis, "Socialization and Adolescent Personality," 43<sup>rd</sup> *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education: Adolescence*, Part 1, edited by Nelson B. Henry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 198. For early theorizing on acculturation that influenced Davis, see: Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville Herskovits, "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation," *American Anthropologist* 38 (Jan.-Mar. 1936): 149-52; Melville J. Herskovits, "The Significance of the Study of Acculturation for Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 39 (Apr.-Jun. 1937): 259-64; Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941); Ralph Linton, *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1940); Melville J. Herskovits, *Acculturation: The Study of Culture Conflict* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1938); and, for Sapir's larger influence, see Regna Darnell, *Edward Sapir: Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 303.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

the acculturative process. His goal was to discover practical avenues for equalizing educational opportunities and for taking advantage of the potential within the “underprivileged” masses.<sup>80</sup>

In early 1943, Davis developed a research proposal for a comparative acculturation project in the schools. He sought to study schools in “the Southwest, Hawaii, Jamaica, and Guatemala” in order to “gain a firsthand view of the practical measures involved in the education of colored peoples who possess many different types of subordinate culture and status in relationship to various white groups.”<sup>81</sup> He believed that “a field study of the schools will furnish a concrete frame of reference for expanding the intercultural understanding of teachers, and will provide rich resources of practical educational measures for improving the understanding and tolerance of all groups.”<sup>82</sup> In this way, Davis would use his social-anthropological skills to study not an entire community, but one institution (the school) in numerous communities in order to compare how well they succeeded in acculturating people of color into the larger society. As World War II made Americans more conscious of the globalized world and of the importance of resolving racial animosities at home, the General Education Board (GEB) granted Davis \$4,000 for his research.<sup>83</sup>

After immediately encountering problems traveling to Hawaii amid the war, Davis changed plans and elected to first study the American Southwest. As was representative of the entire project, Davis had to constantly curtail his research plans after facing obstacles. The Rockefeller and Rosenwald contacts he had in Texas ignored him completely, and those in New

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<sup>80</sup> From this point forward, I will continue to use “underprivileged” to refer to poor and minority peoples who Davis and his colleagues identified as lacking the social advantages of other groups. The term is now archaic, and readers today may find it condescending and misleading. I use it because it was the language that Davis and his colleagues used, and so in the historicist sense, it is necessary and appropriate to use when discussing Davis’s ideas.

<sup>81</sup> Grant In Aid to University of Chicago, Aug. 2, 1943, box 174, folder 5286, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Grant In Aid to University of Chicago, Aug. 2, 1943, box 174, folder 5286, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Mexico dissimulated and resisted the encroachment of a black social scientist upon their school districts.<sup>84</sup> Luckily, Embree's contacts in California proved more fruitful, allowing Davis to study schools especially in Los Angeles, but also in San Diego, Oakland, and San Francisco from January 9 to March 10, 1944. Here Davis made important contacts that would aid the dissemination of his ideas on intelligence testing later on, and here he conducted the research that would most inform his ideas on the role of the schools in the acculturative process. He visited thirty-three public schools and observed one hundred and sixteen classes, and he "had the opportunity to observe...pupil activities, to interview administrators, teachers, and pupils, and to collect records in 16 elementary schools, 9 junior-high schools, and 8 senior-high schools."<sup>85</sup> In the summer of 1944, Davis wrote up a 175-page research report on this material and submitted it to the GEB.

Davis's report, called "The School's Most Costly Weakness: The Public Schools and the Cultural Assimilation of Americans of Negro, Mexican, and Chinese Background," distilled his thinking regarding the school's role in acculturating underprivileged students. In most ways, his ideas paralleled those within the intercultural education movement. Davis saw three major types of culture existing within the United States: 1) "the general American cultural behaviors, such as the monogamous family, or American food habits"; 2) "the social-class cultural behaviors, such as the lower-class approval of overt aggression, or characteristic lower-class food habits"; and 3) "the ethnic or nationality-group cultural behaviors, such as the speaking of Polish or Spanish, or the habitual use of Italian, or Negro, songs and dances." Of all of these, though, Davis argued

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<sup>84</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, University of Chicago, Allison Davis, 1941-1947, Box 182, Folder 6, Lloyd S. Tireman to Davis, Nov. 10, 1943; Allison Davis, "The Public Schools and the Cultural Assimilation of Americans of Negro, Mexican, and Chinese Background," July 1944, Allison Davis Papers, Box 45, Folder 6, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>85</sup> Allison Davis, "The School's Most Costly Weakness: The Education of National, Racial, and Underprivileged Groups in California," *Yearbook of California Elementary School Principals' Association*, (1945): 51.

that social-class culture was the most important. He observed that “Within each of these ethnic groups...there are several social strata...several social classes,” and he contended that shared class cultures often had more influence in determining behavior than shared ethnic or national cultures.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, though not discounting ethnic differences, he emphasized how they translated into a particular social status within the American class system. For example, the Chinese veneration of scholarship and learning mirrored the middle-class American value on education, so even though Mexican culture was more closely related to American culture through its partly European roots, Chinese students actually fared better within American education because of the high value they placed upon learning.<sup>87</sup>

Regarding African Americans, Davis was even blunter. He argued that blacks were “overwhelmingly American in their culture.”<sup>88</sup> He continued:

The cultural stigmas, which American whites react to in most Negroes, are not foreign in any sense. They are stigmas of lowerclass people, of their habits, symbols, and values. Most Americans stigmatize the same kind of behavior in lowerclass whites. Since the color barriers in occupations, education, and politics keep the great majority of Negro Americans in lower-class position, however, this underprivileged culture has become equated with ‘Negro behavior’ in the popular thinking.<sup>89</sup>

While not discounting the influence of African culture on the culture of African Americans, Davis argued that the American class system was the most significant determinant of black culture and life. This position would not fare well during the 1960s and 1970s when Black Nationalist sentiment was resurgent, and when identity politics carried the day. But Davis tailored his position to the particular ideological context of interwar and postwar America, when assimilation loomed large and seemed to offer new opportunities for racial advance through

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<sup>86</sup> Allison Davis, “Some Basic Concepts in the Education of Ethnic and Lower-Class Groups,” Allison Davis Papers, Box 77, Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

integration. Like other black intellectuals of his day, most notably the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, Davis was particularly sensitive to the ways in which discussions of racial difference quickly became justifications for social inequality between the races. While completing his fieldwork in Natchez during the depths of the Depression, he conveyed this awareness to Horace Mann Bond: “One thing is clear. We must utterly abandon racialism. This thing we’re in is a class alignment – and how! ‘Race’ or ‘caste’ is the wedge, as we knew before, but...how cleverly they use it. And right now, for the next 15-20 years, I know they’re going to play off colored [folks] against...whites for all they’re worth.”<sup>90</sup> So Davis had not abandoned his earlier interests in the African influences on African-American culture, nor did he dismiss the work done by social scientists such as Melville Herskovits and Lorenzo Dow Turner on this important subject. Nevertheless, as Frazier and Herskovits debated the existence of “Africanisms” among American blacks, thus revealing the high stakes of the issue, Davis elected to more quietly pursue research centered on class, which was of course racially typed and hence deeply relevant to African Americans.<sup>91</sup>

Davis’s career paralleled that of E. Franklin Frazier’s in many revealing ways. Frazier became one of the most significant black social scientists in the United States at midcentury. He was elected president of the American Sociological Society (later, Association) in 1948, and he

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<sup>90</sup> Davis, Allison, 1934., 1935. Letter from Allison Davis to Horace Mann Bond. May 17, 1935. Horace Mann Bond Papers (MS 411). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>91</sup> As with caste theory, Frazier’s disciplinary training in sociology and his sensitivity to the politics of representation informed his dismissal of African influences on American blacks. Herskovits, on the other hand, because of his disciplinary training in cultural anthropology and his relative white privilege, was keener on seeing African cultural continuities. For some of their writings on the issue, see: Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*; and Frazier, *The Negro Family in the U.S.* A considerable body of good historical literature exists on these debates on African cultural influences and their stakes. See: Jerry Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 93-120; Albert J. Raboteau, “African Religions in America: Theoretical Perspectives,” in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph E. Harris (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993), 65-79; and Lawrence W. Levine, “African Culture and Slavery in the United States,” in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, 99-107.



published some of the most important books on the African-American experience, including *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939) and *The Negro in the United States* (1949).<sup>92</sup> Like Davis, Frazier was a radical who had long critiqued class stratification within the black community as well as within the larger society, and he worked for a more socialistic system. But also like Davis, Frazier maintained an objective stance in his professional career, and he was empirical in his approach. He and Davis both retained their leftist sympathies in the postwar period, but they adapted their work to the ideological context of the times. Frazier “emerged as a major exponent of integration and assimilation” after World War II, emphasizing the damage that racism had exacted upon American blacks as part of his effort to achieve racial integration.<sup>93</sup> Although Davis eschewed expositions of damage, he, too, seized upon his professional stature to aid the process of racial integration in the postwar period. His leadership in intercultural education was part of this effort.

Davis’s thought paralleled Frazier’s in explaining African-American life as a product of social stratification within the United States. Because caste and class relegated the majority of blacks to the lower class, he argued that “The problem of acculturation for American Negroes” was “to learn habits and values more similar to the middleclass way of life.”<sup>94</sup> He continued: “This form of acculturation involves not only the changing habits of language, housing, and manners, but requires also the more difficult learning of new methods of child-rearing, and of basically different controls upon aggression, sexual response, and other gratifications. It also

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<sup>92</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1949).

<sup>93</sup> Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience*, 268.

<sup>94</sup> Davis, “Some Basic Concepts in the Education of Ethnic and Lower-Class Groups.”

involves the final difficulty of learning new values or social goals.<sup>95</sup> To gain status and power within the United States, he made the case that one needed to learn middle-class culture.

Davis perceived the schools to be crucial agents of middle-class acculturation. Because American public education was universal, and because schools were staffed by middle-class people, the schools offered a unique opportunity for acculturating underprivileged groups to the culture of “native, middleclass, white Americans.”<sup>96</sup> Though he was critical of aspects of that culture, he pragmatically argued that it should nevertheless be available to underprivileged groups. Davis explained how “the school creates opportunities for intimate learning contacts between people of different social and cultural levels.”<sup>97</sup> Because it provided students with “daily opportunities to imitate and to identify with each other,” the public school could offer children “sufficiently prolonged and close-range association with middleclass teachers and pupils, to motivate their learning of certain aspects of middleclass culture,” so long as the schools were sufficiently diverse and socially integrated.<sup>98</sup> This reasoning made clear how social participation and interaction continued to loom large in Davis’s thinking, which Lloyd Warner’s brand of social anthropology had helped him to see. Intercultural education served as an important field through which to apply that anthropology.

Unfortunately, Davis found that the schools were failing to adequately acculturate underprivileged youth. One reason for this was that school personnel did not understand the concept of culture or their own class biases. Davis argued that teachers and administrators, much like the middle-class families and businesspeople Davis had analyzed earlier, failed to see how

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Allison Davis, “The School’s Most Costly Weakness: The Public Schools and the Cultural Assimilation of Americans of Negro, Mexican, and Chinese Background,” August 1944, Allison Davis Papers, Box 45, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>97</sup> Allison Davis, “The Public Schools and the Acculturation of Working-Class Children,” Allison Davis Papers, Box 44, Folder 12, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

their own ideas were informed by middleclass culture, which they assumed to be a singular natural entity rather than a product of extensive training. As a result, they reacted to the behaviors of lower-class youth as evidence of individual deficiencies or innate racial inferiority, rather than as logical adaptations to lower-class life.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, instead of understanding the learning environments of underprivileged pupils and helping them absorb new material, teachers typically treated those students as “problems” and favored instead the middle-class pupils, who were better trained to value education and to exhibit the behaviors that appealed to teachers’ middle-class sensibilities.<sup>100</sup>

Davis argued that another major reason that schools failed to acculturate underprivileged youth to middle-class culture was the endemic segregation within American schools. His fieldwork in California, not to mention his own extensive personal and scientific experience with segregated education across the country, exposed Davis to America’s rigidly-segregated school systems. He found that the de facto racial segregation of the North and West, enforced by restrictive covenants as well as violence and intimidation, led to a level of segregation that approached that of the South. He saw this as a huge problem because he believed that an individual could learn another culture only through intimate association with that culture. He wrote that “group isolation is the most powerful obstacle to acculturation.”<sup>101</sup> He continued: “If people of different cultures cannot associate intimately, they cannot learn one another’s special forms of language, manners, morals, and social goals.”<sup>102</sup> Because “ethnic and social class cultures are significant in determining what a child’s social environment offers him in the way of

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<sup>99</sup> Davis, “Some Basic Concepts in the Education of Ethnic and Lower-Class Groups.”

<sup>100</sup> Davis, “The Public Schools and the Acculturation of Working-Class Children.”

<sup>101</sup> Davis, “The School’s Most Costly Weakness: The Public Schools and the Cultural Assimilation of Americans of Negro, Mexican, and Chinese Background.”

<sup>102</sup> Robert J. Havighurst and Allison Davis, “Child Socialization and the School,” *Review of Educational Research* 13 (February 1943): 29.

models for imitation and identification, of cultural incentives and goals,” then schools needed to be spaces of intercultural engagement.<sup>103</sup> Davis would soon expand his critique of segregation to practices *within* particular schools, such as ability grouping, which he found to unfairly perpetuate segregation, and hence class inequality.

Davis also criticized segregation for undermining America’s democratic culture. He saw the very existence of segregation as training children to perceive one another differentially and hence to promote division rather than solidarity. Echoing John Dewey in *Freedom and Culture* (1939), Davis understood democratic culture to be learned and not inherited.<sup>104</sup> Like his CHD colleagues, he thus argued that the schools could be and needed to be bulwarks for democracy by educating all students together and teaching them to value fairness, cooperation, reasoned debate, and community activism.<sup>105</sup> He contended that greater social equality and extensive intercultural interaction, as found only in some integrated public schools, were important preconditions for the successful inculcation of democratic values. He rated social studies teachers as by far the most important teachers in this regard. They were “the most essential people in the schools” because “They were helping the children of the masses learn...the meaning of justice and of injustice in America. They were teaching a devotion to democratic ideals of fairness, and a group disapproval of injustice and oppression.”<sup>106</sup> Davis thus made the case that the social function of schools needed to be both the advancement of social opportunities and the democratic instruction of all children.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1939).

<sup>105</sup> Davis, “The Public Schools and the Acculturation of Working-Class Children.” This type of reasoning regarding the mutability and fragility of democratic culture gained new poignancy amid the rise of fascist regimes abroad and, as some saw it, at home during the World War II era.

<sup>106</sup> Davis, “The School’s Most Costly Weakness: The Public Schools and the Cultural Assimilation of Americans of Negro, Mexican, and Chinese Background.”

In light of his findings, Davis laid out clear recommendations for educators, which he would continue to emphasize in both his publications and his presentations. First, Davis advocated the abolition of segregation in all of its forms—from inter-school and neighborhood segregation to intra-school segregation on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, language, or ability. Second, he promoted the appointment of full-time visiting social psychologists who could instruct school personnel on the cultural and class differences of their students and how to make use of them. For the same reason, he recommended the proliferation of intercultural workshops for teachers. Third, he advised that social studies should be the centerpiece of the curriculum. Finally, he recommended a program of parental education through which schools would build bridges with lower-class parents and get them more involved in the schools' efforts to educate their children.<sup>107</sup>

As the 1940s wore on, Davis continued to try to make progress on the larger comparative acculturation project he had initially proposed. Wartime exigencies and other professional responsibilities, however, obstructed this process. Davis first decided to abandon his proposed study of Jamaica and Guatemala and focus on Brazil instead.<sup>108</sup> He then had to push this research back until the fall of 1945, at which point he finally visited Brazil for a brief period. The trip proved fruitless, however, because the war had disorganized the schools, and because Davis struggled to secure the travel permits, housing, and basic transportation that he required.<sup>109</sup> After giving up on the Latin American aspect of the project, Davis worked for the next few years to study acculturation in Hawaiian schools, which he prioritized above all others because Hawaii

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ralph Tyler to A. R. Mann, Dec. 28, 1944 and February 13, 1945, box 496, folder 5286, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>109</sup> Allison Davis to Ralph Tyler, June 26, 1945, box 496, folder 5286, series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC.

appeared to house America's most racially integrated and democratic school system.<sup>110</sup> After endless delays and difficulties, Davis finally spent two months in Hawaii in spring 1947. The report he produced, called "The Public Schools and America's Most Successful Racial Democracy: Hawaii," did provide some significant ethnographic accounts of Hawaiian society and its unique post-colonial school system.<sup>111</sup> If anything, the research only further convinced Davis that schools needed to racially integrate, to promote democratic culture, and to counteract class inequalities. In the end, however, two months proved insufficient for such a complex setting, and little new on acculturation emerged from this project.

Although the acculturation project struggled to get off the ground, Davis did convey his conclusions to many audiences. For example, he presented a paper entitled "The Role of the Public Schools: Acculturation of Mexican Americans in California" before the Institute for Social Research in August 1944.<sup>112</sup> He also spoke before Chicago schools and PTA meetings on topics such as "Our Schools' Contribution to Democracy."<sup>113</sup> Carrying this work into the 1950s, Davis presented his ideas on acculturation at forums such as the American Home Economics Association. Newspapers covered that particular 1951 talk closely, and they helped to disseminate Davis's ideas further. A journalist for the *New York Times* quoted Davis at length: "'The only institution in our society in which the lower-class children have sufficient contact with middle-class people to be able to learn their habits of nutrition, health care, language, saving, budgeting and economic skills is in the public schools...It is precisely for that reason that

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<sup>110</sup> Allison Davis to Flora M. Rhind, Jan. 7, 1946 and March 17, 1947, box 496, folder 5286, series 1, General Education Board Archives, RAC..

<sup>111</sup> Allison Davis, "The Public Schools and America's Most Successful Racial Democracy: Hawaii," 1947, Allison Davis Papers, Box 45, Folder 10, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>112</sup> "23rd Annual Institute for Social Research to Open Tomorrow," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 3, 1944.

<sup>113</sup> "LT. COL. TAYLOR TO BE SPEAKER AT SOUTH SHORE: Avalon Park PTA to Hold Fathers Night," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 18, 1945; "Allison Davis, Negro Educator, Will Give Talk at Sheil School," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 3, 1943.

the public school in America is the ladder of the people.’’<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, Davis’s arguments came through in his major publications, such as *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, and his major presentations, such as the one at the White House Conference on Children and Youth, which the next chapter will discuss.

Davis also used the CHD as one major platform for the dissemination of his ideas. In both his regular university classes and the CHD workshops he held, he underscored the public school system’s role as “the essential training ground for a democratic society,” which should both “decrease the antagonisms between the social strata in American society” and “give the children of the various social levels and races a chance to interact with one another and to learn to accept certain common loyalties [sic] and standards of justice.”<sup>115</sup> He thus emphasized education for democracy, for social opportunity, and for greater equality. In general, he worked toward this end through instructing teachers and administrators about the realities of social class and cultural difference so that they could better understand and educate underprivileged youth. Indeed, he and Havighurst explained that the uniqueness of the CHD workshops stemmed from their greater emphasis on theory as compared to most other teacher workshops, which typically emphasized only helpful classroom practices.<sup>116</sup>

Through his framework of class as a type of culture, Davis also developed concrete measures for school personnel to more effectively instruct their students, all of which furthered the aims of the intercultural education movement. He conveyed these ideas in his seminars, and also through a 1945 article in the *Journal of Educational Sociology*. Here he first argued that teachers should conduct “socialized interviews” with all of their students in order to understand

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<sup>114</sup> “Schools Termed People’s Ladder,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1951.

<sup>115</sup> Havighurst and Davis, “Human Development and Intergroup Education,” 539.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

the nature of their cultural environments relating to class, race, ethnicity, and family, as well as their individual personalities. The point was to “discover where the pupil is situated in the learning process” in order to effectively surmount the “cultural obstacles which the pupil faces in learning.”<sup>117</sup> Davis recommended extensive in-service teacher training, and he maintained that teachers needed to become familiar not only with social class generally, but also with the particular local communities from which their students came.<sup>118</sup> Second, Davis contended that school curricula needed to be more realistic and interesting to students. He criticized American education’s overemphasis on reading and on memorizing formalized English. He believed that teachers needed to know their students intimately and to then select reading materials with which students could identify. Furthermore, in an article in *Progressive Education*, he argued that school work should be geared towards cultivating problem-solving skills rather than rote memorization of a formulaic middle-class culture.<sup>119</sup> Third, Davis promoted the use of discussion and active student participation as effective pedagogy. Through discussion, teachers would again discern where their students stood in the learning process. Even more, discussion would make students active participants in that process. In a diverse classroom setting, students would learn to understand the different class, race, and ethnic cultures of their peers through extensive interaction with them. Within this atmosphere of intercultural learning and tolerance, teachers could then help students adopt long-term, middle-class goals pertaining to educational

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 539.

<sup>118</sup> Allison Davis, “Changing the Culture of the Disadvantaged Student,” Allison Davis Papers, Box 77, Folder 12. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. Davis, of course, extended this message to all school staff, including social workers, school psychologists, and student counselors. See, for example, Allison Davis, “Applied Research upon Group and Individual Therapy for Delinquents,” Oct. 11, 1948, Allison Davis Papers, Box 77, Folder 5, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>119</sup> Allison Davis, “Education for the Conservation of Human Resources,” *Progressive Education* 27 (May 1950): 224; Allison Davis, “Developing an Improved Primary Curriculum,” *Educational Leadership* 7 (December 1949): 175-180.



and career success, which was the stated aim of schools at the time.<sup>120</sup> Davis again presented these ideas widely, including in journals such as *Educational Leadership*.

As some of Davis's recommendations attest, his focus on using the schools to acculturate underprivileged students to the dominant, middle-class culture was not narrowly assimilationist. Davis never naturalized middle-class culture or prescribed it uncritically, as large as those ideas loomed in the ideological universe in which he operated. In fact, much of his work on the family, industry, and the schools amounted to a critique of middle-class culture. His work in all of these fields pushed middle-class people to discover their own cultural biases in order to transcend them, and then to judge lower-class people on their own terms. He portrayed lower-class behavior as fundamentally reasonable, logical, and adaptive to the larger social and cultural environment of oppression. He pressed parents, businessmen, and teachers to take seriously lower-class culture and the behaviors that lower-class people learned within the context of deprivation. Ultimately, as before, he discerned fortitude in the underprivileged.

Still, as much as Davis wanted to transform aspects of middle-class culture and challenge its values, he understood the centrality of first creating opportunities for the underprivileged to succeed in a society dominated by middle-class culture. Like other civil-rights leaders of the time, Davis understood the importance of breaking down social barriers and allowing equal access to social, economic, and political opportunities. As Gunnar Myrdal wrote, "American culture is 'highest' in the pragmatic sense that adherence to it is practical for any individual or group which is not strong enough to change it."<sup>121</sup> In this battle for access, Davis and others were keenly aware of the growing opportunities to foment such social change in the wake of

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<sup>120</sup> Davis, "Changing the Culture of the Disadvantaged Student."

<sup>121</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniv. ed. (1944; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 929.

global economic depression and war. As World War II and soon the Cold War made racism a problem as never before, many Americans came to support the expansion of social opportunities for racial minorities and other underprivileged peoples.<sup>122</sup> Davis's efforts within intercultural education were part of this process. Attesting to the significance of his work here, St. Clair Drake wrote that "the enduring contribution made by this type of research was incorporation of its ideas into textbooks, thus sensitizing a wide circle of educators to the need for understanding disadvantaged children, irrespective of their race."<sup>123</sup>

The postwar emphasis on "intercultural education" and "access" was conservative in many respects, for it did not address institutional forms of racism, and it emphasized social change through acculturation rather than political mobilization, social solidarity, and cultural pride among disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, intercultural education and access offered powerful, practical new opportunities for attacking social inequality.<sup>124</sup> In particular, as St. Clair noted, intercultural education in the postwar period was essential to the successes of the civil rights movement, which depended upon white Americans viewing racial discrimination and prejudice as a problem.<sup>125</sup> In cultivating antiracism among white Americans, intercultural education thus made possible civil rights victories ranging from school desegregation to legislative victories such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

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<sup>122</sup> See, for instance: Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>123</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Anthropology and the Black Experience," *Black Scholar* 11 (September/October 1980): 23.

<sup>124</sup> Walter Jackson explains how "the study of intergroup contact and the psychodynamics of prejudice" came "at the expense of analyses of how discrimination was rooted in institutions, social structure, and the economic system." See Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience*, 283. See also: John P. Jackson, Jr., *Social Scientists for Social Justice: Making the Case against Segregation* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 64. Elizabeth Cohen, for one, describes how the postwar civil-rights focus on gaining access to sites of consumption did little to touch the structural economic inequalities that circumscribed possibilities for far-reaching social change. See Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 166-91.

<sup>125</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 9, New Perspectives on Black Education (Summer 1978): 88.

Davis, for his part, exploited the new impetus for racial integration and cultural assimilation to foment larger social change, but he also subtly challenged that framework by questioning the very tenets of the dominant culture that many Americans had naturalized as superior.

Allison Davis's class-as-a-culture framework proved effective for producing progressive research on the family, the workplace, and the school. That framework emphasized the different experiences and behaviors of people within the different social classes. In the context of the 1940s and 1950s, this emphasis was valuable, since so many Americans continued to perceive their country as a "classless" one. Davis understood that the middle-class audiences he targeted first needed to perceive social class as real before they could understand the different lives and behaviors of the lower class. In a different context, sharpening the distinctions between the people of different classes was not always so valuable. For example, later in the twentieth century when Americans came to see urban ghettos as fundamentally "other," it became useful for social scientists such as Sudhir Venkatesh to make clear how the urban poor, despite living in very different environments, shared many values with other Americans, such as the desire to build a community.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, in that context, it made sense for Venkatesh to emphasize the interconnected nature of ghetto life and the rest of American life, as was evident in how governmental, philanthropic, and commercial institutions linked all people together. In Davis's time, though, he found it necessary to sharpen the distinctions between class cultures in order to make clear the existence of class stratification and to humanize America's downtrodden.

In Davis's mission, he found willing and able colleagues at the University of Chicago to further develop his research aims, and he benefitted from the university's power and prestige to

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<sup>126</sup> Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 9.

carry out that research. Davis's work relating to the family, the workplace, and the school in this period represented one important way in which intellectuals used culture-and-personality theory for practical ends.<sup>127</sup> Yet it was in the arena of intelligence testing that Davis and his colleagues had their largest influence. Whereas in the other arenas Davis struggled at times to reach a large audience, his work on intelligence testing led to practical reforms and initiated a far-reaching national debate on issues of class, culture, fairness, opportunity, and ability. In many ways, this work marked the culmination of Davis's thought. It is to this subject that we now turn.

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<sup>127</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz called for further examination into the application of culture-and-personality theory. Davis's work marks one important aspect of that much larger process. See Joanne Meyerowitz, "'How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives': Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Thought," *Journal of American History* 96 (March 2010): 1083-1084.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Rethinking Intelligence**

*How shall one measure by standardized tests the skills of a boy who has learned to acquire the fruits of stealing and at the same time to escape being put into jail?<sup>1</sup>*

--- Allison Davis

Davis's most important work as a professor of education at Chicago had to do with reforming intelligence testing. Davis led the first quantitative, empirical studies of the cultural biases of intelligence tests. He and his colleagues at Chicago found extensive biases along class lines, and they reported the nature and extent of those biases to the American public. In the wake of the proliferation of intelligence tests and other sorting tests in the interwar and postwar United States, their research took on a large importance in helping to revise current practices and to grant additional opportunities for minorities and the poor. Davis again applied his class-as-a-culture framework to the problem, but this time his work had a far larger impact than ever before, although that impact was not always immediate. In many ways, Davis's pivotal role in reforming intelligence testing marked the culminating achievement of his career, and the maturation of his interdisciplinary thought.

As was characteristic of his entire career, Davis swam against the tide of public opinion in his critiques of intelligence testing. He continued to emphasize the stark class divisions within the United States at a time when Americans were focused on abundance and general affluence. In his critiques of intelligence testing along class lines, he faced fierce opposition from psychologists, publishers, and other parties invested in the proliferation of the tests throughout American society, even as his ideas found a receptive audience among many educators, African

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<sup>1</sup> Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940), 90.

Americans, and other test critics. In the 1940s and 1950s, powerful vested interests effectively muffled many of Davis's and his colleagues' critics of the tests, and prevented systematic changes in testing practices. But during the 1960s and 1970s, when pro-democratic, anti-poverty, and civil-rights activists mounted powerful movements for social change, Davis's ideas found new life. Various parties took up his original empirical investigations to bolster their movements for social change. Many others never knew of Davis's contributions, but they nonetheless built upon his pioneering research to help to reform American testing practices. The legacy of Davis's work remains with us today.

### **Intelligence Testing and the Schools**

By the 1940s, intelligence testing was deeply entrenched within American society, particularly within the schools. In the previous half century, the nation's dramatic urbanization, industrialization, and immigration left schools with swelling enrollments, bewildering student diversity, and budget shortfalls. From 1890 to 1915 alone, total public school enrollment swelled 55% from 12.7 million to 19.7 million, with the most dramatic increases occurring at the high-school level, where enrollments mushroomed 554%, from 203,000 to 1.3 million.<sup>2</sup> The trends continued in the interwar period, where from 1920 to 1930 total enrollments rose 22% and high school enrollments doubled.<sup>3</sup> The profundity of the challenges posed by these developments galvanized educators at all levels to creatively adjust, and to prepare students for ever more differentiated types of work in an industrial economy. During the Progressive Era,

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Davis Chapman, *Schools as Sorters: Lewis M. Terman, Applied Psychology, and the Intelligence Testing Movement, 1890-1930* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 83.

with its accompanying social-control ethos, this increasingly translated into sorting students into different tracks, which by the 1920s commentators referred to variously as “tracking,” “ability grouping,” and “homogeneous grouping.”

Had intelligence tests never been invented, schools still would have functioned as sorting mechanisms. Nevertheless, intelligence testing played an important role in exacerbating the sorting trends within education, which denied opportunities to lower-class and minority groups. The sorting function was inextricably tied to the interests of professional psychologists, who were both the developers of the tests and their main promoters. During the late nineteenth century, psychologists labored to sever their ties to philosophy, religion, and spiritualism, and to professionalize their discipline by placing it within the more authoritative natural sciences.<sup>4</sup> They did this by establishing an experimental, quantitative psychology. German philosopher Wilhelm Wundt led the way by establishing the first experimental lab in Leipzig in 1879. British scientist Sir Francis Galton placed psychology on scientific rather than metaphysical grounds through his use of the quantitative method. He also laid the groundwork for an applied psychology through his emphasis on “eugenics.” One of his students, Charles Spearman, used correlative methods to theorize the existence of a single intelligence factor, which he referred to as “g.”<sup>5</sup> On the American side, G. Stanley Hall followed his mentor, Wundt, and in 1883 Hall established the first psychology laboratory in the United States at Johns Hopkins. James McKeen Cattell, Wundt’s first American graduate student, brought Wundt’s and Galton’s ideas

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<sup>4</sup> JoAnne Brown, *The Definition of a Profession: The Authority of Metaphor in the History of Intelligence Testing, 1890-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Chapman, 19.

to the United States, and he worked with Hall and William James to establish the subdiscipline of measurement psychology in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

It was, however, Frenchman Alfred Binet who was the most significant figure in the burgeoning field of mental testing. Commissioned in 1904 by the French government to devise ways for diagnosing feeble-mindedness among schoolchildren, Binet became the first to develop a practical test to measure intelligence. Along with his assistant, Theodore Simon, he in 1905 developed the first scale of intelligence, the Binet-Simon, which identified the “mental age” of the test-taker. Underscoring the significance of Binet’s innovation and its long shadow on mental testing, Allison Davis later pointed out that “In the thirty-five years since Binet’s last work, virtually no new types of problems have been included in either the individual or group intelligence tests.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the second generation of American measurement psychologists seized upon Binet’s creation, despite his own reservations, to introduce intelligence testing on a mass scale in the United States. Henry Herbert Goddard was the first to translate Binet’s scale into English in 1908, and shortly thereafter he allied with Lewis Madison Terman, Edward Lee Thorndike, and Robert Mearns Yerkes to institutionalize the tests within the United States.<sup>8</sup> These psychologists’ famous application of the tests in the mobilization for World War I was a major boon to their cause, for it provided the funding and research sample (1.7 million soldiers) necessary to bolster their science, enhanced professional networks among psychologists and

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<sup>6</sup> Brown, 35-38.

<sup>7</sup> Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, “Measurement of Mental Systems: Can Intelligence Be Measured?,” *Scientific Monthly* 66 (April 1948): 302.

<sup>8</sup> Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 90-92.



politicians, and not least of all, a compelling example of the potential utility in classifying large numbers of individuals, in this case for what many saw as a patriotic cause.<sup>9</sup>

The new cohort of psychological testers quickly moved to exploit their successes and to spread intelligence testing throughout society. For them, it was a patriotic cause. Like most progressives of their time, they believed that urban, industrial society needed to be controlled and rationalized, not reconstructed. They believed that heredity was the decisive factor in determining human ability, so by measuring innate mental capacity, they could help to rationalize the sorting of Americans into different jobs, classes, and social roles for increased social efficiency. Despite their generally good intentions, their ideas fell victim to the hereditarian thinking of the times, which mistook social disparities for biological ones, and hence enshrined, rather than mitigated, social inequality. But it was precisely such flaws in their ideas that made them so amenable to many Americans during the 1920s, when deep-seated racism, sexism, classism, and xenophobia predominated. Amid a context of cultural conflict, measurement psychologists found many opportunities to peddle their tests, which provided a scientific justification for the social disparities people observed.<sup>10</sup>

After World War I, education had emerged as the central terrain for the proliferation of intelligence testing. To be sure, corporations, asylums, courts, and the military all began institutionalizing the tests too, but it was in education where the tests reached the most people and were the most widely employed.<sup>11</sup> Lewis Terman was the central spokesmen of this effort, and he exploited psychology's new authority and professional networks to embed intelligence tests within the schools, which continued to suffer from financial, administrative, and cultural

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<sup>9</sup> Chapman, 112-13.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

problems. Aided by the infrastructure already in place from the school survey movement and the social hygiene movement, Terman effectively sold the value of the tests to school administrators, and to teachers eager for a scientific tool to sort out students. He also led efforts in the publishing world to sell and distribute the tests widely. By the mid-1920s, schools, publishing houses, and the discipline of psychology all had deep institutional and financial investments in intelligence testing. As Allison Davis surveyed the scene in the 1940s, he saw how two more decades had only deepened those investments. With the end of World War II and the G. I. Bill, the nation stood poised to continue the application of intelligence tests within the schools at an unprecedented scale.<sup>12</sup>

The problem was that the proliferation of the tests in the schools had occurred so rapidly that critiques were often muted, and major debates regarding the tests' validity and utility only took place after the fact. In their haste to reform society and to professionalize, measurement psychologists largely ignored the significant criticism that was present from the beginning, even among the test developers themselves. For example, Alfred Binet, the creator of the first test, was immediately concerned with the class and cultural biases inherent in his creation, and he was always critical of American psychologists' emphasis on large-scale quantification of their data.<sup>13</sup> In the 1910s, other psychologists built upon Binet's critiques, consistently questioning the ability of the tests to measure something as complex as human intelligence.<sup>14</sup> These critiques, however, continued to be marginalized within the field.

It was not until the 1920s—after the tests were firmly institutionalized—that real public debate, or at least acrimony, over the tests took place. In the context of debates over immigration

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<sup>12</sup> Chapman, Ch. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Allison Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 70-78.

<sup>14</sup> Richard C. Maclaurin, "Educational and Industrial Efficiency," *Science* 33 (1911): 101-103; Unnamed Editor, "Measuring the Mind," *Nation* 94 (1912): 486.

restriction in Congress and the publication of hereditarian tracts such as Lathrop Stoddard's *The Revolt Against Civilization* (1922), which claimed that intelligence tests proved the superiority of Western Europeans, new criticism emerged. For instance, in the progressive education journal, *School and Society*, educator William C. Bagley questioned the psychologists' definition of intelligence and lambasted the "educational determinism" inherent in their use in sorting students.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in the pages of *Opportunity* and *Crisis*, black intellectuals such as Davis's friend Horace Mann Bond criticized the tests as racially biased.<sup>16</sup> Yet the most public controversy occurred in the *New Republic*, as Walter Lippmann roundly critiqued the tests over the course of several articles.<sup>17</sup> He questioned the notion that the tests measured hereditary ability more than environmental influences, contended that psychologists' definitions of intelligence were unclear and unscientific, and argued that the tests were far too susceptible to misuse and abuse in ways that subverted democracy. In most of these debates, it was Lewis Terman on the other side, as he became the public face of the measurement psychologists. In a crusading fashion, he argued that intelligence was a hereditary trait, that the tests did measure it accurately, and that the tests should be used in all parts of society to classify people into different

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<sup>15</sup> William C. Bagley, "Educational Determinism; or Democracy and the I.Q.," *School and Society* 15 (April 1922): 373-84. See also, Thomas J. McCormack, "A Critique of Mental Measurements," *School and Society* 15 (1922): 686-92. For the back and forth between Bagley and Terman, see: Lewis M. Terman, "The Psychological Determinist, or Democracy and the IQ," *Journal of Educational Research* 6 (June 1922): 57-62; and William C. Bagley, "Professor Terman's Determinism," *Journal of Educational Research* 6 (December 1922): 376-85.

<sup>16</sup> Horace M. Bond, "Intelligence Tests and Propaganda," *Crisis* 28 (June 1924): 61-64; Horace M. Bond, "What the Army 'Intelligence' Tests Measured," *Opportunity* 2 (July 1924): 197-202.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Lippman, "The Mental Age of Americans," *New Republic* (October 25, 1922): 213-15; "The Mystery of the 'A' Men," *New Republic* (November 1, 1922): 246-48; "The Reliability of Intelligence Tests," *New Republic* (November 8, 1922): 275-77; "Tests of Hereditary Intelligence," *New Republic* (November 22, 1922): 328-30; "A Future for the Tests," *New Republic* (November 29, 1922): 9-11. For Terman's response, see Lewis M. Terman, "The Great Conspiracy; or the Impulse Imperious of Intelligence Testers Psychoanalyzed and Exposed by Mr. Lippmann," *New Republic* (December 27, 1922): 1-15.

spheres. In characteristic inflammatory language, he stated that “If this, or even half of it, should be found true...Eugenics would deserve to become a religion.”<sup>18</sup>

In the end, the controversies did not lead to practical reforms regarding intelligence testing. The tests had become too institutionalized, and the racist and xenophobic atmosphere of the time was not conducive to launching a social movement against the tests. Moreover, public critics did not issue devastating critiques of the tests. Most agreed that testing could be beneficial if implemented correctly, and most relied upon democratic theory as a basis of critique. The authoritative language of science and engineering, and the sheer amassing of empirical data, lent the psychologists more power than democratically-minded critics to shape testing practices in the 1920s.<sup>19</sup> It was not until the 1940s when Allison Davis launched his empirical investigations into the cultural biases of intelligence tests that critics would begin to confront mental testing on its own terms.<sup>20</sup>

### **Towards a New Study of Intelligence Testing**

Davis’s idea to challenge intelligence-testing practices had been brewing for some time. As a black intellectual within the race-vindicationist tradition, Davis saw early on how intelligence tests were yet another tool through which to further oppress African Americans, in this case by erroneously “proving” their mental inferiority and thus justifying racial disparities. His relationship with Horace Mann Bond, who had researched how the tests were racially biased, only deepened Davis’s understanding of the tests’ flaws.

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis M. Terman, “The Possibilities and Limitations of Training,” *Journal of Educational Research* 10 (December 1924): 340.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, 7-9.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, 138; Arthur R. Jensen, *Bias in Mental Testing* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 368.

As one of the leaders of the social-constructivist revolution within American social thought, Davis began seeing new avenues through which to critique intelligence-testing practices. He became intimately familiar with the environmentalist research in which prominent new voices in the 1930s critiqued the tests. The most important figure here was Otto Klineberg, a Columbia-trained psychologist who studied under Franz Boas.<sup>21</sup> Klineberg conducted a series of studies that pointed to the centrality of the social environment in determining a person's score on intelligence tests.<sup>22</sup> His work, in Davis's words, "has shown...that the I.Q.'s of Negro children born in the South improve steadily with length of residence in New York or Philadelphia."<sup>23</sup> Davis grasped the significance of this finding, concluding that it "indicates the great power of better schools to raise the level of achievement by Negro pupils."<sup>24</sup> Klineberg's work thus clearly informed Davis's own investigations into intelligence testing. Indeed, Klineberg's research was widely influential, as was evident, for instance, in how the social scientists involved with the *Brown v. Board of Education* case cited his work in their amicus brief to the Supreme Court.<sup>25</sup>

Social biologist Lancelot Hogben, one of Davis's mentors at the London School of Economics, was another prominent interwar voice whose critique of intelligence tests influenced Davis. Davis worked closely with Hogben in London, and he stayed in touch with both the man

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<sup>21</sup> Wayne H. Holtzrnan, and Roger W. Russell, "Otto Klineberg: A Pioneer International Psychologist," *International Journal of Psychology* 27 (October 1992): 364–365; Jackson, *Social Scientists for Social Justice*, 20–23.

<sup>22</sup> Otto Klineberg, *Negro Intelligence and Selective Migration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935); Otto Klineberg, *Race Differences* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935).

<sup>23</sup> Allison Davis, "The Culture of the Slum," Allison Davis Papers, Box 77, Folder 18, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Clark, et al., "The Effects of Segregation and the Consequences of Desegregation: A Social Science Statement," *Minnesota Law Review* 37 (1952–53): 431.

and his writings long after he left Europe.<sup>26</sup> Hogben's environmentalist critique of intelligence testing thus continued to inform Davis's ideas on the subject. Davis later explained the importance of Hogben's work in human genetics for his own project on intelligence:

No geneticist, of any national or international standing, furthermore, will venture even the opinion that lower-class groups are genetically inferior. The leading men in the field of human genetics, like J. B. S. Haldane, Lancelot Hogben, and H. S. Jennings, have advanced both theoretical (mathematical) and specific evidence against the probability of the genetic inferiority of the lower social strata. Hogben, probably the most distinguished social biologist in the world, has said, in his Nature and Nurture, with specific reference to intelligence: 'In the light of the new evidence derived from the study of twins, no conclusions about inborn differences based on comparisons of different occupational and racial groups, have any scientific validity.'<sup>27</sup>

In this way, Davis drew from the latest biological science to inform his understanding of human intelligence.

Yet another intellectual influence was the research emanating from the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station in the 1930s. The University of Iowa emerged as a major center for early environmentalist critiques of intelligence testing. Under the leadership of George Stoddard and Kurt Lewin, the Iowa Station "published dozens of studies indicating that nursery-school attendance, orphanage and foster home living, and other broad types of experience could affect the I.Q. considerably."<sup>28</sup> "Unlike many of their peers," historian Ellen Condliffe Lagemann explains, "the Iowa researchers were rejecting a determinist position in favor of the view that intelligence was an interaction between heredity and environment."<sup>29</sup> Ralph Tyler, Davis's

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<sup>26</sup> Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, J. A. Rogers Collection, Allison Davis Fellowship File, 1932-42, Allison Davis to George R. Arthur, October 8, 1932, Box 406, Folder 5; See also: Allison Davis, "The Distribution of Blood Groups and Its Bearing on the Concept of Race," *The Sociological Review* 27 (January 1935): 19-34; Part II in the next issue: volume 28 (April 1935): 183-200.

<sup>27</sup> Allison Davis, "GEB Study of the Cultural Factors in Intelligence," Allison Davis Papers, Box 52, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>28</sup> S. Stansfeld Sargent, review of *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*, by Kenneth Eells, Allison Davis, Robert J. Havighurst, Virgil E. Herrick, and Ralph Tyler, *American Journal of Sociology* 58 (September 1952): 209.

<sup>29</sup> Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 136.

colleague and mentor at the University of Chicago, had been involved with disseminating the Iowa School's findings through his directorship of the Progressive Education Association.<sup>30</sup>

Davis's relationship with Tyler, as well as his association with the American Council on Education, thus exposed him to this important early work.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, Davis's own research experiences with intelligence testing were especially formative in developing his critique. During his study of black youth for the American Youth Commission, for instance, he and Dollard observed directly how IQ scores were often out of line with their own assessments of adolescents' intelligence. The American Youth Commission mandated that Davis and Dollard employ intelligence tests such as the Kuhlman-Anderson in assessing the overall personality of the youth.<sup>32</sup> The two researchers found the tests problematic.

In *Children of Bondage*, they wrote:

Mrs. Martin says that Edward has always been a smart boy. The psychologists disagree; they grant him an I.Q. of 71. The Doc, however, tended to agree with the mother. How shall one measure by standardized tests the skills of a boy who has learned to acquire the fruits of stealing and at the same time to escape being put into jail?<sup>33</sup>

Ever sensitive of the centrality of cultural training in shaping the behaviors and skills of the youth, Davis saw how the formulaic nature of the tests rewarded middle-class training and punished students with lower-class backgrounds.

Davis's studies of acculturation in the schools only solidified for him the problematic nature and devastating effects of widespread, culturally biased intelligence testing. Indeed, after his two-month study of California schools in 1944, Davis's number-one recommendation for the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance: Kurt Lewin, "Survey of Activities at Iowa in Recent Years," Allison Davis Papers, Box 33, Folder 8, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>32</sup> Bonita Valien, Acting-Departmental Secretary for the American Youth Commission, to Allison Davis, Dec. 3, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Box 30, Folder 4, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>33</sup> Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 90.

schools was the development of new, culturally fair intelligence tests. He discerned how the traditional tests penalized lower-class children and stigmatized “the Negro and Mexican-American, and other low-status groups” as intellectually inferior.<sup>34</sup> He lamented how teachers “use this ‘scientific’ judgment, as symbolized in the I.Q., to justify the schools’ discrimination against colored pupils, and their own inefficient teaching.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, because educators throughout the nation used these tests so routinely, the issue was even more pressing. Here Davis perceived an opportunity, because a reform to intelligence tests would be relatively easy to accomplish and yet could have a huge impact on American education. For this reason, he saw the development of culturally fair tests as “The most practical inexpensive aid to the education of underprivileged white and colored groups in this country.”<sup>36</sup> Davis then laid out his future research agenda on intelligence testing:

Using as a guide the research completed on lower and middle-class cultures in America by social anthropologists and comparative psychologists, during the past fifteen years, it is now possible to construct a much more objective test of general intelligence. The development of a test which would measure fairly the abilities of lowerclass children, white as well as colored, has been long overdue in educational research. Such a test would constitute the most useful reform possible at present in the public education of minority groups.<sup>37</sup>

Notably, Davis’s response to cultural bias in intelligence testing was not to abolish the tests. Like many of his contemporaries, he believed in using the power of social science to help guide and engineer social practices. He thus sought to eliminate cultural bias and to devise new, “culturally fair” tests. It was to this task that Davis turned.

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<sup>34</sup> Allison Davis, “The School’s Most Costly Weakness: The Public Schools and the Cultural Assimilation of Americans of Negro, Mexican, and Chinese Background,” August 1944, Allison Davis Papers, Box 45, Folder 2, page viii, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., ix.



In 1945, as part of the Committee on Human Development (CHD), Davis spearheaded an extensive study of the relationship between social-class background and performance on intelligence tests. This project required a large sample of both lower- and middle-class families, and it needed those class differences to be empirically demonstrated. Davis selected Rockford, Illinois, which had a population of 115,000, as the site for the study. This made sense because of Rockford's relatively large sample size, and because the CHD had recently launched a community research project there and had already begun analyzing Rockford's social-class system.<sup>38</sup> He proposed to the General Education Board a three-year program through which researchers would uncover the class biases of traditional intelligence tests and then develop new, culturally fair ones.<sup>39</sup> The GEB approved a \$25,940 grant to the University of Chicago in January 1945.<sup>40</sup> Davis took the lead in conceptualizing the project, but others ultimately carried out most of the fieldwork. Specifically, a sociology graduate student named Charles Warriner and his wife completed much of the research in 1946, after which Kenneth Eells conducted much of the statistical work.<sup>41</sup> Ernest A. Haggard, Robert J. Havighurst, Virgil E. Herrick, Edith Lind, and Ralph W. Tyler all participated in this collaborative project.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, the study tested over 4,800 Rockford children aged nine, ten, thirteen, and fourteen, and it correlated their results with Warner and Eells' Index of Status Characteristics, which sorted the children by social

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<sup>38</sup> Robert J. Havighurst, "Chicago: 1935-1960," in "W. Lloyd Warner; Social Anthropologist," by Mildred Hall Warner, Burleigh Gardner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Associates, with corrections, n.d. W. Lloyd Warner Papers, Box 5, Folder 6, pages 9.23, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>39</sup> University of Chicago, "Proposal for the Development and Standardization of a Verbal Test of General Intelligence That Will Measure and Offer a Means of Comparing Abilities of Children of All Socio-Economic Levels," Jan. 31, 1945, box 496, folder 5289, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>40</sup> A. R. Mann to Robert Hutchins, Jan. 19, 1945, box 496, folder 5289, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>41</sup> Havighurst, "Chicago: 1935-1960," 9.23.

<sup>42</sup> Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, 85.

class.<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Eells was the principal author of the full explication of this project's research findings in *Intelligence and Cultural Differences* (1951).<sup>44</sup> Though that book disclosed the project's full methodology and research findings, its essential arguments included—at times verbatim—the arguments that Davis and his colleagues had made in previous years.

### ***Social-Class Influences upon Learning***

The most important statement of the study's intellectual orientation and contribution was actually Davis's *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* (1948). This book was a published version of Davis's 1948 Inglis Lecture at Harvard University. In November 1947, Harvard's Graduate School of Education honored Davis and his work on social class and education by inviting him to give this prestigious annual lecture focused on American secondary education.<sup>45</sup> Previous Inglis Lecturers included such luminaries as John Dewey and Edward Thorndike. Due to the requirements of this type of presentation, Davis was forced to step back from the intricate details of his research and to concisely convey to a wide audience his ideas about and research on the role of social class in American education. The brief, one-hundred-page product was thus much more than a critique of traditional intelligence tests; it was Davis's synthesis of his almost two decades of social-science work. By deeply contextualizing the problems of intelligence testing within the larger social-class system, Davis made a compelling argument against traditional intelligence tests.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 40; See also: W. Lloyd Warner, Marchia Meeker, and Kenneth Eells, *Social Class in America: A Manual of Procedure for the Measurement of Social Status* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

<sup>44</sup> Kenneth Eells, et al., *Intelligence and Cultural Differences: A Study of Cultural Learning and Problem-Solving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

<sup>45</sup> Ralph Beatley to Allison Davis, Nov. 22, 1947, Tyler, Ralph W. Papers, Box 8, Folder 6, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; "Noted Chicago Educator to Give Inglis Lecture," *Daily Boston Globe*, March 21, 1948.

Davis organized *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* into five parts, each of which marked a stage in his own intellectual evolution. The first part described the nature of social classes in the United States. Here Davis drew from his social-anthropological training with Warner and from his research for *Deep South*. He explained how social classes, ethnic groups, and color-castes comprised the three broad systems of American social status, in which each system dispensed social rewards and punishments unequally depending upon one's position within it.<sup>46</sup> Naturally, his focus here was on the different social classes, which he argued amounted to different social worlds—different cultures—that did not have intimate access to one another.

The second part briefly explained the impact of social-class differences on patterns of early childhood socialization. Here Davis drew from his culture-and-personality work for *Children of Bondage* and *Father of the Man*. He reported his findings that lower-class parents were generally more lenient with regard to weaning, toilet-training, and early sex training. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, tended to more rigorously socialize their children in these areas. They also supervised and directed their children's behaviors much more vigorously.<sup>47</sup> As with *Father of the Man* itself, this section of the book failed to fully spell out the significance of these differences.

The third part of the book discussed the different cultures, or learning environments, of the lower and middle classes. Davis focused above all on explaining the culture of the "slum," or the lower class, as he had done in all of his work at Chicago, including that on family socialization patterns, industrial relations, and acculturation. This section, however, amounted to Davis's fullest published examination of lower-class culture. He took pains explaining the logic

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<sup>46</sup> Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 13-22.

of lower-class behaviors such as heightened sexual freedom and physical aggression, greater levels of theft, and “extravagant” spending and eating, for instance. He made clear that lower-class people had their own standards of decency and morality, but that these standards simply differed from those of the middle class.<sup>48</sup> This was only natural because the lower class developed its standards in the context of a very different social, economic, and political environment. Davis never romanticized lower-class life as a “happy hunting-ground,” but he did make clear that middle-class values such as moderation and delayed gratification often made little sense in the cultural universe of the lower class.<sup>49</sup> For example, it was only rational for a person to delay gratification if he or she could reliably trust that such a delay would translate into later gratification.<sup>50</sup> Lower-class people, however, lived in environments of chronic insecurity and anxiety over meeting basic needs related to shelter, sleep, food, clothing, heat, and light.<sup>51</sup> Because they could not reasonably rely on significant returns from delaying gratification, they seized upon those rare moments when they had access to those basic needs. Acting rationally, lower-class folks would thus try to adopt the symbols of middle-class status when possible, and they would “splurge” on food and clothing, for instance, as a defense against their anxieties over the certain deprivations they would soon face in these areas.<sup>52</sup> The only way to change these

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>50</sup> Notably, this insight continues to serve as fertile ground for social-science research. See, for example, J.T. McGuire and J.W. Kable, “Decision Makers Calibrate Behavioral Persistence on the Basis of Time-Interval Experience,” *Cognition* 124 (August 2012): 216-26; J.T. McGuire and J.W. Kable, “Rational Temporal Predictions Can Underlie Apparent Failures to Delay Gratification,” *Psychological Review* 120 (April 2013): 395-410; and Laura Michaelson, Alejandro de la Vega, Christopher H. Chatham, and Yuko Munakata, “Delaying Gratification Depends on Social Trust,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 4 (June 2013): 1-7.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

behaviors, Davis consistently argued, was to change the social environments that caused them in the first place. “New situations,” he maintained, “make new behavior.”<sup>53</sup>

The fourth part of the book examined the role of social class in measuring intelligence. Here Davis finally discussed his latest research on intelligence testing. Though Davis’s later publications would spell out the full findings of the research project, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* laid out its preliminary findings. After measuring various tests against social-class differentials, Davis and his colleagues found that “a large proportion of the items in each of these tests ‘discriminated between’ children from the highest and lowest socio-economic levels.”<sup>54</sup> They discovered that the level of discrimination varied depending on the particular tests and the particular test items they assessed. This prompted them to scrutinize the nature of the items that discriminated along class lines. Above all, they found that the language of the test items explained much of the difference. For example, in test items using words such as “sonata,” which lower-class children were almost never exposed to, only 28% of lower-class children scored it correctly, versus 78% of children in the high socio-economic group.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, when intelligence tests used items with language that was easily understood across class lines, such as “cutting tool,” the class differentials nearly vanished.

Davis then launched a general critique of intelligence-testing practices. He argued that psychologists, in their haste to devise practical tests of intelligence, had failed to grasp the incredible complexity of a concept such as “intelligence.” Drawing from A. R. Radcliffe-Brown’s structural-functionalist theory, Davis explained how mental behavior was “a system in

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 45.

the sense that all ‘mental’ acts are interdependent and interconnected.”<sup>56</sup> Davis thus saw intelligence not as an “essence,” but as something that was phenomenal and organic and inextricable from the larger human organism. Here he took issue with psychometricians such as Charles Spearman who conceptualized intelligence as “one essential human ability,” which they called “the general factor, or *g*.”<sup>57</sup> Such psychometricians, Davis continued, failed to understand the difficulty in measuring something as complex as intelligence, which was a complex “system of acts,” none of which could be meaningfully isolated from one another and assessed independently.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the inherent difficulty in measuring intelligence, Davis argued that the application of the culture concept could resolve many of the tests’ most significant problems. Defining culture as “all behavior learned by the individual in conformity with a group,” he argued that “culture ‘teaches’ the individual not only to recognize certain phenomena, but also certain symbols of phenomena, and the logical relationships among them.”<sup>59</sup> Culture, furthermore, “sets the goals of human problems, and teaches the inferences (logic) which people in a particular culture regard as justifiable.”<sup>60</sup> Because individuals within particular social classes shared similar social experiences, social sanctions, patterns of behavior, and cultural logic, it made sense to conceptually isolate “class cultures” for the purpose of studying them. Using this reasoning, Davis made the case that intelligence tests needed to eliminate class-cultural bias if they were to assess general intelligence in any meaningful way. The point was to

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 50; Here Davis cited A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, “The Nature of a Science of Society” (1937). See Allison Davis Papers, Box 13, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>57</sup> Nicholas Lemann, “The Great Sorting,” *The Atlantic* 276 (September 1995), 84. Lemann stresses, though, that other founders of intelligence testing, including Lewis Terman, H. H. Goddard, Carl Brigham, and even Spearman himself, began moving away from conceptualizing intelligence so narrowly by the 1940s – especially after facing strong criticisms from environmentalist social scientists in the 1930s.

<sup>58</sup> Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, 57.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

measure individual ability rather than cultural training. Davis thus spelled out criteria for the creation of “culturally fair” tests—not “culture-free” tests, for culture could not be removed.<sup>61</sup> He explained how the test problems must 1) refer to experiences equally common in the life of all socio-economic groups, 2) must “be expressed in symbols, in words or pictures” equally common to all classes, and 3) must “be such as to arouse approximately equal interest, attention, and desire to achieve their solution” among all socio-economic groups.<sup>62</sup>

The way to achieve such culturally fair tests was to control for social-class variables and to select test items drawn from a “common American culture.” It was here that Davis and his colleagues ran into their most intractable problem, for what precisely could count as “common culture” in a nation so racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse? The nationalistic, postwar environment of “consensus” was crucial in making sense of how these and other American intellectuals could genuinely believe in the possibility of locating a clear “American culture,” or “American way of life.”<sup>63</sup> The hollowness of Davis’s statements regarding features of this American culture belied the validity of such a concept. For example, drawing from his acculturation work, Davis referred vaguely to “American food habits” and cultural behaviors such as monogamy.<sup>64</sup> Rarely did he examine American culture more concretely, for in that cultural moment Americans took for granted the existence of an integrated American culture. Creating test problems drawn from this common culture, though, would prove difficult.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>63</sup> For more on the rise of cultural nationalism and consensus culture, see Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Wendy Wall, *Inventing the ‘American Way’: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Philip Gleason, “World War II and the Development of American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 36, 3 (1984): 343-58.

<sup>64</sup> Allison Davis, “Some Basic Concepts in the Education of Ethnic and Lower-Class Groups,” Allison Davis Papers, Box 77, Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Consequently, Davis and his colleagues spent more energy simply purging social-class biases from intelligence tests. Again, the test items' language proved most important. Davis found that two types of test questions predominated: those based upon "(1) verbal relationship and complex academic phrasing (such as verbal 'analogies' and 'opposites,' and 'syllogisms'); and (2) rare words (used in vocabulary tests and 'definitions')." <sup>65</sup> Even though the more reflective test creators such as Alfred Binet discerned the cultural biases of tests so reliant on language, they nevertheless continued to design tests along those lines. Davis explained test-makers' justification for this as stemming from the traditional tests' ability to correlate highly with school achievement, and thus to serve as practical barometers of school success, even if that success only marked a perpetuation of social inequality. Davis also explained that

test-makers and academic people persist in the belief that verbal facility is the highest expression of mental capacity. Their own careers and training have emphasized linguistic skill above all other forms of learning. Since they make and administer the tests, they build into the tests, as most important, that particular element or factor which is most important in their own academic culture. <sup>66</sup>

Like the middle-class families, industrialists, and school personnel whom Davis had studied earlier, he found test-makers to be middle-class people who enshrined middle-class bias in their own particular institutional practice.

Davis drew from linguistic theory to critique the widespread notion that fluency in language equated with higher intelligence. Davis explained that "Any language is a highly formalized system of cultural behavior" that "must be learned by long experience in that cultural group which possesses the language." <sup>67</sup> So facility with language represented cultural training more than native ability. Furthermore, he described how "The lower socio-economic groups

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<sup>65</sup> Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, 79.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*



have a different language-culture than the higher groups.”<sup>68</sup> Here Davis cited the work of Edward Sapir and Morris Swadesh, both of whom relativized language by portraying the language of any particular group—“primitive” or “civilized”—as equal, and as well-suited for the needs of that particular group.<sup>69</sup> Davis innovatively extrapolated those ideas to modern lower-class groups, whose nonstandard dialects, he contended, were as complex and functional as academic English. Because languages were equal, and because they were a measure only of cultural training, intelligence tests needed to control for language differences if they were to measure native ability.

Davis concluded this section by discussing the preliminary findings of his and his colleagues’ experimental tests of intelligence. After reducing class-biased language and content and better equalizing motivation for completing the tests successfully, Davis found that he and his colleagues had drastically reduced social-class differences on intelligence tests.<sup>70</sup> These findings anticipated those of the fully completed project as laid out in *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*.

The fifth and final part of *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* extended Davis’s insights regarding the relationship between social class and intelligence testing into American education more broadly. Davis perceived the abolition of traditional intelligence tests as the one practical reform that would have the most far-reaching effects, but he also made clear that all aspects of education required transformation in light of his findings on social class. This was especially true for the curriculum. Reiterating points from his earlier work on acculturation, and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Specifically, he cited: Edward Sapir, *Language* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939); and M. Swadesh, “Siglo XX,” *La Nueva Filología* 4 (Biblioteca del Maestro Mexico: El Nacional, 1941). See Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, 84-85.

<sup>70</sup> Davis, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, 85-88.

echoing the sentiment of his CHD colleagues, Davis explained how 95% of school personnel were members of the middle class who enshrined their middle-class biases into the classroom.<sup>71</sup> In curricular terms, this meant that schools overemphasized verbal fluency and comprehension. The centrality of reading to the curriculum demonstrated this priority, which Davis saw as problematic because he observed how reading “consists chiefly of learning to recognize written symbols, to pronounce them, and to paraphrase them.”<sup>72</sup> Learning to decode the language of others, Davis argued, was far less important than teaching a child “how to think, to develop his reason, his insight, his invention, his imagination.”<sup>73</sup> As Warner, Havighurst, and Loeb had argued in *Who Shall Be Educated?*, Davis maintained that education’s main objective must be to teach students how to solve problems and therefore be effective workers and citizens in a democracy.

Unfortunately, Davis saw American schools as falling fall short of this objective. He observed that schools tended to enshrine social inequality rather than to serve as effective ladders for social mobility and as instruments for democratic inculcation. Culturally-biased intelligence tests played an important role in this process, but so did other school practices. The most important of these was the segregation of students. Davis took up the problem of racial segregation elsewhere; in *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, he criticized the widespread practice of homogenous ability grouping.<sup>74</sup> He explained how very early in a student’s career, teachers combined intelligence tests, reading scores, and their own assessments of students—all of which were culturally biased in favor of the middle class—to segregate students into different ability groups. In effect, ability grouping thus led to segregation along class lines. This

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 94-96.

segregation stigmatized lower-class children as intellectually inferior, and it further alienated them from an educational system that already seemed unrealistic and largely irrelevant to them. Drawing from his acculturation work, Davis also critiqued homogeneous grouping for setting up “different social and cultural groups within the school” and thus establishing “different learning environments.”<sup>75</sup> This harmed all students, for rather than learning the diverse skills of children with different experiences, segregated students were denied opportunities for cultural exchange and engagement.

In the end, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* offered a concise and compelling examination of the nature and effects of social-class stratification within American education. Each part synthesized years of research on different aspects of American society into an accessible framework that made all of Davis’s social science work visible to a wide audience. Nevertheless, the book was most influential for its indictment of traditional intelligence tests, and it was in this arena that Davis effected the most social change.

### **The Reception of Davis’s Ideas on Intelligence**

The dissemination of Davis’s ideas on social class and intelligence testing began, of course, before his Inglis Lecture at Harvard. For instance, he presented on this subject at the University of Iowa, the University of Illinois, and the University of California, as well as at educational associations at Iowa State University and the University of Minnesota.<sup>76</sup> But the Inglis Lecture was instrumental in beginning the dissemination process in earnest, for its prestige

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>76</sup> Allison Davis to Flora Rhind, Nov. 10, 1948, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

offered Davis a wide new audience. The publication of Davis's Inglis Lecture, *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*, furthermore, met with immediate commercial success. By 1950, the book was already in its third printing and had sold over 4,500 copies, which was more than any other Inglis lecture in the previous twenty years.<sup>77</sup> In addition, "many of the largest universities" used it as a text, and would continue to do so for the next three decades, as it was constantly reprinted.<sup>78</sup> The book would thus continue to inform educators and others on social class, education, and intelligence testing.

In addition to the book itself, Davis disseminated his ideas on intelligence testing in all sorts of ways. Naturally, he shared his ideas with thousands of students, teachers, and administrators through his courses and workshops at the University of Chicago. But one particularly important professional forum was the esteemed and widely read journal *Scientific Monthly*. In April 1948, he and Havighurst published an article detailing their study of intelligence tests, which extended Davis's ideas to another format and offered additional empirical evidence.<sup>79</sup> This same journal had only recently published an article by psychologist Henry E. Garrett that maintained that disparities in intelligence scores among whites and blacks reflected biological differences in mental ability.<sup>80</sup> That a social scientist could continue to argue that it was "extremely unlikely...that environmental opportunities can possibly explain *all* the differences found" between the test scores of whites and blacks demonstrated how racism continued to hold a place in mainstream social science.<sup>81</sup> This was an important part of the

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<sup>77</sup> Allison Davis, "Author Questionnaire," Nov. 16, 1950, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 165, Folder 3. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, "Measurement of Mental Systems: Can Intelligence Be Measured?," *Scientific Monthly* 66 (April 1948): 301-316.

<sup>80</sup> Henry E. Garrett, "Negro-White Differences in Mental Ability in the United States," *Scientific Monthly* 65 (October 1947): 329-333.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 333.

context in which Davis and his colleagues attempted to inform debates on intelligence testing, even if those debates had become more dormant by the 1940s. To be sure, though, the number of scholars who vigorously criticized Garrett's article, including Ashley Montagu, testified to the larger environmentalist trend in social science.<sup>82</sup>

Still, those who believed in innate racial differences in intelligence comprised only one group of critics of Davis's ideas. The psychologists who developed the tests and the industries that profited from their proliferation were two other important groups. Indeed, Davis and his colleagues were well-aware of the fierce criticism their work would inspire among these groups, both of which had "vested interests" in the traditional tests.<sup>83</sup> Arthur S. Otis, one of the leading intelligence-test makers and the one-time Director of Test Services for World Book Company, soon gave voice to such critiques in a long rejoinder to Davis and Havighurst's article in the *Scientific Monthly*.<sup>84</sup> Otis argued that the authors were biased in assuming, but not proving, the equal intelligence of people from different socio-economic groups. In a social-Darwinian fashion, he contended that "logical reasoning" in fact made clear that the higher socio-economic groups would be more intelligent.<sup>85</sup> He explained that "in the long run the less favored individuals—those with less hereditary ability to solve life's problems and adjust themselves, especially in these days of insecurity—must necessarily tend to gravitate into the lower

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<sup>82</sup> Ashley F. Montagu, "Racial Intelligence," *Scientific Monthly* 66 (January 1948): 81-82; Benj. Pasamanick, "Comments and Criticisms," *Scientific Monthly* 66 (January 1948): 82; Daniel A. Okun, "Comments and Criticisms," *Scientific Monthly* 66 (February 1948): 173; Joseph Samachson, "Comments and Criticisms," *Scientific Monthly* 66 (February 1948): 173-74; and Herbert Cahn, "Comments and Criticisms," *Scientific Monthly* 66 (May 1948): 447.

<sup>83</sup> Allison Davis to Flora Rhind, Nov. 10, 1948, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>84</sup> Arthur S. Otis, "Can Intelligence Be Measured? (A Reply to Davis and Havighurst)," *Scientific Monthly* 67 (October 1948): 312-13. For another example of a test-maker who resisted Davis's ideas, see Ernest W. Tiegs, Editor-in-Chief of the California Test Bureau, to Ernest A. Haggard, February 10, 1950, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>85</sup> Otis, "Can Intelligence Be Measured?," 312.

socioeconomic groups.”<sup>86</sup> Henry Chauncey, the director of the Educational Testing Service, a private nonprofit testing company founded in 1947 but destined to fundamentally transform testing practices in the United States, was but one other important person who expressed the same thinking.<sup>87</sup>

Otis’s logic was thus precisely the type of reasoning that Davis and his colleagues had to confront. This was not easy because such “logical reasoning” had a seductive simplicity. Such logic, in fact, mistook social differences for biological differences, but therein lay the problem. Abstract social forces such as “class” and “culture” were often difficult to understand, yet they were a prerequisite for understanding Davis’s critique of intelligence tests. Davis thus had to first expose people to their own cultural biases, which they had naturalized or unthinkingly accepted, before he could get them to see how social characteristics actually masqueraded as individual ones. Of course, these arguments did not occur in a vacuum. Test-makers and distributors had powerful vested interests in maintaining the status quo. Still, even if only to protect themselves, many test-makers sought out Davis’s ideas and labored to modify their tests in order to make them more culturally fair.<sup>88</sup>

Davis and Havighurst quickly refuted Otis’s arguments. They explained, first, how they had not simply assumed that all socio-economic groups were necessarily equal in intelligence. Rather, they drew from the latest genetic science to conclude that it was far more likely that “the several socioeconomic groups in the United States are equal in innate intelligence.”<sup>89</sup>

Essentially, they placed the burden of proof on their critics to prove any socio-economic

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>87</sup> Lemann, “The Great Sorting,” 87.

<sup>88</sup> See, for instance, Harold Seashore, Director of Test Division for The Psychological Corporation, to Davis, Feb. 2, 1950, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>89</sup> Robert J. Havighurst and W. Allison Davis, “(A Rejoinder to Mr. Otis),” *Scientific Monthly* 67 (October 1948): 313-14.

differences in intelligence. Such proof, of course, would have to rely on far more than “logical reasoning,” which simply inscribed social differences onto individuals. Citing the work of J. B. S. Haldane, Julian Huxley, and Lancelot Hogben, the authors explained how genetics refuted Otis’s “logical reasoning” at every turn.<sup>90</sup> Above all, they argued that genetic adaptations among humans occurred very slowly over long periods of time, meaning that socio-economic differences over the course of a few generations simply would not affect innate intelligence. They continued with a practical argument that even if a small innate difference existed, then there would still be far more lower-class individuals endowed with greater innate intelligence simply because there were so many more lower-class people. Finally, they critiqued the oft-proclaimed defense of intelligence tests as harmless, useful prognosticators of individuals’ school success. Davis and Havighurst explained how the tests did not merely prognosticate success, but were actually active in determining it. Specifically, they were part of the larger sorting apparatus that favored higher-status individuals and penalized lower-status pupils. They “put pupils into one or another kind of learning program” and told teachers “how much to expect from pupils.”<sup>91</sup> In this way, intelligence tests actually helped perpetuate social inequality.

That such back-and-forth arguments took place within the pages of the *Scientific Monthly* illustrates the wide interest that Davis’s ideas were garnering. Indeed, readers began writing to Davis to profess support for his position and to request further information. One example was Orval Hobart Mowrer, who became the president of the American Psychological Association in 1954. In a letter to Davis, Mowrer referenced the dispute with Otis, and he admitted that Davis’s

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 314.

arguments were more compelling.<sup>92</sup> Writing to Flora Rhind of the General Education Board, Davis reported that he was pleased that “Havighurst’s and my rejoinder to [Otis] brought a good response from psychologists.”<sup>93</sup>

The full report on the intelligence-testing project, *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*, was another important instrument for the dissemination of Davis’s ideas. Indeed, in addition to regular sales, the authors distributed 200 copies of the book to “leaders and influential persons in the field of mental testing and measurement.”<sup>94</sup> In this book, Davis reprinted, largely verbatim, his work as published in the *Scientific Monthly* and in his Inglis Lecture. Since *Intelligence and Cultural Differences* was reviewed widely, however, it better reveals the reception of Davis’s ideas, especially among the social-science community. Both national and international audiences reviewed the book, the latter of which included Arabic and French scholars.<sup>95</sup> The book met with favorable reviews in a wide range of periodicals, such as the *Elementary School Journal* and the *U. S. Quarterly Book Review*.<sup>96</sup> A reviewer in the *Teachers College Record* called the book “so important and so challenging” that its publication had led to a symposium “organized around the ‘Implications of the Chicago Studies of Intelligence and Cultural Differences’ at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association” in 1952.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Orval Hobart Mowrer to Allison Davis, Sept. 25, 1948, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>93</sup> Allison Davis to Flora Rhind, Nov. 10, 1948, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>94</sup> Kenneth Eells to Tyler, Bloom, Havighurst, Haggard, Hess, and Davis, Aug. 17, 1951, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>95</sup> See University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 165, Folder 3, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>96</sup> *Book Review Digest* (February 1953); *Elementary School Journal* 52 (1952): 365; *U. S. Quarterly Book Review* 7 (1951): 394. See University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 165, Folder 3. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>97</sup> Irving Lorge, “Implications of *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*,” by Kenneth Eells, Allison Davis, Robert J. Havighurst, Virgil E. Herrick, and Ralph Tyler, *Teachers College Record* (January 195e), University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 165, Folder 3. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.



Criticisms of the book centered on a few areas. First, some reviewers criticized the presentation of the book. Anthropologist Charles F. Harding, for instance, called it “overly long and detailed” given the “essential simplicity of the conclusions reached.”<sup>98</sup> Second, some reviewers sought greater theoretical clarification. One critic argued that the results would be clearer if the authors had made “distinctions between three types of intelligence: namely, genetic intelligence, developmental intelligence, and test intelligence.”<sup>99</sup> A third and more revealing criticism revolved around the authors’ recommendations for abolishing the traditional tests. Sociologist William H. Sewell, along with many others, wanted to salvage the current tests, arguing that the abolition of traditional tests was unnecessary, unrealistic, and problematic. Sewell contended that there were “many legitimate uses for existing intelligence tests,” particularly the tests’ ability to prognosticate school and social success.<sup>100</sup> Like Arthur Otis, Sewell side-stepped the problem that the tests did not merely predict such success, but actually helped to determine it in culturally-biased ways.

The richest review by far was that of S. Stansfeld Sargent in the *American Journal of Sociology*.<sup>101</sup> Sargent’s review contextualized the study with a brief history of social-scientific investigations into intelligence testing. Like most reviewers, he praised the book for demonstrating the social-class bias in intelligence tests, and he admired the interdisciplinary, culture-and-personality collaboration showcased by the authors. Yet he also perceived the

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<sup>98</sup> Charles F. Harding, review of *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*, by Kenneth Eells, Allison Davis, Robert J. Havighurst, Virgil E. Herrick, and Ralph Tyler, *American Anthropologist* 56 (February 1954): 152.

<sup>99</sup> Denton Coker, review of *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*, by Kenneth Eells, Allison Davis, Robert J. Havighurst, Virgil E. Herrick, and Ralph Tyler, *Review and Expositor* (1954), University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 165, Folder 3. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>100</sup> William H. Sewell, review of *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*, by Kenneth Eells, Allison Davis, Robert J. Havighurst, Virgil E. Herrick, and Ralph Tyler, *American Sociological Review* 18 (April 1953): 221. For a test-maker conveying similar ideas, see Ernest W. Tiegs, Editor-in-Chief of the California Test Bureau, to Ernest A. Haggard, February 10, 1950, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>101</sup> Sargent, review of *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*, 209-210.

fundamental weakness of the research project. He explained how their “common-culture” approach required “limiting the test to such a narrow range of experiences that it could not possibly be representative of the most important kinds of problem-solving ability in either high-status or low-status culture.”<sup>102</sup> Here he exposed the hollowness of the concept of a “common culture.” Social class, in the end, informed every aspect of people’s behavior, values, and motivations, so eliminating it was not only impossible, but also destructive of the potential value of any intelligence test. To be fair, though, the authors recognized the difficulty here, and they focused above all on reducing cultural bias. Still, Sargent’s point helps to explain one of the reasons that Davis and his colleagues ultimately failed to develop commercially successful alternative tests.

Of course, the real significance of Davis’s ideas lay not in his ability to develop valid alternative tests as judged by social scientists, but in rethinking intelligence more broadly and exposing the cultural bias inherent in current tests and educational practices. Professional educators were thus naturally one of Davis’s most important audiences. Accordingly, many of his other writings targeted educational publications. For example, one article in *The Phi Beta Kappan* explained the cultural biases of intelligence tests.<sup>103</sup> Another article in that same journal explained the different class cultures and their implications for how teachers assessed the abilities of their students.<sup>104</sup> Davis also published an important article in *Educational Leadership*, which was an organ of the National Education Association that reached over 400,000 readers.<sup>105</sup> Here Davis recommended a primary curriculum that was relevant,

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>103</sup> Allison Davis, “Poor People have Brains Too,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 30 (April 1949): 294-95.

<sup>104</sup> Allison Davis, “Socio-Economic Influences on Learning,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 32 (January 1951): 253-56.

<sup>105</sup> Allison Davis, “Developing an Improved Primary Curriculum,” *Educational Leadership: Journal of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, N.E.A.* 7 (December 1949): 175-180; Allison Davis,

interesting, and comprehensible to students. He maintained that teachers needed to move away from rote memorization and lower-order thinking, and instead should focus on higher-order thinking by emphasizing the “*real and common* experiences of all socio-economic groups.”<sup>106</sup> Within less than a year of this article’s publication, Davis received “more than 350 letters referring to the article.”<sup>107</sup>

Davis also disseminated his ideas to even larger national audiences. In addition to well-received presentations at Harvard, Columbia, Northwestern, California, Iowa, the American Psychological Association, the American Educational Research Association, and the International Society for the Study of Exceptional Children, Davis presented at the important 1950 White House Conference on Children and Youth.<sup>108</sup> In fact, Davis had the privilege of being “the only speaker on the program with President Truman on the morning of December 5, 1951.”<sup>109</sup> This conference had been held every ten years since its inception in 1919, and this particular gathering focused on the theme of personality development and adjustment.<sup>110</sup> Here many of the nation’s foremost thinkers and activists in the field presented papers, including Benjamin Spock, Margaret Mead, Bruno Bettelheim, Erik Erikson, and Franz Alexander.<sup>111</sup> Kenneth Clark also presented a paper on the effects of prejudice and discrimination on children’s

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“Author Questionnaire,” Nov. 16, 1950, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 165, Folder 3, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>106</sup> Davis, “Developing an Improved Primary Curriculum,” 178.

<sup>107</sup> Allison Davis, “Author Questionnaire,” Nov. 16, 1950, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 165, Folder 3, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>108</sup> Allison Davis to Fred D. Wieck, Sept. 28, 1949, University of Chicago Press, Records, Box 165, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; “Standard Intelligence Tests Held Remiss in Evaluating Children’s Mental Capacities,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1950.

<sup>109</sup> Allison Davis to Anna Rosenberg, Assistant Secretary of Defense, April 8, 1951, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; “Youth Conference Schedule,” *Washington Post*, December 3, 1950.

<sup>110</sup> Edward A. Richards, ed., *Proceedings of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth* (Raleigh, NC: Health Publications Institute, 1951), 13.

<sup>111</sup> Catherine E. Kerr, “Race in the Making of American Liberalism, 1912-1965,” (Ph.D. Diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1995), 240.

personalities, citing his famous “doll test,” which would be important in *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>112</sup> Davis, for his part, presented his research on intelligence testing and explained the need for culturally fair intelligence tests.

Davis calibrated his talk, entitled “Socio-Economic Influence Upon Children’s Learning,” to appeal to Americans in the context of the Cold War.<sup>113</sup> In the late 1940s, he perceived a new opportunity to mobilize Americans against the discrimination faced by lower-class and minority peoples. Rather than making moralistic arguments about helping the underprivileged, he made practical, nationalistic arguments about successfully waging the Cold War. In his presentation, much of which he later published in an article called “Education for the Conservation of Human Resources” in the journal *Progressive Education*, Davis discussed how the U.S. wasted nearly 60% of its human resources by failing to develop and take advantage of the abilities of lower-class Americans.<sup>114</sup> Drawing from his own research, he explained the root causes of this problem as “owing to (a) the failure of intelligence tests to measure the real mental ability of the children from the lower socio-economic groups, and (b) the failure of the schools to recognize and train this ability.”<sup>115</sup> Davis then made clear the dangerous implications of this failure:

This country cannot survive as the leading world power, unless we learn how to discover, recruit, and train more of the brains in the lower-income groups. If we cannot find more people with quick minds and native-ability in the great reservoir of the lower-income groups in the United States...we shall not be able to compete with the vast populations of western Europe or Asia...If our society is to increase its strength, we need to recruit ability of all kinds from the lower socio-economic groups. When any nation stops recruiting or slows it down through the failure to discover the able but poor children, and

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<sup>112</sup> Jackson, Jr., *Social Scientists for Social Justice*, 111.

<sup>113</sup> Allison Davis, “Socio-Economic Influences Upon Children’s Learning,” in *Proceedings of the MidCentury White House Conference*, 77-83.

<sup>114</sup> Allison Davis, “Education for the Conservation of Human Resources,” *Progressive Education* 27 (May 1950): 221-22. Davis published another article in *The Survey* that reiterated the same ideas. See Allison Davis, “Ability and Survival,” *The Survey* 87 (February 1951): 60-63.

<sup>115</sup> Davis, “Education for the Conservation of Human Resources,” 221-22.

to develop their abilities, that nation starts to decline and die. There have been no exceptions to this rule in the history of modern nations.<sup>116</sup>

This jarring language resonated with many Americans in the context of chronic insecurity and anxiety surrounding the Cold War and the Red Scare. Davis's provocative talk at the conference was then circulated to a national audience through various news organizations.<sup>117</sup>

The late 1940s and early 1950s marked the height of Cold War fears about nuclear holocaust and further global conflagration. In rapid succession, a series of foreign and domestic developments created an atmosphere of insecurity. Americans' hopes for peace after the war soon dissipated as the United States confronted the Soviet Union all over the globe. Stalin denied free elections in Poland, took control of Czechoslovakia, and hardened the Soviets' position in eastern Germany. Meanwhile, the United States stayed mobilized for war and aggressively expanded its economic and military might across the world, as was evident through the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the Berlin Blockade crisis. Then in 1949, the Soviets developed an atomic bomb, and China had a communist revolution, eventually pushing the United States to enter a war in Korea in June 1950 to prevent what policy-makers saw as Northern communist aggression. Speaking right after Davis at the White House Conference on Children and Youth, Truman alerted Americans that "the effort of the evil forces of Communism to reach out and dominate the world confronts our nation and our civilization with the greatest challenge in our history."<sup>118</sup> He insisted that only massive rearmament and permanent military readiness "can insure our survival as a nation."<sup>119</sup> At home, fears of communist subversion

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 221-22.

<sup>117</sup> Dorothea Andrews, "U.S. Wastes Manpower, Parley Told: Class Conflict Between Adults, Children Blamed By Educator," *Washington Post*, December 6, 1950; "Baby's Thumb Sucking Laid to Parental Zeal," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 6, 1950; "China Poses Grave Risk, Truman Says," *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1950; Elsie Carper, "U.S. Public Education System Not Democratic, Says Dr. Davis," *Washington Post*, December 10, 1950.

<sup>118</sup> "China Poses Grave Risk, Truman Says," *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1950.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

escalated after the famous 1947 “Hollywood Ten” case, after Truman’s investigation—beginning in 1947—into the loyalty of federal employees, and especially by 1950 after Joseph McCarthy rose to power in the Senate by accusing high-ranking congressional and military officials of Communist Party membership. In the context of such anxiety regarding America’s ability to defeat its enemies at home and abroad, Davis’s call to mobilize all of the country’s human resources for national strength was compelling.<sup>120</sup>

As influential as all of the above publications and presentations were in disseminating Davis’s ideas, it was arguably his presentations before the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in 1949 that proved the most important. Indeed, Ralph Tyler had made clear to Davis that the AASA was “the most powerful education association in the country.”<sup>121</sup> The high-level administrators involved with this organization had broad authority in setting school policy.<sup>122</sup> Davis presented his research on intelligence testing at the AASA’s three regional meetings held in San Francisco, St. Louis, and Philadelphia, respectively. The San Francisco conference alone included “Four thousand superintendents, educators, college professors and other administrators,” while the Philadelphia meeting drew 5,000.<sup>123</sup> In part because Davis had already made personal and institutional connections with educators in California through his earlier acculturation work, his first AASA presentation in San Francisco proved the most influential. Indeed, Davis’s ideas soon prompted a leading intelligence-test creator, Lewis Terman, to defend intelligence tests at the International Council for Exceptional

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<sup>120</sup> For an overview of American foreign policy in these years, see George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 595-650. For an overview of McCarthyism, see Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).

<sup>121</sup> Allison Davis to Flora Rhind, Nov. 10, 1948, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>122</sup> Benjamin Fines, “Education in Review: Teacher Shortage Remains Greatest Problem, According to School Administrators,” *New York Times*, February 27, 1949.

<sup>123</sup> Fines, “Education in Review;” “5000 Educators Open Conference,” *Washington Post*, March 27, 1949.

Children.<sup>124</sup> The President of the Science Research Associates later told Davis: “your lectures created a sensation on the West Coast.”<sup>125</sup>

Of course, Davis was already aware of this sensation because of the deluge of personal letters he received from conference participants. One field representative for the California Teachers Association, for example, thanked Davis for his “powerful address” at the San Francisco conference.<sup>126</sup> Another told Davis that papers like his “embody a kind of leadership that America badly needs.”<sup>127</sup> Almost everyone who wrote Davis asked him for more information about his ideas, or even for copies of his presentation for distribution to others.<sup>128</sup> The director of secondary instruction of San Diego City Schools summed up many educators’ sentiments in writing that “I believe that it will cause more discussion by educators the country over than any talk that has been given before such groups in recent years.”<sup>129</sup>

The *New York Times* further spread this sensation to a larger national audience by publishing two articles about the San Francisco conference that discussed the nature and impact of Davis’s presentations there. *Times* reporter Benjamin Fines spent one-third of his main article, which was intended to cover the entire conference, on Davis’s “extremely provocative and challenging paper.”<sup>130</sup> After summarizing Davis’s main arguments about intelligence

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<sup>124</sup> The reporter wrote: “Without mentioning Prof. Allison Davis of the University of Chicago by name, he referred, in a paper prepared for the opening of the annual session here of the International Council for Exceptional Children, to Dr. Allen’s [*sic*] criticism of the validity of IQ tests.” Lawrence E. Davis, “Educator Defends Validity of the IQ,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1949.

<sup>125</sup> Lyle M. Spencer to Allison Davis, Aug. 1, 1950, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>126</sup> J. F. Graham to Allison Davis, Feb. 24, 1949, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>127</sup> Franklin Patterson to Davis, March 10, 1949, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>128</sup> W. Hugh Stickler to Allison Davis, on March 2, 1949, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>129</sup> T. Malcolm Brown to Allison Davis, March 4, 1949, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>130</sup> Fines, “Education in Review.”

testing, Fines made clear how “Educators were quick to see the far-reaching implications of this report.”<sup>131</sup> The conference attendees, he continued,

realized that if the Chicago study holds up under further analysis, many of the accepted dogmas and principles of our school program would have to be seriously revised. To a large extent, the I. Q. tests are used to separate children into various groupings either in or out of the classroom. The entire concept of the “intellectually gifted classes” and the “superior” groupings in school rooms throughout the country would have to be reconsidered.<sup>132</sup>

Another article two days later reiterated the same material.<sup>133</sup>

The *Times* articles prompted even more educators from across the country to write to Davis. Now personnel at institutions as diverse as Boston University, the Detroit Board of Education, and the Pine Mountain Settlement School in Kentucky corresponded with Davis to voice their support and to ask for more information on his ideas.<sup>134</sup> All of these letters make clear that Davis had tapped into a widely-held sentiment among educators that their own assessments of their students’ abilities failed to correlate well with those students’ scores on intelligence tests. A professor of education at West Virginia University, for instance, explained to Davis how his skepticism of “so-called intelligence examinations...was greatly increased during my period in the United States Indian Service when I discovered that Indian children appeared always to rate so much lower by these tests than white children, whose intellectual capacity I would have rated no higher.”<sup>135</sup> Another educator in Kentucky reached the same skeptical position after working with children “who are supposed to be ‘inferior’ on more than

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Benjamin Fines, “12 Billions Asked to Build Schools: Long-Range Program Proposed at Coast Conference to End a Dangerous Shortage,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1949.

<sup>134</sup> John M. Harmon to Allison Davis, March 1, 1949; E. W. McDaid to Allison Davis, March 3, 1949; Burton Rogers to Allison Davis, March 1, 1949, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>135</sup> R. D. Baldwin to Allison Davis, March 9, 1949, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.



one count, being not merely Southern and rural but ‘mountain.’”<sup>136</sup> Here the experience of working closely with underprivileged groups taught educators to perceive the cultural bias inherent in standardized tests of intelligence.

African Americans, in particular, were keenly aware of the cultural bias of traditional intelligence tests. They understood how Davis’s work was as much about race as it was about class. As Davis himself had discussed repeatedly, blacks were disproportionately lower-class, and hence disproportionate victims of the class-biased tests. For this reason, black newspapers, such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Chicago Bee*, praised Davis’s work on intelligence testing. One editorial referred to Davis’s project as of the “utmost importance to Negro America.”<sup>137</sup> It explained how African Americans had in fact been waging “The battle on the I.Q. front” for many years, discerning all along that the “failure of intelligence tests is that essentially they measure the literacy and culture of a person rather than their native intelligence.”<sup>138</sup> The color-caste system, black critics maintained, ensured that blacks’ access to literacy and culture was always impeded. Most educators, in turn, missed this environmental explanation for racial differences in intelligence scores, instead believing that “the tests ‘proved’ Negroes to be of ‘inferior intelligence.’”<sup>139</sup> The devastating consequences of this logic, according to another columnist, were that “the public schools used the present unsound tests as the basis for saddling Negro pupils with inferior equipment, curricula, and standards of education.”<sup>140</sup>

Other black columnists perceived even more dire consequences for such racist conceptions of intelligence. Reporter Jacqueline Lopez, for instance, explained how such

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<sup>136</sup> Burton Rogers to Allison Davis, March 1, 1949, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>137</sup> Editorial, “Testing the I.Q. of the Test Takers,” *Chicago Defender*, July 7, 1945.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> “Davis to Revise Intelligence Tests,” *Chicago Bee*, July 7, 1945.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

misconceptions “periodically lead to violence.”<sup>141</sup> Effectively linking such racial discrimination with the international context, Lopez continued: “Most notorious of these misconceptions—that some human beings are innately inferior to others—gave rise to the Nazi ‘superman’ philosophy, and is used by Americans to justify the persecution of the Negro.”<sup>142</sup> At a time when Americans were eager to define themselves against the Nazis and that group’s racial persecution, such arguments took on new weight. Members of the black community, in turn, read about Davis’s work through these black newspapers, and they, too, began writing letters to him. One black teacher in the public schools, for instance, voiced her shared concern that the tests had “not been used wisely,” ultimately thanking Davis for being so “far-seeing.”<sup>143</sup>

Finally, Davis’s colleagues were of course also instrumental in disseminating these same ideas regarding the cultural biases of intelligence tests. The project, after all, was a deeply collaborative one. Davis’s colleague Ernest A. Haggard offers a case in point. In addition to helping to conduct the empirical investigations into class and intelligence, Haggard also presented widely on the group’s findings.<sup>144</sup> For example, he presented before two major organizations at the heart of the intelligence-test industry: the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1948 and the Educational Testing Service in 1949.<sup>145</sup> His talks proved nearly as provocative as Davis’s. For instance, Davis claimed that Haggard’s paper “received more discussion than any paper at the last annual meetings” of the APA.<sup>146</sup> The *Boston Globe*

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<sup>141</sup> Jacqueline Lopez, “U. Of C. Project To Devise IQ Test Fair To All Groups,” *Chicago Defender*, July 14, 1945.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Gail B. Willis to Allison Davis, Sept. 5, 1945, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>144</sup> On Haggard’s help with the project, see Allison Davis, “Education for the Conservation of Human Resources,” Allison Davis Papers, Box 50, Folder 10, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>145</sup> Ernest A. Haggard, “Influence of Culture Background on Test Performance,” Oct. 29, 1949, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>146</sup> Allison Davis to Flora Rhind, Nov. 10, 1948, box 496, folder 5290, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

then transmitted Haggard's ideas to a wider audience, as supporters and critics debated the Chicago group's ideas on intelligence.<sup>147</sup> Echoing Davis's experience, interested readers then wrote to Haggard to hear more about his ideas.<sup>148</sup> Haggard's example is thus indicative of the larger efforts made by Davis's colleagues to disseminate their ideas, and it also reveals the widespread interest in and favorable reception of those ideas on the national scene.

It is impossible to measure how many school districts across the country discontinued their use of intelligence tests at midcentury, but the outpouring of positive responses to Davis's ideas among superintendents, teachers, and professors of education suggests that the numbers were significant. Of course, many other districts may have continued using the tests, but many school personnel would have begun treating their results more critically, and also in conjunction with a greater number of other diagnostics. Many of the tests themselves, moreover, became less culturally biased because of Davis's work. Letters to Davis from test-makers demonstrate how personnel in the testing industry worked to accommodate Davis's ideas and reduce the class bias in their tests.<sup>149</sup> In these ways, Davis and his colleagues helped to eliminate some of the most egregious examples of class bias in the tests themselves and in how they were used, all the while prompting many districts to discontinue their use altogether.

## **Reform Deferred**

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<sup>147</sup> "Wider Intelligence Tests Urged by Psychologists," *The Boston Herald*, Sept. 9, 1948.

<sup>148</sup> Ernest W. Tieg to Ernest A. Haggard, Feb. 10, 1950, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>149</sup> See, for instance, Harold Seashore, Director of Test Division for The Psychological Corporation, to Davis, Feb. 2, 1950, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Despite their many achievements, Davis and his colleagues could not successfully orchestrate more systematic changes to intelligence testing in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. The timing was simply not right. To be sure, Davis had indeed tapped into a deep populist resentment against intelligence testing within American culture. But such latent hostility ran up against practical exigencies within postwar America, and with the vested interests of several groups. Over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, publishing companies, schools, corporations, and psychologists all developed powerful vested interests in the tests, and challenging those arrangements would require more than sound critiques; it would require a social movement. But with wartime demobilization and the beginnings of a population explosion known as the “baby boom,” the need to sort Americans into different segments of a complex society only seemed to increase. Applied psychology proliferated as psychologists devised practical ways to “adjust” Americans to various social institutions.<sup>150</sup> In the interwar era, the Great Depression had nurtured radicalism and prompted Americans to question social stratification and to mobilize against inequality. In the postwar era, on the other hand, the Depression had abated and fascism had taught many Americans the perils of radicalism. So Americans in the postwar period focused more on expanding opportunity than on challenging social arrangements.

It might have helped if Davis and his colleagues had been more successful in developing alternative, “culturally fair” tests that could have supplanted the traditional tests. Developing alternative tests, however, proved more difficult than Davis and his colleagues had imagined. By 1948, when the GEB’s three-year grant ended, the CHD had made very little progress in that endeavor. The GEB then refused to offer an additional grant to help with “developing and

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<sup>150</sup> See Donald S. Napoli, *Architects of Adjustment: The History of the Psychological Profession in the United States* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1981), 30-41, 86-152.

standardizing the new tests.”<sup>151</sup> Because Davis and his colleagues were unable to procure additional grant money, the task of developing new tests increasingly fell to Davis alone. In August 1950, he reported: “I have taken off four quarters from teaching, without salary, in order to construct my tests. That is, I gave up salary for that period. I have therefore put the equivalent of about \$11,000 into the tests, in addition to \$750 which I have paid of my own money for the drawing of items.”<sup>152</sup> Davis knew that alternative tests were necessary in order to push schools and other institutions to discontinue use of the traditional tests, so he incurred large personal expenses to try to keep the creation project alive. By 1951, he and Kenneth Eells succeeded in developing a “common-culture” test, which became known as the *Davis-Eells Test*.<sup>153</sup> Davis marketed the test not only to schools, but also to industry and the military—all of which he believed needed to better identify and recruit lower-class ability.<sup>154</sup>

The *Davis-Eells Test* marked a valiant effort to measure mental ability in non-culturally-biased ways. It consisted of a series of cartoons in which test-takers would interpret images of ordinary people in easily recognizable situations. For example, one test item involved showing the examinee a particular image accompanied by an examiner (who had established rapport with the examinees) who reads aloud the following:

This picture shows a woman; it shows a man with a bump on his head; and it shows a broken window. A boy is outside the window. Look at the picture and find out the thing that is true. (1) The man fell down and hit his head. (2) The ball came through the window and hit the man’s head. (3) The picture does not show how the man got the bump

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<sup>151</sup> Flora M. Rhind to Allison Davis, Oct. 29, 1948, box 496, folder 5289, series 1, General Education Board Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>152</sup> Allison Davis to Lyle M. Spencer, August 16, 1950, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>153</sup> Allison Davis and Kenneth Eells, *Davis-Eells Test of General Intelligence or Problem-Solving Ability: Manual* (New York: World Book Company, 1953).

<sup>154</sup> Allison Davis to Anna Rosenberg, Assistant Secretary of Defense, April 8, 1951, Allison Davis Papers, Box 46, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

on his head. Nobody can tell because the picture doesn't show how the man got the bump.<sup>155</sup>

The test required no reading, and it had no time limit—both of which were factors the authors understood as favoring middle-class test-takers.<sup>156</sup> The *Davis-Eells Test* thus aimed to measure general reasoning ability and practical problem-solving skills in non-biased ways. To assess older and brighter students, the items demanded that test-takers draw increasingly complex inferences and judgments from the cartoons. Davis, Eells, Robert Hess, and others at the University of Chicago found the tests to be successful in reducing class bias, while still effectively measuring individual differences and predicting scholastic success.<sup>157</sup>

Not surprisingly, most psychologists disagreed. An array of independent studies found that the *Davis-Eells Test* produced a similar level of discrimination along social-class, ethnic, and rural-urban lines.<sup>158</sup> One study concluded that “the Davis-Eells Games do not tend to reveal a ‘hidden intellectual potential’—by virtue of their elimination of culturally unfair items—not tapped by other intelligence tests presumed to be culturally biased.”<sup>159</sup> Professional symposia also featured attacks on the test, further showing how challenging Davis's ideas were at the time.<sup>160</sup> The *Davis-Eells Test* may not have been a great alternative to traditional tests, for it was

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<sup>155</sup> Jensen, *Bias in Mental Testing*, 644.

<sup>156</sup> Davis and Eells, *Davis-Eells Test*, 4-5.

<sup>157</sup> Davis and Eells, *Davis-Eells Test*, 60; Robert D. Hess, “Controlling Culture Influence in Mental Testing: An Experimental Test,” *Journal of Educational Research* 49 (September 1955): 58.

<sup>158</sup> Henry Angelino and Charles L. Shedd, “An Initial Report of a Validation Study of the Davis-Eells Tests of General Intelligence or Problem Solving Ability,” *Journal of Psychology* 40 (January 1955): 35-38; William Coleman and Annie W. Ward, “A Comparison of Davis-Eells and Kuhlman-Finch Scores of Children from High and Low socio-economic status,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 46 (December 1955): 465-69; H. Glen Ludlow, “Some Recent Research on the Davis-Eells Game,” *School and Society* 84 (October 1956): 146-48; Victor H. Nolls, “Relation of Scores on Davis-Eells Test of General Intelligence to Social Status, School Achievement, and Other Intelligence Test Results,” *American Psychologist* 13 (1958): 394; Merle W. Tate and Charlotte E. Voss, “A Study of the Davis-Eells Test of Intelligence,” *Harvard Educational Review* 26 (Fall 1956): 374-87.

<sup>159</sup> Sidney Rosenblum, James E. Keller, and Ned Papania, “Davis-Eells (‘Culture-Fair’) Test Performance of Lower-Class Retarded Children,” *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 19 (June 1955): 54.

<sup>160</sup> Lee J. Cronbach, “Five Decades of Public Controversy Over Mental Testing,” *American Psychologist* 30 (1975): 8.

cumbersome to administer and was arguably not well-equipped to predict scholastic success. Furthermore, the idea of a “common culture” was hopelessly vague, and the cartoon format made it difficult to assess more sophisticated types of thinking.

Nevertheless, the seriousness of Davis’s critique did not rise and fall on the tenability of any particular alternative test. His challenge was not merely to traditional tests, but to traditional methods of schooling, and to customary ways of thinking about intelligence. Measurement psychologists exploited the weaknesses of the *Games* to divert attention away from the larger charges of cultural bias. In the 1940s and 1950s, they were largely successful in muffling Davis’s critiques and in overseeing the proliferation of the traditional tests. Still, as the next chapter explores, Davis continued to use his empirical findings of class bias, which disproportionately affected African Americans, for progressive ends in the 1950s. In particular, he counteracted racist imputations about black intellectual inferiority that arose in response to efforts to desegregate schools in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

Despite the success of vested interests in sidelining Davis’s critiques in the 1950s, Davis, in 1972, surveyed his own influence and reported satisfactorily: “This was one time I got what I wanted: a direct effect on society from social science research.”<sup>161</sup> Indeed, in addition to the earlier interest it garnered, Davis’s work was rediscovered and redeployed during the 1960s and 1970s in movements for social change. Even though his contributions were not always acknowledged and appreciated, Davis’s efforts in overseeing the first quantitative, empirical critiques of cultural bias in intelligence testing underpinned progressive changes in testing in a later generation.

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<sup>161</sup> Allison Davis quoted in Barbara P. Turner, “Profile of Allison Davis; The Man and His Research,” *Education at Chicago 2* (Autumn 1972): 22.

The process began in the 1960s, when serious change was afoot. An atmosphere of protest over inequality and expert authority prevailed, as Americans questioned Jim Crow, poverty, sexism, Cold War foreign policy, and antidemocratic practices everywhere. The civil rights movement fueled the protest and empowered African Americans and others to demand social justice in many arenas. In that new context, Davis's critiques of class and racial biases in intelligence testing proved influential among a variety of social activists. Davis helped the cause by continuing to speak on these issues in the 1960s, and he found an increasingly interested public. For instance, he gave a talk on the social influences upon IQ scores before the American Home Economics Association in 1965, and the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Washington Post* broadcast his ideas to a larger audience.<sup>162</sup> A year earlier, Ralph McGill, an opponent of segregation and a Pulitzer-Prize-winning journalist, testified to the changing tenor of the times by critiquing intelligence tests as discriminatory against racial minorities, the poor, and rural people. He drew directly from Davis's research to explain how the tests were "based on a super middle and upper class culture."<sup>163</sup> In this way, commentators rediscovered Davis's earlier quantitative studies of the cultural biases of intelligence tests to lend validity to their own social critiques, and to bolster their movements for social change.

As African Americans fought for the end of Jim Crow, for fair housing practices, for fair employment practices, and against institutional racism of all sorts, many of them also harnessed the power of their social movement to critique intelligence testing, which they had long understood to be a tool of racial oppression. The Association of Black Psychologists (ABP) led the way here. The organization formed in 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

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<sup>162</sup> "City Life Aids Negroes' I. Q., Seminar Told," *Chicago Tribune*, March 17, 1965; "Life in North Said to Boost Negroes' IQ," *Washington Post*, March 17, 1965.

<sup>163</sup> Ralph McGill, "IQ Tests Are Unfair," *Boston Globe*, February 6, 1964.



and amid the rise of Black Nationalism. Perceiving the institutional racism within white-dominated institutions like the American Psychological Association, and mirroring Black Nationalist trends throughout the country, ABP members sought to develop their own black-controlled institution that was dedicated to black liberation from poverty and racism. One of the founders of the ABP was an African American named Robert L. Williams. When he was in high school, Williams had scored an 82 on an IQ test. Had he scored three points lower, he would have been placed on a special-education track. All the same, his counselor told him he was not equipped for college, but that bricklaying suited him well. Williams ignored his advice and eventually went on to earn a Ph.D. and become a professor of psychology at Washington University in St. Louis.<sup>164</sup> His own experience thus sensitized him to the biases of the tests and to the systematic ways in which they perpetuated racial inequalities.

Accordingly, Williams worked with the ABP to challenge intelligence-testing practices from within the discipline. He built explicitly from Davis's research to carry out further research that showed how intelligence tests were biased in favor of the white middle class.<sup>165</sup> Reflecting the more confrontational attitudes of the time, Williams also developed two tests—provocatively called the B.I.T.C.H. (Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity) and the S.O.B. (Son of the Original Bitch test)—that measured white people's knowledge of, or lack thereof, the black experience.<sup>166</sup> The idea was to reveal in humiliating fashion how ignorant whites were of black culture, and how racially biased tests of intelligence were given the vastly different cultural experiences of white and black people. In an earlier context, Davis sought to exploit

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<sup>164</sup> Robert L. Williams, "Scientific Racism and the IQ: The Silent Mugging of the Black Community," *Psychology Today* (May 1974): 32.

<sup>165</sup> Paul Delaney, "Black Psychologist Fighting Use of Intelligence Tests He Says Reflect White Middle-Class Values," *New York Times*, May 13, 1975.

<sup>166</sup> Williams, "Scientific Racism and the IQ," 101.

opportunities for racial integration by deemphasizing cultural differences between the races, and by attacking intelligence tests on class grounds. But in the era of Black Power, black critics rejected the idea of assimilation into white culture, and they celebrated what they perceived as a unique and vibrant black culture. Consequently, Williams emphasized the racial as well as class biases of the tests. At the ABP's 1969 annual meeting, Williams and other members called for an immediate moratorium on testing of African Americans' IQs. The members charged that the tests:

1. Label black children as uneducable;
2. Place black children in special classes;
3. Potentiate inferior education;
4. Assign black children to lower education tracks than whites;
5. Deny black children higher educational opportunities;
6. Destroy positive intellectual growth and development of black children.<sup>167</sup>

Through their ability to draw upon Davis's empirical studies of the biases of intelligence tests, the ABP's arguments gained further credibility and validity.

With a larger social movement behind the protests, major social changes began to occur. Members of marginalized groups took to the courts to challenge the discrimination they faced from intelligence tests, and the courts started to rule in their favor. The first court decision in which intelligence tests played a prominent role was *Hobsen v. Hansen* (1967).<sup>168</sup> Circuit Judge J. Skelly Wright outlawed the tracking system in Washington, D. C., arguing that it was used to perpetuate racial inequality, and to resist the mandated racial desegregation of the schools in 1956. Because mental tests were a significant justification for tracking, Wright criticized the tests along the same lines as Davis. He wrote: "The skills measured by scholastic aptitude tests

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<sup>167</sup> Robert L. Williams, "Abuses and Misuses in Testing Black Children," *Counseling Psychologist* 2 (Fall 1971), 67.

<sup>168</sup> David K. Cohen, "Jurists and Educators on Urban Schools: The Wright Decision and the Passow Report," *Teachers College Record* 70 (December 1968): 233-50.

are verbal. More precisely, an aptitude test is essentially a test of the student's command of standard English and grammar."<sup>169</sup> He continued:

Whether a test is verbal or nonverbal, the skills being measured are not innate or inherited traits. They are learned, acquired through experience. It used to be the prevailing theory that aptitude tests—or 'intelligence' tests as they are often called, although the term is obviously misleading—do measure some stable, predetermined intellectual process that can be isolated and called intelligence. Today, modern experts in educational testing and psychology have rejected this concept as false.<sup>170</sup>

Wright may not have been familiar with Davis's work in particular, but the modern expertise that he referred to began a quarter century earlier with Davis's and the CHD's empirical investigations into intelligence testing. Other cases all across the country, including *Diana et al. v. California Board of Education* (1970) and *Larry P. et al. v. Wilson Riles, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of California* (1979), involved similar rulings by judges using similar reasoning. The latter case had the significant result of outlawing the use of IQ tests for all black children in California schools.<sup>171</sup>

By the 1970s, critics of intelligence testing had largely won the public debate. Although serious public interest in the problems of mental testing had only surfaced a few years before, especially in 1962 with the publication of Banesh Hoffman's *The Tyranny of Testing* (1962), the fierce criticism that greeted Arthur Jensen's and Richard Herrnstein's re-articulations of the role of heredity within group intelligence testified to the new hostility towards the tests, which many now saw as antidemocratic and racist.<sup>172</sup> In 1972, the National Education Association's (NEA) annual conference theme was "Tests and Use of Tests—Violations of Human and Civil Rights."

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<sup>169</sup> J. Skelly Wright, quoted in Jensen, *Bias in Mental Testing*, 28.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>171</sup> Jensen, *Bias in Mental Testing*, 32.

<sup>172</sup> Arthur R. Jensen, "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?" *Harvard Educational Review* 39 (Winter 1969): 1-123; Richard J. Herrnstein, "I.Q.," *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1971): 43-64; Cronbach, 1-6; Mark Snyderman and Stanley Rothman, *The IQ Controversy, the Media and Public Policy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988), 1-41.

Echoing Davis, the NEA's stated objective was "To create greater national awareness of an immediate need for concerted action to prohibit the use of IQ and other test scores as indicators of growth potential; especially for the culturally different learner."<sup>173</sup> Throughout the ensuing years, further effective critiques of mental testing arose, even as the tests remained a staple of American society.<sup>174</sup> But measuring the distance Americans had come on the issue, in 1994 when Richard Herrnstein allied with Charles Murray to again publish a hereditarian tract on intelligence testing, *The Bell Curve*, the critical response was once again overwhelming.<sup>175</sup>

In all of these struggles, Allison Davis's shadow loomed large. He built from the long tradition of environmentalist thought to develop the first quantitative, empirical critiques of cultural bias within intelligence tests. He also underlined the significance of his findings by emphasizing the devastating social—and more subtly, moral—effects of wasting human potential. Davis argued that intelligence-testing practices, by arbitrarily curtailing individual development and ratifying social inequality, subverted democracy and the principles of fairness and equality that underpinned it. At midcentury, he and his colleagues at the University of Chicago labored in an environment often hostile to their work, but their research paved the way for future critiques and informed the social activism of the next generation, which was better positioned to foment social change.

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<sup>173</sup> Jensen, *Bias in Mental Testing*, 13.

<sup>174</sup> Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981); Paul L. Houts, ed., *The Myth of Measurability* (New York: Hart Publishing, 1977); Leon J. Kamin, *The Science and Politics of IQ* (Potomac, MD: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1974); and Andrew J. Strenio, *The Testing Trap* (New York: Rawson, Wade, 1981),

<sup>175</sup> Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994). Stephen J. Gould published his famous criticism of intelligence tests, *The Mismeasure of Man* in 1981, but he revised and expanded it in 1995 in order to directly refute *The Bell Curve*, which caused a large public controversy. A variety of intellectuals also published an important compendium in response to *The Bell Curve*. See Russell Jacoby and Naomi Glauberman, eds., *The Bell Curve Debate: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

## **Chapter 10**

### **From *Brown v. Board* to Head Start**

*What is now required is not equality of access to education. What is needed to solve our current as well as future crises in education is a system of compensatory education which can prevent or overcome earlier deficiencies in the development of each individual. Essentially, what this involves is the writing and filling of educational prescriptions for groups of children which will enable them to realize their fullest development.*<sup>1</sup>

--- Allison Davis

Following his efforts within intelligence testing in the 1940s and early 1950s, Davis entered a less productive stage of his career. He had finally managed to gain a modicum of financial stability after earning tenure at Chicago in 1947, but the decades of vigorous work and the string of racial humiliations he had to endure in the process all took their toll. Moreover, the challenges of being an iconoclast wore him down. His pioneering work on racial caste was often misinterpreted and seen as irrelevant in postwar America. So, too, was his work on social class. And in intelligence testing, in which he demonstrated empirically the biases within the tests and then found an audience eager for his ideas, mainstream psychologists and others with vested interests rebuffed his alternative tests and squelched efforts for serious reform. So in the 1950s, some of the very traits that made Davis such an important figure, including his iconoclasm and his status as a pioneer, made him depressive, as people at the time failed to appreciate his work and to act upon his ideas.

Davis's personal life at times contributed to his sour mental state. In the 1950s and 1960s, his wife, Elizabeth, became sickly. After thirty-seven years of marriage and intellectual partnership, she passed away in 1966. Allison then began courting Lois S. Mason, a close friend

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin S. Bloom, Allison Davis, Robert Hess, *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), 6.

since his years at Dillard University in the 1930s. The two married on January 7, 1969, and Mason's exuberant nature boosted Davis's spirit, and that of his children. Allison S. and Gordon J. Davis had in fact become significant figures in their own right, following the example of race leadership which their father had embodied. While W. Allison Davis pursued a career within social science, his two sons chose the legal profession as a practical way to fight racial discrimination and inequality. Allison S. Davis worked for racial integration as a senior partner in housing development firms in Chicago, one of which even employed Barack Obama in the 1990s. In the 1970s, Gordon Davis served as the first African-American commissioner of New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation, and he later worked as a partner in various firms supporting progressive causes relating to real estate, land use, and the environment.<sup>2</sup>

Even while W. Allison Davis at times struggled with depressive mental states, he continued being a quintessential professional. He threw more energy into teaching in subsequent years, and he did continue various lines of research. One project further analyzed the psychology behind middle-class socialization patterns, which he had begun in *Children of Bondage*. In 1960, the University of Pittsburgh invited him to give their Horace Mann Lecture, which he published as *Psychology of the Child of the Middle Class* (1960).<sup>3</sup> In a familiar fashion, he argued that middle-class patterns of socialization relating to delayed gratification and sublimation were psychologically costly, resulting in heightened levels of anxiety among middle-class youth. The idea was useful in pointing out problems associated with dominant patterns of socialization that many people naturalized and prescribed normatively. Another project was a longitudinal study of adolescence and early adulthood that he conducted with Robert Hess in the

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<sup>2</sup> Allison Davis to George Allen Mason, March 28, 1974, Allison Davis Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>3</sup> Allison Davis, *Psychology of the Child in the Middle Class* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1960).

1950s and 1960s. In *Achievement in Adolescence and Young Adulthood* (1963), he and Hess argued that, contrary to received wisdom, adolescents did not resolve their identity crises nor complete their ego development during adolescence.<sup>4</sup> Rather, they found that people did not fully develop psychologically until early adulthood, with the implication that adolescents should not yet be treated as full adults, and that adolescents needed to be better supported throughout the development process.

Even though the depth and breadth of his research waned after 1950, Davis continued to be involved in some of the most consequential developments in American society in the postwar years. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and Head Start represented two such developments. These were major milestones in the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty, respectively, and Davis had a significant role to play within each. Davis exerted his influence in both direct and indirect ways, but it was, above all, the rigor of his scholarship that underpinned both efforts.

However, as before, some of Davis's relevant ideas did not become part of these larger efforts for social justice, for they challenged dominant assumptions and approaches within each cause. In *Brown*, Davis's refusal to emphasize the psychological damage that segregation caused black people, which often came at the expense of structural explanations of inequality, minimized his direct intellectual contribution. Regarding Head Start, which the Johnson administration inaugurated speedily and haphazardly, Davis provided empirical support for the program but also went further than it did by stressing the need for greater educational support throughout childhood and adolescence. In the larger 1960s debates over poverty, in which reductive and problematic conceptions of the "culture of poverty" prevailed, Davis's own scholarship had much to offer. Unlike the white liberals espousing the culture of poverty idea,

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<sup>4</sup> Allison Davis and Robert D. Hess, *Achievement in Adolescence and Young Adulthood* (U.S. Office of Education, 1963).

Davis had emphasized the interplay between economic and cultural forces in a more sophisticated manner, and he documented the resiliency and adaptability of the poor while refraining from stigmatizing them. In the 1960s, liberals were not particularly interested in that nuanced portrait of poverty, preferring instead to play up the damaging effects poverty had on the poor in order to stir middle-class outrage. Davis's public remarks regarding the Aid to Dependent Children welfare program represented his attempt to enter into the fray of these debates, but generally he let his earlier research make clear how poverty functioned as part of the larger social system. That Davis was not more widely consulted regarding his expertise on these issues revealed how much his iconoclasm and his status as a black man in a white-dominated academy had marginalized him. But as both an insider and an outsider in these monumental historical processes, Davis makes clearer the power dynamics, ideological contexts, and missed opportunities in operation in this history.

### ***Brown v. Board of Education***

Davis played a significant role within the process of school desegregation culminating in the United States Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board*, which ruled *de jure* school segregation unconstitutional. Indeed, much of Davis's social-scientific work informed debates on desegregation. Three areas of his research, in particular, made cases against segregation generally. First, Davis's social-anthropological analyses of racial caste in *Deep South* and in many articles amounted to a strong critique of segregation and the wider system of racial stratification of which it was a part. In *Deep South*, Davis's environmentalist critique of caste showed how it was arbitrary, unfair, and debilitating for African Americans, and also how it



perpetuated the larger class stratification that hurt whites as well as blacks, because it helped the white upper class shore up its economic power. Second, Davis's culture-and-personality thought in *Children of Bondage* and elsewhere exposed how racial caste and its attendant segregation delimited the lives of black youth. Though humanizing these children and explaining their behaviors as rational adaptations to difficult environments, Davis showed how the caste divide created frustration and aggression among black youth and thus hindered their successful social development.

Davis's third critique of segregation was more specific to the practice of segregation itself, and it dealt with the school in particular. In his acculturation work at the University of Chicago, Davis made his most powerful critique of racial segregation within the schools. He explained how segregation prevented lower-class and minority children from learning the dominant American middle-class culture, thus maintaining social divisions rather than providing ladders for mobility. Moreover, Davis argued that school segregation hurt more privileged Americans by preventing them from learning the skills and cultures of Americans from other social strata. Here Davis discerned value within lower-class and minority cultures. All of this underpinned his charge that school segregation undermined American democracy. He maintained that a democratic system required not only social opportunity for all, but also rigorous engagement between all groups in order to foster the level of mutual respect and reasoned debate necessary for a democratic system. Consequently, these anti-democratic practices hurt America's influence abroad, and the loss of manpower stemming from the failure to develop the potential of all Americans weakened America's national power.

These three critiques of segregation were important ones that helped to lay the intellectual foundation for *Brown v. Board*. As the previous chapters have detailed, Davis

disseminated these ideas to a wide audience through his teaching, his publications, and his public presentations. In this way, Davis was very much a part of the rising tide in American society that saw *de jure* racial segregation in the schools and elsewhere as anti-democratic, morally wrong, and nationally damaging. Davis's greater emphasis on social class during his years at Chicago should not obscure the centrality of race in his thinking. His focus on class always grew out of the understanding that class disparities affected black people disproportionately, and so by addressing class disparities, he was addressing racial ones. During his years in Natchez, he came to see how effectively affluent whites used race as a wedge to divide lower-class workers with shared economic interests. In such a context, it was important for Davis to emphasize how racial differences were actually negligible, and how what many Americans viewed as black culture was really just lower-class culture. Nevertheless, Davis's focus on racial caste, which was all about the unique inequalities that blacks faced, continued throughout his career. After *Deep South* and *Children of Bondage*, he continued to write articles and give talks about caste in the ensuing years, even as class became his central research paradigm.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the deep relevance of his work for the *Brown* cases, in which social science played a prominent role, Davis's research played a surprisingly minor role within the proceedings. One major reason for this stemmed from the nature of his research and how it did not emphasize the "damage" that segregation exacted upon African Americans. While Davis stressed the resiliency of black people to adapt to oppression and to adopt new behaviors when circumstances changed, Thurgood Marshall, the chief NAACP attorney, made the discourse of "damage" central to his arguments *Brown*. He said, "we had to try this case just like any other

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<sup>5</sup> Allison Davis, "Racial Status and Personality Development," *Scientific Monthly* 57 (October 1943): 354-62; Allison Davis, "Caste, Economy, and Violence," *American Journal of Sociology* 51 (July 1945): 7-15; Allison Davis, "Retrospect, 1965: Power and Caste," in *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class*, abr. ed. (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1965), 337-46.

one in which you would try to prove damages to your client. If your car ran over my client, you'd have to pay up, and my function as an attorney would be to put experts on the stand to testify to how much damage was done.”<sup>6</sup> Marshall and other NAACP attorneys thus turned to recent social-psychological research on racial prejudice to bolster their arguments. Here they had much to draw upon, because social science in the postwar period moved away from structural analyses of racial stratification pioneered by Davis and towards the investigation of racism as an individualistic, psychological problem in the minds of white people, which Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* had helped to inaugurate.<sup>7</sup> The stature of books such as Robin M. Williams's *The Reduction of Intergroup Tensions* (1947), Theodor Adorno et al.'s *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey's *The Mark of Oppression* (1951), Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), and Kenneth Clark's *Prejudice and Your Child* (1955) all testify to the dominance of a postwar social science that portrayed racism as a psychological problem that damaged black personalities. The NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDEF) thus fittingly chose Kenneth Clark to head up the social-science team. His research, especially his famous “doll test,” in which black children showed preference for white dolls over black ones, bolstered the claim that segregation caused psychological damage to black children.<sup>8</sup>

In December 1952, Clark and other social scientists submitted an important amicus brief to accompany the NAACP-LDEF's oral arguments in the five school desegregation cases

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<sup>6</sup> Thurgood Marshall quoted in Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 292.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>8</sup> John P. Jackson, Jr., *Social Scientists for Social Justice: Making the Case against Segregation* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 139.

comprising *Brown*.<sup>9</sup> The brief, later published for a wider audience in the *Minnesota Law Review* in May 1953, argued that segregation was psychologically damaging, especially to minority children, and that desegregation could proceed smoothly if initiated immediately and resolutely. On the first point, Clark contended that segregation “damaged children of the minority groups.”<sup>10</sup> He continued: “as minority group children learn the inferior status to which they are assigned—as they observe the fact that they are almost always segregated and kept apart from others who are treated with more respect by the society as a whole—they often react with feelings of inferiority and a sense of personal humiliation.”<sup>11</sup> Most disturbingly, he claimed, segregation thus leads a black person “to self-hatred and rejection of his own group.”<sup>12</sup> In addition to citing an abundance of social-science research, Clark and the NAACP-LDEF also solicited signatures from leading social scientists across the country. In all, thirty-two social scientists—including Allison Davis—signed Clark’s brief and consequently enhanced the document’s authority. On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren suggested the import of this social-science research for the Court’s decision when he wrote the Court’s unanimous opinion that segregation violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Warren explicitly cited Clark’s work, as well as that of Gunnar Myrdal and others, to justify the Court’s decision that *de jure* school segregation deprived the plaintiffs of equal protection under the law.<sup>13</sup> Of course, as Daryl Michael Scott shows, the Supreme Court Justices did not rely on the social-scientific damage

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth B. Clark, “The Effects of Segregation and the Consequences of Desegregation: A Social Science Statement,” *Minnesota Law Review* 37 (1952-53): 429.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson, Jr., *Social Scientists for Social Justice*, 174.

imagery to decide the case, but Chief Justice Earl Warren and others did use it to carefully manage public relations and negotiate internal Court consensus in this crucial case.<sup>14</sup>

Though Davis signed the amicus brief, his research was not particularly helpful in delineating the damage that segregation exacted upon African Americans. As discussed in previous chapters, the bulk of Davis's work eschewed such expositions of damage as put forth by Kenneth Clark. Davis always put the onus for dysfunction on the social system itself, and he generally elected to emphasize the resiliency and rationality of individual blacks as they navigated environments of inequality and discrimination. In *Scientific Monthly*, he stated directly that black children's "racial status had a somewhat minor influence on their personalities."<sup>15</sup> The differing emphasis here between Davis and his social-scientific peers was profound. A later generation of scholars schooled in the civil rights movement would come to reject expositions of damage as inaccurate and insulting, but in Davis's time, his position made him a marginal countervailing voice among a chorus of proponents of damage imagery.

Nevertheless, Clark and the social scientists involved in *Brown* were still able to mobilize parts of Davis's work for their purposes in the case. In the amicus brief, Clark explicitly cited Davis's 1939 article in the *Journal of Negro Education*.<sup>16</sup> Here Clark drew from Davis's work to bolster the claim that segregation caused maladaptive frustration and aggression within some black youth.<sup>17</sup> Clark also cited Myrdal, and in this way Davis's analyses of black churches and associations were relevant to the amicus brief. As discussed in Chapter Four, Myrdal took up Davis's left-wing critique of those institutions as evidence of pathology within black society.

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<sup>14</sup> Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 125-36.

<sup>15</sup> Allison Davis, "Racial Status and Personality Development," *Scientific Monthly* 57 (October 1943): 359.

<sup>16</sup> Allison Davis, "The Socialization of the American Negro Child and Adolescent," *Journal of Negro Education* 8, (July 1939): 264-74.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, "The Effects of Segregation and the Consequences of Desegregation," 430.

Clark was therefore able to draw from Davis's ideas here to play up the damage among African Americans as a result of segregation. Finally, Clark drew from research showing that no racial differences in intelligence existed. He did not cite Davis here, but Davis's work still certainly had influence in this regard.

However, the bulk of Davis's work was not marshaled in the social-science arguments in *Brown*, nor was Davis's most potent criticism of school segregation, which came through in his acculturation work. The marginalization of Davis's work here was a logical outcome of the liberal consensus among social scientists to "close ranks" and to achieve desegregation by whatever means necessary, which in this case meant playing up the damage that school segregation caused to black personalities. Davis's signature on Clark's brief demonstrates how he, too, took part in this cause, even though his own research contradicted many of Clark's claims about damage. In that historical moment, social scientists such as Davis cared less about how damaging school segregation in particular was for black youth, and more about how debilitating the *entire system* of segregation was for African Americans. Davis and his peers realized that *Brown* represented an opportunity to strike a major blow to *de jure* segregation as a whole, so they willingly misrepresented parts of their own research to achieve that end.<sup>18</sup> In many ways, this was an entirely defensible position. In their minds, education could not be fairly isolated from segregation as a whole, even though the proceedings of the law in this case demanded it be so. So without guilty consciences, Davis and his colleagues testified against the system of segregation itself. Their pragmatic emphasis on damage to black personalities, however, was a fateful one that would later be used against black interests.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Scott, *Contempt and Pity*, 129-30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-202. The argument that school segregation was morally wrong and socially problematic because it damaged the personalities of black youth carried with it unfortunate consequences. In particular, this position

Even if Davis's research was not central to the specific arguments made in *Brown*, he still contributed to the case in other significant ways. His younger brother, John Aubrey Davis, served as the director of nonlegal research for the NAACP in *Brown*. After hearing the oral arguments of the case in December 1952, the Supreme Court Justices remained uncertain as to how they would rule in this divisive case, so they finally called for a re-argument of the issues in June 1953.<sup>20</sup> The Justices asked the plaintiffs and the defendants to make new arguments in response to five questions. The first three questions had to do with the historical circumstances surrounding the passage, ratification, and implementation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The last two questions regarded how school desegregation should be carried out in light of a potential ruling that segregation was unconstitutional. John Aubrey Davis appointed a group of historians, including Horace Mann Bond, John Hope Franklin, and C. Vann Woodward, to address the first three questions; he appointed Kenneth Clark to direct the research into the latter two questions, which Clark and others later published in an article entitled "Desegregation: An Appraisal of the Evidence" in the *Journal of Social Issues* in 1953.<sup>21</sup> In September 1953, shortly before this nonlegal team submitted its brief to the Supreme Court, the NAACP-LDEF held a three-day conference in New York.<sup>22</sup> At this conference, Allison Davis served as one of the 42 attendees who critiqued the work of the nonlegal team. Here he collaborated directly with the social scientists involved in *Brown*. Beyond personal relationships with his brother and with Horace Mann Bond, Davis had intimate ties to numerous others among this tightly-knit group of black

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stigmatized black people and focused attention on their psychological problems rather than on the equal rights and protections that they deserved as citizens. Later, conservatives would co-opt this damage imagery for conservative ends, including attacks on government programs benefiting black people.

<sup>20</sup> Jackson, Jr., *Social Scientists for Social Justice*, 168.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 168-72; Wayne J. Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 168-70.

<sup>22</sup> Alfred Perkins, "Welcome Consequences and Fulfilled Promise: Julius Rosenwald Fellows and 'Brown v. Board of Education,'" *Journal of Negro Education* 72 (Summer 2003): 351.

scholars. Many of them were also Rosenwald Fellows, and the assemblage included colleagues and friends such as Rayford Logan and Charles H. Thompson.<sup>23</sup> All of this suggests that Davis played an important role within the general proceedings of *Brown*.

Davis also played a role in more subtle ways through the earlier litigation that led up to *Brown*. His mentor and eventual colleague at the University of Chicago, anthropologist Robert Redfield, served as an expert witness on race and desegregation in a number of cases before *Brown*, including *Sweatt v. Painter* (1947) and *Sipuel v. Oklahoma State Regents* (1948).<sup>24</sup> For his testimony, Redfield drew from his personal experiences with the integrating appointment of Allison Davis at the University of Chicago. While arguing that segregation undermined “public security and general welfare,” Redfield was able to contrast that reality with the successful appointment of Allison Davis, who had proven to be an esteemed colleague, a productive researcher, and an inspiring teacher to students of all races.<sup>25</sup>

After the Supreme Court ruled school segregation unconstitutional in 1954, Davis also took to the press to help clarify the significance of the ruling, and to push the Court to enact desegregation immediately. Indeed, the Court refrained from addressing the implementation of desegregation in its 1954 decision. It was not until May 31, 1955 that the Court remanded the cases to the federal district courts within each state and passively directed them to desegregate the schools “with all deliberate speed.”<sup>26</sup> After the 1954 decision, the *New York Times* interviewed several esteemed social scientists of race relations including Davis, Charles S. Johnson, and Gordon Allport. The reporter discussed Davis’s response first and in greatest detail. Explaining the significance of the decision in terms of American democracy, Davis said

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Jackson, Jr., *Social Scientists for Social Justice*, 96-97.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 195-96.



that it “makes it clear that our democratic government is vital, because it is adaptive, able to respond vigorously to the processes of cultural and economic change.”<sup>27</sup> He emphasized the international significance of this democratic victory, describing how it “makes it clear to the colored peoples of Japan, Africa, India and Indonesia, as well as to the European colonial powers...that the United States is not defending a color hierarchy in the world but is defending a democratic political system which is proving itself efficient.”<sup>28</sup> Finally, Davis argued for hastening the ruling’s implementation by underlining its significance in terms of American national power. He wrote: “When this decision is implemented, it will result in a tremendous increase in the fund of ability and skill available to our country. Outnumbered as we are, the survival of the United States seems to depend upon its developing the ability of millions of our citizens whose capacities have been crippled by segregation.”<sup>29</sup> Even if these arguments were not central to those made by the plaintiffs in *Brown*, they reached a national audience through Allison Davis’s involvement with the case.

In the next few years, Davis persisted in trying to spur on the desegregation process and to shape the national debate regarding desegregation. He and the other social scientists involved with *Brown* were disappointed by the Court’s passive ruling in 1955, in *Brown II*, for they saw how it emboldened the states to delay desegregation. Furthermore, in those areas where integration efforts had begun, there was often a strong counter-reaction. In Louisville, Kentucky, for instance, locals found that “Negro pupils were about two years below the level of achievement of their white classmates.”<sup>30</sup> Hearings in Washington, D.C. confirmed this finding

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<sup>27</sup> “Court Said to End ‘A Sense of Guilt,’” *New York Times*, May 18, 1954.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Fines, “Races Declared Equal in Brains,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1956.

on the national level.<sup>31</sup> This finding disturbed many white parents who did not want their children's education to be jeopardized by an influx of inferior students into their children's classrooms. In addition to widespread local resistance, vocal figures such as Frank C. J. McGurk, a psychology professor at Villanova University, emerged spouting racist epithets about inherent black inferiority. McGurk argued that "as far as psychological-test performance is a measure of capacity for education, Negroes as a group do not possess as much of it as whites as a group."<sup>32</sup> Such "alleged intellectual inferiority of Negroes" was also "inferred during the congressional investigation of the District's integrated schools."<sup>33</sup>

On October 15, 1956, Davis and a group of seventeen other esteemed social scientists responded by issuing a joint statement condemning the incorrect and racist statements regarding black intelligence that were pervading American society as a result of the debates over school desegregation. Davis, along with such experts as Otto Klineberg, Gardner Murphy, Kenneth Clark, and Theodore Newcomb, elucidated the scientific consensus that no "innate racial difference in intelligence" existed.<sup>34</sup> They explained, furthermore, how this scientific conclusion had already been established decades ago, and that "no new research" had emerged to challenge that consensus.<sup>35</sup> The social scientists agreed that the average level of black educational achievement was behind that of the average white student, but they made clear that this discrepancy resulted from the systematic social inequalities that the average black student faced. Moreover, they cited studies such as Klineberg's that proved how African Americans' scores on intelligence tests improved drastically—even exceeding those of whites—upon migration to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Eve Edstrom, "Scientists Reject Idea of Negro Inferiority," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, October 16, 1956.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> "Experts Deny Negro Lacking in Brainpower," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 16, 1956.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Northern urban environments, where the schools were better and more racially integrated.<sup>36</sup>

They thus advised immediate desegregation to redress the problem, rather than continued segregation, which would only exacerbate the racial disparities. In all of the ways described above, then, Allison Davis was intimately connected with the battle against racial segregation in the schools, which *Brown* came to symbolize.

### **Head Start and The Culture of Poverty**

Several writers have credited Davis with laying the intellectual foundations for the federal Head Start program, initiated as part of the Johnson administration's War on Poverty in 1965. Kenan Heise, for instance, in the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote: "His research, books and lectures helped spur preschool programs such as Head Start for poor children."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Davis's ideas on poverty were part of national efforts to redress it, and in many ways he anticipated and extended contemporary debates. He most directly influenced debates surrounding early educational intervention programs, but he also had much to contribute to discussions of poverty generally.

In the early 1960s, poverty became a national issue in a way it had not been since the Great Depression. Despite the work of certain social scientists such as Davis, Lloyd Warner, and C. Wright Mills, who continued to delineate class stratification in the 1940s and 1950s, most American commentators at that time focused on America's affluence and its rising standard of

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<sup>36</sup> Fines, "Races Declared Equal in Brains," October 16, 1956.

<sup>37</sup> Kenan Heise, "Obituaries: Allison Davis; research aided poor children," *Chicago Tribune*, November 23, 1983; See also: The JBHE Foundation, "Black Heritage Award for an African-American Educator," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 3 (Spring 1994): 23; Morris Finder, "Davis, Allison," *American National Biography Online*, <http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-01164.html> (accessed October 27, 2012).

living—and not without reason.<sup>38</sup> Americans on the whole experienced a 19.2 percent increase in per capita income over the course of the 1950s.<sup>39</sup> Owing to the gains stemming from unionization, progressive taxation, and government support of education, social welfare, suburbanization, and infrastructural development, the United States built a large and thriving middle class in the postwar years.<sup>40</sup> Underneath this growing middle class, however, was an entrenched lower class that failed to benefit from the larger macroeconomic growth. In fact, the bottom quarter of the population was in some ways harmed by it, as their skills gap actually deepened in these years, and as suburbanization eroded tax bases from the cities and created isolated pockets of poverty.

It was precisely this phenomenon that critics such as Michael Harrington, a Catholic socialist, investigated and reported to a national audience.<sup>41</sup> In his influential exposé of American poverty, *The Other America* (1962), Harrington revealed how 25% of Americans were trapped within a “vicious circle” of poverty from which they could not escape.<sup>42</sup> The book described how unemployment and underemployment combined with inadequate education, housing, healthcare, and nutrition, as well as with age and race discrimination, to systematically

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<sup>38</sup> Critics tended to focus on problems stemming from affluence, such as conformity and ennui in suburban life and the corporate environment. See, for example: David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956), and Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers: An Exploration of Class Behavior in American and the Hidden Barriers that Affect You, Your Community, Your Future* (New York: D. McKay, 1959).

<sup>39</sup> Maris A. Vinovskis, *The Birth of Head Start: Preschool Education Policies in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>40</sup> James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 311-70.

<sup>41</sup> To be sure, many other journalists and researchers tracked poverty in these years as well, though they had a smaller national impact. For instance, Harry Caudill’s *Night Comes to the Cumberland* (1962) was an important expose of rural poverty in America.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 21-22. *The Other America* became a national best-seller after Dwight Macdonald wrote a laudatory 50-page review of it in the *New Yorker*. See Dwight MacDonald, “The Invisible Poor,” *New Yorker*, January 19, 1963, 82-132.

reproduce an “underclass” even amid a booming economy.<sup>43</sup> In addition to this structural emphasis on material conditions, Harrington and other critics explained how the effects of poverty extended to the realm of culture. Harrington, for instance, drew from anthropologist Oscar Lewis to argue that “Poverty in the United States is a culture, an institution, a way of life.”<sup>44</sup> He described the poor as hapless victims whose “will and spirit” were warped, and who lacked “the social energy and political strength to turn [their] misery into a cause.”<sup>45</sup>

Such exposés as *The Other America* had a major impact through their influence within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. John F. Kennedy was already primed to do something about poverty after being shocked by the Appalachian poor during the 1960 presidential primary campaign in West Virginia.<sup>46</sup> Dwight Macdonald’s laudatory review of *The Other America* in the *New Yorker* further affected Kennedy, moving him to take more concrete steps to initiate a “war on poverty.”<sup>47</sup> After Kennedy’s assassination on November 22, 1963, however, the task fell to Lyndon Johnson to further develop and implement a “war on poverty.” Surprising many within his new administration, President Johnson did just that, proclaiming boldly at his first State of the Union address on January 11, 1964 that “This administration today here and now declares unconditional war on poverty in America.”<sup>48</sup> He sought to combat a web of poverty which he argued grew out of “our failure to give our fellow citizens a fair chance to develop their own capacities—in a lack of education and training, in a lack of medical care and housing, in a lack of decent communities in which to live and bring up their children.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Vinovskis, *Birth of Head Start*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Scott Stossel, *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 337-38.

<sup>48</sup> President Johnson quoted in Stossel, *Sarge*, 333.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 334.

Head Start has been the most enduring and popular program within the War on Poverty, but it was not originally part of the initiative at all. The Economic Opportunity Act, passed in October 1964, wrote the War on Poverty into law. The Act funded various programs that could reduce poverty, including the Job Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, which aimed to provide the poor with basic adult education and job experience; Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), a domestic Peace Corps, which enlisted volunteers to provide various services for the economically disadvantaged; and several Community Action programs to empower communities to address the poverty around them.<sup>50</sup> It was through the Community Action section of the Economic Opportunity Act that Head Start was initially conceived. In late 1964, Sargent Shriver, the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, became appalled by the demographic data showing that children comprised half of the nation's poor, and that seventeen percent of those children—or six million people—were under the age of six.<sup>51</sup> He began reaching out to figures connected with the Kennedy Foundation to learn more, and researchers such as Susan Gray and Philip Dodge showed him evidence demonstrating the significance of early childhood intervention for increasing IQs and general well being.<sup>52</sup> He quickly organized a team of thirteen researchers led by Dr. Robert E. Cooke of Johns Hopkins University to develop a comprehensive program for childhood intervention that would include medical care, nutrition, and social skills, as well as basic education.<sup>53</sup> Shriver and President Johnson hastily expanded and implemented the program dubbed “Head Start” as outlined by Cooke and his team. Head Start began in the summer of 1965, and by the end of that summer, it

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<sup>50</sup> Jean Yavis Jones, *Head Start – A History of Legislation, Issues and Funding* (Washington, D.C.: The Library of Congress, 1978), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Stossel, *Sarge*, 417.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 417-18.

<sup>53</sup> Valora Washington and Ura Jean Oyemade Bailey, *Project Head Start: Model and Strategies for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 21-22.

had already served over a half million children.<sup>54</sup> Head Start then quickly became a permanent and popular year-long program.

Though the work of Allison Davis and other relevant researchers was not intimately connected with the hasty process through which national politicians conceived of and implemented Head Start, their work nevertheless played a significant role in the context through which Head Start became a success. Benjamin S. Bloom, a professor of education at the University of Chicago, is generally credited as one of the main intellectual architects of Head Start, even if his research “did not directly translate into public policy.”<sup>55</sup> After being invited by President Johnson, he did, however, testify before Congress in support of the Economic Opportunity Act.<sup>56</sup> Here Bloom conveyed the research in his influential book, *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics* (1964), which convinced many of his contemporaries of the centrality of early childhood in human learning. In this research, Bloom drew directly from the environmentalist thought that Davis, Klineberg, and others had been developing since the 1930s. For his section on intelligence, for instance, Bloom cited Davis’s *Intelligence and Cultural Differences*, and he showed the clear influence of Davis and other colleagues at Chicago.<sup>57</sup> By the time that *Stability and Change* came out, Davis and Bloom had in fact been colleagues and friends for a quarter century, first as doctoral students and then as fellow professors of education at Chicago.<sup>58</sup> Davis’s extensive investigations into early childhood socialization no doubt informed Bloom’s research. Bloom’s novel contribution in *Stability and Change* thus stemmed

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>55</sup> Washington and Bailey, *Project Head Start*, 22; Vinovskis, *Birth of Head Start*, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas R. Guskey, “Stability and Change in Human Characteristics,” in *Benjamin S. Bloom: Portraits of an Educator*, ed. Thomas R. Guskey, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2012), 59.

<sup>57</sup> Benjamin S. Bloom, *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), 77, 87-91.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas R. Guskey, “The Early Years,” in *Benjamin S. Bloom*, 16-17; Thomas R. Guskey, “The University of Chicago’s Board of Examinations,” in *Benjamin S. Bloom*, 28-29.

not from his observation that early childhood education was vital, but from his data showing that learning actually occurred more quickly during that period of life, before then slowing down and stabilizing. Consequently, Bloom stressed the need for early childhood intervention above all else, discerning “the great importance of the first few years of school as well as the preschool period in the developing of learning patterns and general achievement.”<sup>59</sup>

Davis also collaborated with Bloom directly in organizing a four-day conference in June 1964, called the Research Conference on Education and Cultural Deprivation. The conference led to the publication of an important book coauthored by Bloom, Davis, and Robert Hess, entitled *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation* (1965). This book sought to capitalize on the national sentiment to combat early childhood poverty, and it aimed to steer public policy in productive directions. Moving beyond the singular focus on integration, the authors argued that:

what is now required is not equality of access to education. What is needed to solve our current as well as future crises in education is a system of compensatory education which can prevent or overcome earlier deficiencies in the development of each individual. Essentially, what this involves is the writing and filling of educational prescriptions for groups of children which will enable them to realize their fullest development.<sup>60</sup>

The authors elucidated practical measures to counteract the social, economic, and cultural disadvantages that prevented poor students from reaching their full potential and from competing equally with more privileged students. Reinforcing the emerging Head Start program at every turn, the authors recommended a guaranteed breakfast and mid-day meal each day, a guaranteed physical exam and regular health services, and guaranteed clothing.<sup>61</sup> They understood that students first needed to secure their basic needs regarding food and nutrition, clothing, exercise,

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<sup>59</sup> Bloom, *Stability and Change*, 127.

<sup>60</sup> Benjamin S. Bloom, Allison Davis, Robert Hess, *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 6.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.



medical care, and living conditions before issues of learning could even be addressed. They advocated a nursery and kindergarten system that could help young children to develop learning skills that were required for school success, but which poor children often did not receive at home.<sup>62</sup> Recognizing the racial disparities of poverty, the authors drew from Davis's work to propose racial integration of the schools and collaborative work between all pupils in order to mitigate racial inequalities. Finally, the authors went further than Head Start by recommending guidance programs that would mentor students and track their struggles throughout adolescence.<sup>63</sup>

*Compensatory Education* represented continuity with Davis's entire body of work. His career centered on efforts to understand and counteract race and class stratification, with the goal of allowing each individual to reach his or her full potential. *Deep South, Children of Bondage*, and *Social-Class Influences upon Learning* all shared this same underlying mission.

*Compensatory Education*, therefore, was only the latest in a series of efforts to fight social and educational inequality. In December 1962, for instance, Davis was already disseminating his progressive ideas on child poverty. Speaking to 150 people at the annual civic assembly of the City Club of Chicago, Davis criticized the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) welfare program for misunderstanding and improperly treating poverty. Three years before the advent of Head Start, he laid out practical solutions such as "day care centers and nursery schools...to help children 3 to 5 years old to learn language, basic cultural habits, and academic skills that enable them to do better work in elementary school."<sup>64</sup> At the same time, he proposed regular bi-weekly interviews with all ADC children in grades one through ten, as well as "residential

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> "Educator Hits ADC Program 'Shortcoming,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 8, 1962.

vocational centers, summer camps, and youth corps projects...for ADC youths 14 to 16 years old.”<sup>65</sup> Davis continued to speak widely on these issues in the coming years, helping to create the context in which programs such as Head Start could be successful.<sup>66</sup>

Realizing that his goals required more than the mere presentation of his ideas to different audiences, Davis also took up political action in the 1960s. For example, he aligned with the National Urban League, the NAACP, and many other civil-rights organizations to demand reforms to the school-board nomination procedure in order “to give more representation to Negroes and labor groups, among others.”<sup>67</sup> On March 12, 1964, he told the Chicago branch of the National Council of Jewish Women that the Chicago school system was failing to provide quality education for its students, and especially for African Americans, because the “gerrymandering of school attendance boundaries” created harmful segregation.<sup>68</sup> Davis joined twenty-four civil rights groups in calling for a radical reconstruction of the Chicago school board, beginning with the dismissal of Chicago School Superintendant Benjamin Willis, who had resisted the racial integration of Chicago public schools. Several of these groups recognized Davis as an effective leader in this fight, so they nominated him for the mayor’s advisory committee on school board nominations.<sup>69</sup> On the national level, Davis’s work earned him membership in President Johnson’s Commission on Civil Rights (1966-1967), in the Department

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> “Plan Session on Fair Youth Opportunities,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 27, 1964; “City Schools Fail To Do Job, Say Speakers,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1964; “City Life Aids Negroes’ I. Q., Seminar Told,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 17, 1965.

<sup>67</sup> “City Schools Fail To Do Job, Say Speakers,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1964.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> “Urban League Offers 4 for School Board,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 18, 1964; “Propose 7 for School Board,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 4, 1964; “I. V. I. Proposes 7 for School Board Posts,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 9, 1964; “C. C. O. Urges Naming of 3 to School Board,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1964.

of Labor's Commission on Manpower Retraining as vice chairman (1968-1972), as well as in the Conference to Insure Civil Rights and in the White House Task Force on the Gifted.<sup>70</sup>

Ironically, even though Davis's work was important in laying the intellectual foundations for Head Start, his work also led some contemporaries to question the value of that program. In 1966, James S. Coleman published *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, commonly known as the Coleman Report. Coleman was a colleague of Davis's at the University of Chicago from 1956 to 1959, and his report was in line with some of Davis's work.<sup>71</sup> Coleman mirrored Davis in arguing that students' family background and socioeconomic status mattered far more than school resources in shaping educational outcomes.<sup>72</sup> Also like Davis, Coleman prescribed racial integration and quality instruction informed by understandings of socioeconomic differences.<sup>73</sup> Coleman thus echoed Davis in emphasizing the importance of social class, which they both used as the basis for recommending bold new forms of educational and social interventions, including racial integration, compensatory educational programs, and invigorated antipoverty programs. As a colleague of Robert E. Cooke's at Johns Hopkins University in the 1960s, Coleman also had a direct tie to the chief architect of Head Start. Other contemporaries, however, interpreted Davis's and especially Coleman's findings as proving the ineffectiveness of programs such as Head Start amid an entrenched class system. Some research at the time, and, above all, an extensive study by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation, found that the gains from Head Start

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<sup>70</sup> Walter H. Waggoner, "Allison Davis, Psychologist, Dies: Wrote About Blacks in America," *New York Times*, November 22, 1983.

<sup>71</sup> "Obituary: James Coleman, Sociology," *University of Chicago Chronicle* 14, March 30, 1995, <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/950330/coleman.shtml> (accessed April 17, 2014).

<sup>72</sup> James S. Coleman, et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 3-23; Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 196.

<sup>73</sup> Coleman, et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, 3-23.

programs dissipated within the first few years after children left the program.<sup>74</sup> Davis understood such findings as only underscoring the need for increased and prolonged educational and social interventions, but others used them to discredit Head Start and other antipoverty programs as ineffective and wasteful. Nonetheless, in one form or another, Davis's ideas were never far from the heated debates over education and poverty in the 1960s.

Along the same lines as his earlier criticisms of school personnel, business people, and middle-class families, Davis critiqued the government officials who were responsible for creating and implementing welfare programs such as ADC. He charged that ADC was crippled by the middle-class biases of its architects, which prevented them from developing a program that could actually change the conditions under which the poor lived and learned to survive. Because ADC offered no means to develop social goals, "no method for improving the skills of the poor, and no services which would raise the hope and occupational level of the children whom it is supposed to serve," it merely degenerated into a dole.<sup>75</sup> Davis explained how the ADC's lack of a constructive program encouraged the poor to simply incorporate the funds "into their already established survival patterns."<sup>76</sup> Here Davis again emphasized the sophisticated patterns of behavior that the poor learned in order to survive under circumstances of extreme deprivation. One lesson that poor people, especially racial minorities, learned was that the system was stacked against them and that hopes of social mobility were unrealistic and even dangerous.<sup>77</sup> In the context of a whole system that blocked mobility and reinforced subordination, a pittance of

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<sup>74</sup> Washington and Bailey, *Project Head Start*, 24; Jones, *Head Start*, 4. Other studies, of course, showed the long-term significance and cost-effectiveness of Head Start. Indeed, extensive studies of Head Start became a mainstay within social science. See Raymond C. Collins, *Head Start: A Review of Research with Implications for Practice in Early Childhood Education* (S.I.: ERIC Clearinghouse, 1984).

<sup>75</sup> Allison Davis, "A Constructive Program for ADC," Allison Davis Papers, Box 77, Folder 16, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>76</sup> Allison Davis, "Survival and Defense in Slum Life," Allison Davis Papers, Box 80, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

welfare money was naturally often futile at redirecting the behaviors of the poor. Davis argued that, in the end, only a constructive program offering real avenues to success could instigate a behavioral change among the poor.<sup>78</sup>

Davis's conception of lower-class culture was far richer than the mainstream discourse on the "culture of poverty," and for that reason it was unfortunate that more contemporaries did not draw from his ideas. The ways in which liberals and leftists employed the "culture of poverty" idea were often deeply flawed, even if at first useful in galvanizing moral opposition to poverty. As mentioned above, Harrington believed that the effects of poverty extended to culture, creating a debilitating environment of despair and dependency. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, though, was the liberal who was most connected with the idea on the national scene. He sent a memo to President Johnson and other White House staff that focused on African-American poverty and portrayed it in a way similar to Harrington. Moynihan, however, stigmatized poor blacks even more than Harrington had stigmatized the general poor. He argued that "Three centuries of injustice have brought about deep-seated structural distortions in the life of the Negro American," creating a "tangle of pathology" within African-American society.<sup>79</sup> Drawing from E. Franklin Frazier, he located the fundamental pathology within the black "family structure," whose single-parent, matriarchal practices he observed as deeply pathological.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps most controversially, he viewed such pathology as "capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world," thus placing undue emphasis on the nature of the black family structure itself rather than on the structural forces, such as unequal employment, housing, education,

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<sup>78</sup> Davis, "A Constructive Program for ADC."

<sup>79</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," U.S. Department of Labor, <http://www.dol.gov/dol/aboutdol/history/moynchapter5.htm> (accessed April 2, 2014).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

medical care, and discrimination, which dictated the nature and form of black families.<sup>81</sup>

Moynihan understood that his memo was not comprehensive, and he meant only to concisely state the problem of black poverty as he saw it in order to initiate discussions within the Johnson Administration regarding potential policy solutions.<sup>82</sup> Still, the memo made clear just how problematic many liberals' conceptions of poverty were at the time. When the memo became public in August 1965, critics rightly attacked the bitterly stigmatizing portrait of black poverty that Moynihan had painted.<sup>83</sup>

Ultimately, Harrington's and Moynihan's understanding of the "culture of poverty" was unsound and far weaker than that of experts such as Allison Davis. Unlike Davis, Harrington and Moynihan narrowly judged the behaviors of the poor from their middle-class worldview, and they stigmatized those behaviors as merely pathological adaptations to oppression. Similar to Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma*, such 1960s liberals played up the damage and the pathology that systematic oppression exacted upon certain Americans in order to cultivate moral outrage and to galvanize a movement to ameliorate inequality. Though these intentions framed their rhetoric, it was ultimately these liberals' failure of interpretive vision that guided their arguments. When they looked out at the behaviors of the poor from their middle-class perspective, as Davis saw it, they could only see pathology. They sympathized with the downtrodden, but they could not appreciate, as Davis did, the virtues of lower-class patterns of behavior as they enabled poor people to survive in very different circumstances. They also failed to see how the poor were active agents in the making of their own worlds, which Davis's

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> For a sympathetic account of Moynihan, see James T. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America's Struggle over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>83</sup> The Moynihan Report continues to be fiercely debated. For a recent assessment of Moynihan's arguments in relation to novel social-science research, see: Gregory Acs, Kenneth Braswell, Elaine Sorensen, and Margaret Austin Turner, "The Moynihan Report Revisited," The Urban Institute, 2013, <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412839-The-Moynihan-Report-Revisited.pdf> (accessed April 9, 2014).

*Children of Bondage* had shown. The marginalization in the postwar years of studies of the subaltern themselves, and especially of black society and culture, only exacerbated this tendency.<sup>84</sup>

It was in the arena of lower-class culture that Allison Davis's work could have enriched debates on the "culture of poverty."<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, Davis's work was marginalized in these discussions, even as he presented at conferences alongside architects of the concept such as Oscar Lewis.<sup>86</sup> Institutional racism within the academy played a role here, for the contributions of black intellectuals such as Davis often failed to reach mainstream social science. In 1967, a sociologist named Lee Rainwater observed this phenomenon. He saw how contemporary discussions of poverty ignored the work of Davis and other—especially black—scholars of a previous generation. He wrote:

the current researches on Negro subculture represent a refining and updating of patterns which have been described, for example, by Frazier in the '30s, Cayton and Drake and Allison Davis in the '40s, Kardiner and Rohrer and Edmonson in the '50s. The fact that the larger society has been indifferent to their findings does not make the current studies 'a new and ominous phenomenon.'<sup>87</sup>

In *Commentary* magazine in the late 1960s, St. Clair Drake criticized Moynihan specifically for his cursory understanding of blacks' social-science investigations into poverty,

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<sup>84</sup> Walter A. Jackson explains how significant Gunnar Myrdal's project was for the future of social-science research. He describes how the study of black society and culture, which had thrived in the interwar period, virtually ceased in the postwar period as the foundations discontinued funding for that subject. The foundations, he argues, saw Myrdal's work as definitive, so they followed Myrdal's interpretation of racism as a white man's psychological problem, and they generally perceived black society and culture to be merely pathological versions of white culture. In the postwar period, then, the foundations elected to support social-psychological research into prejudice rather than research into black people and institutions and the ways in which they helped African Americans survive and even thrive within the United States. See Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 261-71.

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 7 for a discussion of how Davis's class-as-a-culture discourse refrained from stigmatizing the poor and actually took seriously their behaviors and values as reasonable and respectable reactions to their environments.

<sup>86</sup> "U. of Chicago Sets Parley on Poor Class," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 12, 1962.

<sup>87</sup> Lee Rainwater, "Letters to the Editor: Cancer of the Cities: Two Views," *Washington Post, Times Herald*, February 11, 1967.

evidenced most clearly by his failure to mention Davis's work at all.<sup>88</sup> Drake castigated Moynihan for "deploring what he feels to be a scarcity of insightful research *on* Negroes *by* Negroes," while at the same time ignoring the many contributions of prolific scholars such as Allison Davis.<sup>89</sup> Drake also represented the majority opinion of black intellectuals, and increasingly of white liberals, in the late 1960s when he disparaged Moynihan for his "constantly reiterated hypothesis that so much 'structural damage' has been done to Negro personalities and institutions."<sup>90</sup> Amid a civil rights movement at home and a decolonization movement abroad, both of which empowered black people across the world to see themselves as powerful agents of change who embodied a beautiful and viable cultural tradition, Moynihan's emphasis on black people's "damage" and "pathology" was increasingly anathema. Indeed, the mobilization of the poorest and most oppressed blacks in the global freedom struggles exposed the fallaciousness of the "culture of poverty" idea, which considered the poorest peoples as powerless and beyond the pale. So instead of looking to work such as Davis's, which could have deepened their understanding of lower-class and minority cultures, the 1960s liberals involved in waging the "war on poverty" more typically ignored it to their detriment.<sup>91</sup>

Of course, some of these liberals surely encountered Davis's work and merely rejected it. Ellsworth Faris, a Chicago School sociologist, had in fact rejected Davis's interpretations of lower-class cultures in his 1948 review of *Father of the Man*. He echoed the dominant opinion in sociology as well as in American society generally when he wrote that "much of what is here

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<sup>88</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Poverty, Sociology & Finks," Allison Davis Papers, Box 1, Folder 12, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> To be sure, other critics responding to Moynihan did, at times, hit upon the central weaknesses of his arguments. In an article in *Commonweal*, white sociologist Herbert Gans refrained from stigmatizing matriarchal families and even pointed to the stability of extended kinship systems. At a White House conference in November 1965, black sociologist Hylan Lewis gave a paper that implicitly critiqued Moynihan's crisis-oriented rhetoric, and he explained how class more than race was the issue at stake. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough*, 78-79, 83-84.



called ‘culture’ is termed disorganization in the vocabulary of the sociologist.”<sup>92</sup> It is a credit to Davis that he was able to take seriously the behaviors and values of the poor and to see them as rational, adaptive, and even virtuous, rather than merely pathological. In this regard, his own experiences with racial oppression and his disciplinary training in anthropology, which taught him to view culture in more relative terms, enriched Davis’s understanding of poverty.

As it turned out, liberals’ problematic conceptions of the “culture of poverty” backfired when conservatives seized upon that discourse to undermine liberal efforts to combat poverty altogether. Conservatives often adulterated liberals’ ideas, but also partially followed their lead, when they willfully ignored the structural, material aspects of poverty and emphasized instead its cultural dimensions.<sup>93</sup> This tactic enabled conservatives and neoconservatives such as Nathan Glazer to prescribe behavioral solutions to poverty rather than economic and social ones.<sup>94</sup> Here they were aided by a general conflation of poverty with the urban, ghetto poverty of African Americans after the uprising at Watts in 1965. Americans increasingly linked President Johnson’s War on Poverty with his support for black civil rights and for programs of affirmative action. As many white Americans fled the Democratic Party, believing that the government was no longer on “their” side, but had taken the side of minorities and liberal interest groups, they abandoned support for efforts to address a poverty that was actually a white and rural problem as much as it was a black and urban one. Though this confluence of forces was beyond the control of liberal critics of America’s “culture of poverty,” those liberals would have helped their cause

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<sup>92</sup> Ellsworth Faris, review of *Father of the Man: How Your Child Gets His Personality*, by W. Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst,” *American Journal of Sociology* 53 (March 1948): 401.

<sup>93</sup> To be sure, the culture of poverty idea could just as easily be used for conservative ends, though that was not typically the case in the 1950s and 1960s. For one example, see Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958).

<sup>94</sup> Nathan Glazer, “The Culture of Poverty: The View from New York City,” in Alan Winter, ed., *The Poor: A Culture of Poverty or a Poverty of Culture?* (Grand Rapids: William b. Eerdmans, 1971), 39-48.

had they not so problematically conceptualized, emphasized, and stigmatized the cultural aspects of poverty.

In all of these issues, Allison Davis had much to offer. His structural-cultural approach, which rooted poverty in structural realities but also explored its cultural dimensions, would have been helpful. His social-psychological approach, which understood behavior as conditioned by the power dynamics within the immediate environment, could have exposed the limitations of portraying behavior as the response to a stable and inherited set of cultural values. Finally, his cultural relativism and humanism allowed him to see agency and virtue in lower-class peoples when most middle-class commentators could only see pathology. All of this, in fact, anticipated the mounting critiques of the culture of poverty in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>95</sup>

Even as Davis's research productivity slowed in the 1950s and 1960s, he continued to play significant roles in major social developments. In both direct and indirect ways, he helped to make racial desegregation in the schools and antipoverty programs a success. *Brown v. Board* and Head Start became monumental liberal achievements that fueled the civil rights movement and the struggles against poverty and social inequality. The particular roles that Davis played within each are revealing. His scholarship generally supported both proceedings, but social engineers used it selectively to further their causes. In *Brown v. Board*, this meant drawing from the parts of Davis's work that could at least imply a level of damage or frustration among black people, while ignoring his emphasis on resilience and adaptability. In Head Start, this meant ignoring Davis's call for more sustained educational support throughout the entire schooling

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<sup>95</sup> See Charles A. Valentine, *Culture and Poverty: Critique and Counterproposals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Hylan Lewis, "Culture of Poverty? What Does It Matter?" in *The Culture of Poverty: A Critique*, ed. Eleanor E. Leacock (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), 345-63; and Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1989), 36-43.

process. Regarding the culture of poverty, this again meant ignoring much of Davis's work on poverty and emphasizing instead the deep damage that resulted from being poor. In the middle of the twentieth century, the damage imagery proved useful in winning some important court cases and mobilizing people against social injustice. But it was also a deeply flawed way to build a movement for social change. Instead of including oppressed peoples in the fight and empowering them as the foot soldiers, this approach excluded them as beyond the pale and condescendingly presumed that it was up to more affluent whites to direct social change. This furthered the cultural gap between races and classes and made it difficult to find common ground. Furthermore, evoking pity through damage imagery came at the expense of arguments for change based upon the shared goals of full citizenship rights, equal opportunity, and freedom from discrimination, which could have united people through common cause. However, in the ideological context of the 1950s and 1960s, such approaches did not win out. The nature of Davis's particular roles within these processes makes clearer the historical landscape of this period, as well as some of the missed opportunities for further progressive change.

## **Conclusion**

### **Honoring Allison Davis**

*He challenged the cultural bias of standardized intelligence tests and fought for the understanding of the human potential beyond racial class and caste. His work helped end legalized racial segregation and contributed to contemporary thought on valuing the capabilities of youth from diverse backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>*

--- U.S. Postal Service

Later in his career, Allison Davis finally began receiving the national accolades his life's work had warranted. This recognition took several forms. For one, several universities honored Davis by offering him prestigious visiting professorships. He ended up accepting temporary posts at Berkeley, Michigan, Columbia, and Illinois, and he declined an offer from Cambridge.<sup>2</sup> For him, these positions were notable honors, but for most black scholars, who could still not gain tenure-line positions at predominantly-white universities even a quarter century after Davis's landmark appointment at Chicago, such temporary appointments were unfortunately still the most they could hope for. Second, numerous schools offered Davis the chance to give named lectures on education. In addition to Harvard's Inglis Lecture in 1948, Davis also gave the Billings Memorial Lecture at Smith College in 1957, the Horace Mann Lecture at the University of Pittsburgh in 1960, the Leo Franklin Lecture at Wayne State University in 1966, and the Du Pont Lecture at the University of Delaware in 1966, and the Frederick Douglass Lecture at the University of Rochester in 1967.<sup>3</sup> Third, Davis was awarded honorary degrees from institutions ranging from Tuskegee Institute to his alma mater, Williams College. Williams' recognition of Davis was meaningful, but it could not erase his resentment of how that institution had treated

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<sup>1</sup> Morris Funder, "Davis, Allison," *American National Biography Online*. <http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-01164.html> (accessed October 27, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Allison Davis Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

him a half century earlier, when it denied him teaching opportunities, made him live off campus with other black students, and segregated him socially.<sup>4</sup> Fourth, the University of Chicago made him the first-ever John Dewey Distinguished Service Professor in 1970, and it held a symposium in his honor shortly before his passing in 1983 called “Race, Class, Socialization and the Life Cycle.”<sup>5</sup> Many of his closest friends and colleagues participated in honoring the depth and breadth of Davis’s career.

In addition to these honors by universities, Davis received numerous other forms of recognition for his career. In 1972, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences elected Davis as its first member from the field of education. In 1971, the journal *Education* selected Davis as one of the “Gold Medal Educators of the 1960s” and named him the 1971 “Leader in Education.”<sup>6</sup> Davis’s rising prominence in the national sphere also prompted the federal government to offer him positions within numerous federal organizations, including Lyndon Johnson’s Commission on Civil Rights, the Department of Labor’s Commission on Manpower Retraining, the Conference to Ensure Civil Rights, and the White House Task Force on the Gifted.<sup>7</sup>

Other notable honors came after Davis had passed away. The most significant was the placement of Davis’s image on a postage stamp in February 1994, ushering in Black History Month that year. After recommendations from the Black American Heritage Foundation in 1975, the United States Postal Service initiated the Black Heritage Series, in which it included

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<sup>4</sup> The Davis Center, “W. Allison Davis ’24,” Williams College, <http://davis-center.williams.edu/daviscenter/allison-davis/> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Allison Davis Papers, “Biographical Note,” Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>6</sup> “U. of C. Professor Is Honored,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 13, 1972.

<sup>7</sup> “Davis, Allison,” *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford African American Studies Center, 2012, <http://0-www.oxfordaasc.com/libraries.colorado.edu/article/opr/t0002/e11161?hi=0&highlight=1&from=quick&pos=1#match> (accessed April 8, 2014); Walter H. Waggoner, “Allison Davis, Psychologist, Dies: Wrote About Blacks in America,” *New York Times*, November 22, 1983.

one African American on a stamp each year. The program began in 1978 with Harriet Tubman, so Davis's inclusion on a stamp in 1994 placed him among an elite group of black pioneers already honored, including figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and W. E. B. Du Bois. Davis's supporters had successfully lobbied for the honor the previous year to mark the ten-year anniversary of his death and the bicentennial of Williams College.<sup>8</sup> The Postal Service's description nicely captured his significance, saying that "He challenged the cultural bias of standardized intelligence tests and fought for the understanding of the human potential beyond racial class and caste. His work helped end legalized racial segregation and contributed to contemporary thought on valuing the capabilities of youth from diverse backgrounds."<sup>9</sup> This stamp, in turn, brought greater attention to Allison Davis, and numerous articles and brief biographical entries appeared around the time of its issuance.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, in 2005, Davis's family partnered with the University of Chicago, the Chicago Park District, and the Chicago Community Trust to build the Allison Davis Garden near the University of Chicago in Midway Park. At an unusually large dedication ceremony that included Davis's children and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, speakers discussed how the park "separated the heart of the university from Woodlawn, a predominantly African-American neighborhood."<sup>11</sup> Throughout the course of Davis's long career at Chicago, he daily crossed the physical boundaries separating the university from the neighboring black communities. He was

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<sup>8</sup> Bill McAllister, "Blacks' Stamp Presence," *Washington Post*, January 21, 1994; Bill McAllister, "Stamps & Coins," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1993; Bill McAllister, "Heritage Series, Flying High," *Washington Post*, April 7, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Finder, "Davis, Allison."

<sup>10</sup> The JBHE Foundation, "Black Heritage Award for an African-American Educator"; Michael R. Hillis, "Allison Davis and the Study of Race, Social Class, and Schooling," *Journal of Negro Education* 64 (Winter 1995): 33-41; Joan Oleck, "Allison Davis: 1902-1983," *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol.12, ed. Shirelle Phelps (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996), 38-41; Dallas L. Browne, "Across Class and Culture: Allison Davis and His Works," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, eds. Ira E. Harrison and Faye Harrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 168-190.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Stevens, *Hyde Park Herald*, November 3, 2004.

thus both a physical and symbolic example of someone who broke down racial barriers and confronted America's color line. Those involved with the Garden hoped that Davis's example might inspire a renewed dedication to the principles of racial inclusion in a city still terribly divided by race and class.<sup>12</sup> Along these same lines, in 2012, Williams College renamed its Multicultural Center "The Davis Center" to honor Allison Davis and his brother, John Aubrey Davis, both of whom were accomplished alumni.<sup>13</sup> Once again, the aim was to acknowledge a history of exclusion and discrimination and to use the Davises' example to promote renewed dedication to the principles of inclusion and fairness.

Allison Davis must have appreciated the many honors he received during his lifetime. But as his efforts to publish another book at the end of his life revealed, he never lost sight of all that remained to be done in the battle for social justice. His final book, *Leadership, Love, and Aggression* (1983), conveyed Davis's own struggle in transforming the devastating effects of racial oppression into socially-productive ends.<sup>14</sup> With the support of grants from the Spencer Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation, Davis analyzed the lives and careers of Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The psychological biographies he provided explored how and why each figure dealt with racial discrimination, and to what extent they were able to successfully transform their righteous anger into action that was effective in fomenting positive social change. He found King to be the most successful, but the

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<sup>12</sup> Jeremy Adragna, "Ground-breaking prof honored at weekend garden opening," *Hyde Park Herald*, September 14, 2005; "New Allison Davis Garden in Washington Park honors a pioneer and a recommitment to inclusion," Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, <http://www.hydepark.org/parks/washington/DavisGard.htm> (accessed April 14, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> "History of the Davis Center," Williams College, <http://davis-center.williams.edu/about/history-of-the-mcc/> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Allison Davis, *Leadership, Love, and Aggression* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

book made clear how difficult and psychologically-taxing it was to live as a black person in a society built upon racial injustice. The book reflected his tireless efforts to avoid sinking into despair over the absurdity of life and the intractability and arbitrariness of human suffering. In the figure of King, he found his greatest example of a person who managed to transform the hate targeted at him into love for others, and to build a peaceful social movement that would benefit the most oppressed among us.<sup>15</sup> This was the cause Davis most believed in, and it was the one way he believed it was possible to transcend hate and to make the most of life. It was evident that he instilled this lesson in his own sons when Gordon Davis later said, “It’s not about the person at the top but at the bottom.”<sup>16</sup> So the greatest way to honor Allison Davis is not to lavish awards upon him or anyone else who has succeeded, but to try to live up to the ideals he prescribed: namely, fairness and equal opportunity to cultivate human potential beyond the constraints of race, class, and other social divisions.

Unfortunately, those constraints have hardly lessened between the latter half of the twentieth century and our own time. Instead, they merely took new form. Davis’s own success revealed the contradictions of a society in which explicit racism and *de jure* segregation were increasingly challenged, thus allowing more blacks to enter the middle class and to secure positions of power, but also where institutional racism thrived and continued to circumscribe the lives of most African Americans. The positive attention devoted to successful black people such as Allison Davis too often served as evidence to white America that racism was no longer a problem in the United States. A brief look at recent sociological research, however, demonstrates the utter absurdity of such a notion. De facto segregation, mass incarceration, and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>16</sup> Ralph Blumenthal, “Insider Is Chosen to Lead Lincoln Center in Rebirth,” *New York Times*, October 27, 2000.



structural unemployment have functioned together to ensure that African Americans as a group suffer from the worst education, housing, medical care, nutrition, and violence.<sup>17</sup> Not only does this lead to a far lower quality of life for the average black person, it actually shortens the very length of that life by several years.<sup>18</sup> To understand the nature of such a pernicious social inequality, one must grasp its structural nature, which is precisely the task to which Davis dedicated his life. He focused on the realm of scholarship and ideas, and his work in that arena thus remains as relevant as ever.

Befitting his spirit, this dissertation evaluated Davis's life and ideas with an eye to how they inform our understanding of American society and culture. Hagiography does little to help those most oppressed, but close attention to bold humanistic ideas and the social contexts in which they originate and are received is instructive. The case of Allison Davis has shown how America's systems of race and class inequality helped to produce a man who was ideally situated to lay bare those very systems. As a victim of racial oppression but also as a beneficiary of the finest education available at the time, Davis was well-positioned to elucidate the nature of America's social structure. Furthermore, his example shows how particular individuals took advantage of liberal strains within American social thought for their own ends. Davis used the social-constructivist methods and assumptions of social anthropology, culture-and-personality thought, and educational theory to expose the environmental forces that prevented many racial minorities and the poor from succeeding socially. His life's work, which included his "Negro-Stoical" literature, his social-science classics such as *Deep South* and *Children of Bondage*, and

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory Acs, Kenneth Braswell, Elaine Sorensen, and Margaret Austin Turner, "The Moynihan Report Revisited," The Urban Institute, 2013, <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412839-The-Moynihan-Report-Revisited.pdf> (accessed April 9, 2014); Ta-Nehisi Coates, "This is How We Lost to the White Man," *The Atlantic*, May 1, 2008, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/05/-this-is-how-we-lost-to-the-white-man/306774/> (accessed October 29, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Robert Pear, "Gap in Life Expectancy Widens for the Nation," *New York Times*, March 23, 2008.

his many efforts within the field of education, was dedicated to eliminating arbitrary social constraints so that all people could realize their full potential. His entire career reflected that essential goal, but he calibrated his shifting approaches to the evolving social and ideological contexts of the twentieth-century United States.

The best way to understand Allison Davis's career is to view it as part of the larger black freedom struggle. Born as a member of a despised caste in a country where the black-white divide defined American life, Davis, in many ways, had little choice but to become part of this struggle. In pursuing the modest aspirations of becoming educated, securing a decent job, voting, or even eating lunch with colleagues, Davis found himself consistently denied and penned in. By refusing to give in and continuing to strive for even such modest goals, he invariably became part of the freedom struggle for racial equality. But Davis was of another mold altogether. He channeled his righteous indignation over racial injustice into an effective program of action. Swallowing the daily affronts to his basic humanity, he dedicated himself to a near-singular pursuit of scholarship that would debunk the racist, hereditarian thinking prevalent within American society, and that would expose the environmentalist roots of group differences. Even as he grew weary and waxed pessimistic about the possibilities for change, he continued to speak and live his truth about the equal capacities of all races and peoples of the world.

Davis's story helps us to better understand the nature and texture of the larger black freedom struggle. For one thing, we should see ordinary acts of living and striving as part of that struggle. The labors of innumerable slaves and sharecroppers to merely survive in rigidly oppressive environments were as much a part of the struggle to be free as was any other effort. More often than not, it was the changing context that allowed freedom struggles to take novel

forms, and to eventually have greater success. For Allison Davis, that novel form was education and social-science research, which became increasingly accessible to black people in the interwar period through eroding barriers within universities. Davis seized upon that opportunity to wage the environmentalist battle of ideas. The nature of his activities and the level of his successes were largely new, but the struggle itself was not.

By placing African Americans such as Davis at the center of the environmentalist struggle, we, in turn, gain a better sense of the larger civil rights movement. Historians have recently sought to broaden traditional interpretations of the civil-rights struggle to include more than only the Southern battle against Jim Crow at midcentury, expanding the freedom struggle temporally, regionally, and conceptually. One result has been the inclusion of freedom struggles in interwar America, which often took more radical forms, including the focus on economic justice as well as civil rights. Davis makes clearer what one element of this earlier, more radical struggle looked like. In particular, he demonstrates the importance of ideas within movement politics. Davis and some of his peers recognized that social justice depended upon demonstrating to Americans that racial inequality was a social problem, not a biological one. Accordingly, Davis's work showed how caste and class, not heredity, delimited African Americans' lives. In the process, he posed the radical argument that rich and powerful Americans exploited racial inequality for their own ends, implying that class struggle needed to accompany racial struggle. Such ideas infused the grassroots activism during interwar America as well as the desegregation efforts in postwar America. Equally important, Davis's life highlights the significance of American social anthropology and culture-and-personality, of Southern experiences within the New Negro Renaissance, of movements for intercultural

education, of connections between the arts and sciences, and much else besides. Davis's dynamic life offers a clear window into many aspects of American history.

Davis's story, however, is of more than only historiographical value. Many of his ideas are directly relevant, and even pressingly urgent, today. First, Davis's examination of the structural nature of race and class is as relevant as ever. Race and class stratification are persistent elements of the American social structure, and later investigators' focus on "institutional" inequality was merely a reformulation of Davis's and his colleague's structural thought. Davis's structuralism is particularly important, moreover, in the context of America's current "neoliberal" moment, when an excessively individualistic and agentic model of human behavior prevails. Of course, this heightened individualism only exacerbates a deeper strain of exceptionalism within American culture, through which Americans see their country as a "classless" land of opportunity for all. For these reasons, Davis's emphasis on the persistence of structural inequality continues to serve as a valuable remedy to Americans' overwrought individualism.

Similarly, Davis's evaluation of the interconnections between race and class remains important. In scrutinizing how race and class functioned together as complementary systems of inequality, Davis anticipated the study of "intersectionality," in which scholars consciously explore how class, race, gender, and other social systems intersect with one another to further entrench inequality. Davis's and his colleagues' caste-and-class framework was a pioneering form of this type of work. Scholars today, of course, could not ignore the centrality of other social systems, most notably gender, which Davis and his colleagues did largely ignore. Despite their considerable reliance upon the work of women in both their home lives and their scholarly

careers, the primarily-male social scientists of Davis's time often took for granted the gendered nature of their world. Adding an analysis of sex and gender to Davis's work would have greatly strengthened it. Still, it would be anachronistic to criticize Davis and his colleagues for insights growing out of a powerful women's movement that occurred largely after Davis's time. Moreover, a focus on fewer rather than more categories of inequality also has value, for studies of intersectionality sometimes obfuscate rather than clarify in their complexity.

Second, Davis's analyses of socialization are particularly significant. Along with other culture-and-personality theorists, Davis helped to move structural theorists beyond the tendency to erect abstract social systems or cultures that were only tangentially linked with actual individuals. Davis showed how race and class were tangible realities in the lives of individuals as experienced through the family, the school, and other socializing agents. Moreover, unlike many of his contemporaries, Davis challenged the holistic, totalizing conceptions of culture held by many culture-and-personality theorists. He showed how American society was differentiated along class lines, and hence had many distinct class cultures. Due to the exigencies of empiricism, Davis emphasized overt behavior more than thought and ideology. His work could thus be fairly criticized for downplaying the role of long-term values in directing individual behavior. Still, this focus on overt behavior and the environmental forces shaping it had much value. Informed by social-psychological research, Davis grasped that people were best understood less as stable creatures embodying a consistent set of behaviors and values, and more as resilient and adaptable beings who behaved and thought very differently depending on the immediate context. This type of thinking allowed Davis to emphasize the centrality of the social environment in shaping behavior, and it enabled him to discern individuals' abilities to learn new behaviors and adapt to new situations when the environment changed. For this reason, Davis

was able to avoid the flaws of many “culture of poverty” theorists who saw poverty as a closed, entrenched system that permanently warped individuals and taught them unalterable values.

Third, Davis’s criticisms of intelligence testing remain important and relevant today. Despite the sound critiques that he and others have made over the years, the tests continue to be used widely in schools, businesses, and other sectors of society. As journalist Nicholas Lemann describes, modern intelligence testing often takes the guise of “aptitude testing,” which is essentially only a slightly modified form of intelligence testing. Both types of tests rely heavily on academic skills such as reading comprehension and vocabulary. Lemann argues that United States—through the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which institutionalized the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT), the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), and the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)—has become “the most thoroughly IQ-tested society in the world.”<sup>19</sup> Despite abundant evidence that the tests are merely barometers of social affluence rather than intellectual ability, and that they do not even accurately predict a person’s academic success in later years, these tests remain deeply embedded within American education. Davis saw these tests for what they really were: tools that reflected, legitimized, and actively perpetuated social inequality.

Fourth, Davis’s conception of education as a public good rather than a private investment remains valuable today. In the twenty-first century, amid a struggling economy and a neoliberal assault on public institutions, Americans have increasingly viewed education in narrowly individualistic and utilitarian ways. Davis and his contemporaries at the University of Chicago and elsewhere understood education far more broadly as a bulwark of democracy. They knew

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<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Lemann, “The Great Sorting,” *The Atlantic* 276 (September 1995), 88.

that a democratic system relied upon an informed and empathetic citizenry who was equipped to question power and to productively engage fellow citizens in reasoned debate. As such, Davis attacked all things antidemocratic within the schools, especially segregation and unfair sorting practices. Rather than pit students against one another in competition and merely reflect the larger stratified society, Davis argued that schools should be laboratories of diversity and engagement, as well as mechanisms for social mobility.<sup>20</sup> In a twenty-first century when the United States Congress remains deadlocked, and when social inequality approaches that of the Gilded Age, a more informed and engaged citizenry remains as important as ever.

Stemming from his conception of education for democracy, Davis also had much to offer in terms of pedagogy. As a prerequisite for mutual engagement, Davis insisted that teachers and students learn about one another's lives. He understood that poor and minority students had much to "teach" more privileged students and teachers about their lives and worlds, so he promoted class discussion and debate as major pedagogical tools. Furthermore, he advised teachers to gain sociological and anthropological knowledge about their students, and to forge alliances with the students' parents and their larger communities. Given his priority on productive engagement, Davis valued most highly social studies and the humanities. He understood these disciplines as the most important ones in fostering empathy and social knowledge. In other words, he knew that social science had as much practical value as did any physical or applied science. Contrary to the current emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education, Davis thus saw the deeper value of a humanistic

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<sup>20</sup> In this regard, Davis, like so many other Americans, followed in the footsteps of John Dewey. It was thus fitting that Davis rose to assume the first (and last) John Dewey Distinguished Service Professorship at the University of Chicago. Despite their similarities in thought, however, there is no evidence that the two men had a personal relationship. It is likely that Dewey influenced Davis mainly through his general impact on American intellectual life and his deep influence upon the University of Chicago in particular.

education that prepared students not merely to meet the increasing demands of employers, but to question the nature and fairness of those demands, and of the country's general economic landscape. Anticipating later progressive trends within education, Davis accordingly prescribed an education that was rooted in the lives and interests of the particular students in the classroom. Moreover, unlike present-day focuses on standardization, Davis recommended an education that was highly tailored, and hence relevant, to the lives of America's richly diverse students. He believed that only by investing in all students and in all public schools, and by training students to think critically, empathetically, and socially, could American democracy be made to thrive. Consequently, America's twenty-first-century education "reform" movement, which is heavily based on privatizing education, attacking democratic forms of power such as teacher unions, and proliferating charter schools and STEM courses, would have been anathema to democratically-minded thinkers such as Davis.

Finally, Davis's general intellectual mode—a type of American existentialism—is of value to Americans today. Davis faced squarely the final tragedy and ultimate purposelessness of life. As many people around him continued to get caught up in trivial social pursuits engineered seemingly to foster ignorance of those darker realities, Davis elected not to shrink from them but to use them to construct the most meaningful life possible.<sup>21</sup> Davis worked to transform his ennui and his righteous anger over life's unfairness into socially productive ends: namely, the reduction of social inequalities and the realization of every person's potential. In other words, rather than shrinking from the most profound human questions or getting caught up in the rat race, Davis probed the nature of human existence and ultimately devised a humanistic goal and purpose: to ease suffering and to better the lives of others. In a speech Davis gave at

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<sup>21</sup> For an interesting analysis of this phenomenon, in which Americans invent ways to be busy in order to avoid confronting their existential angst, see Tim Kreider, "The Busy Trap," *New York Times*, June 30, 2012.



the University of Chicago's commencement ceremony late in his life, he made clear to the graduates what form his own path through the nothingness had taken: "Although we seem trapped in the Age of Anger and Despair, the alternatives remain the same as in all other ages. We can scuttle – or we can sail the seas. Navigare necesse est; non vivere est. 'One must chart his course and set sail; it is not enough merely to exist.'"<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Allison Davis, "Commencement Address, University of Chicago, 1975," Allison Davis Papers, Box 62, Folder 19, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

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