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PREVIEW

**ATLANTA UNIVERSITY AND AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY, 1896-1917:
AN EARNEST DESIRE FOR THE TRUTH
DESPITE ITS POSSIBLE UNPLEASANTNESS**

by

Earl Wright II

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Sociology

Under the Supervision of Professor Thomas C. Calhoun

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 2000

UMI Number: 9977035

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Atlanta University and American Sociology, 1896-1917:

An Earnest Desire for the Truth Despite Its Possible Unpleasantness

BY

Earl Wright II

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**ATLANTA UNIVERSITY AND AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY, 1896-1917:
AN EARNEST DESIRE FOR THE TRUTH DESPITE ITS POSSIBLE
UNPLEASANTNESS**

Earl Wright II, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2000

Advisor: Thomas C. Calhoun

The objectives of this investigation are to uncover some of the sociological accomplishments of Atlanta University scholars and ascertain if the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory (1896-1917) comprised one of the first American schools of sociology. Although Atlanta University is recognized as one of the earliest American sociology departments, the contributions of Atlanta University sociologists are, mostly, omitted from classical and contemporary discussions concerning prominent and early scholars who contributed to the discipline of sociology during its formative years in the United States. Instead, Chicago School sociologists and the University of Chicago are lauded as establishing “the first successful American program of collective sociological research” (Bulmer, p. xv, 1984). This study reveals that Atlanta University may have comprised one of the first schools of sociology and their sociologists possibly initiated one of the first successful programs of collective and institutionally supported American sociological research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I	
Introduction.....	1
Chapter II	
Literature Review.....	8
Chapter III	
Methods.....	24
Chapter IV	
“I Will Find A Way Or Make One”.....	28
The Sociological Laboratory at Atlanta University.....	32
Chapter V	
Atlanta University Publications, 1896-1917.....	41
Atlanta University Publication #1, 1896.....	42
Atlanta University Publication #2, 1897.....	46
Atlanta University Publication #3, 1898.....	53
Atlanta University Publication #4, 1899.....	60
Atlanta University Publication #5, 1900.....	64
Atlanta University Publication #6, 1901.....	65
Atlanta University Publication #7, 1902.....	69
Atlanta University Publication #8, 1903.....	75
Atlanta University Publication #9, 1904.....	77
Atlanta University Publication #10, 1905.....	81
Atlanta University Publication #11, 1906.....	82
Atlanta University Publication #12, 1907.....	86
Atlanta University Publication #13, 1908.....	88
Atlanta University Publication #14, 1909.....	92
Atlanta University Publication #15, 1910.....	97
Atlanta University Publication #16, 1911.....	101
Atlanta University Publication #17, 1912.....	106
Atlanta University Publication #18, 1913.....	110
Atlanta University Publication #19, 1917.....	113
Atlanta University Publication #20, 1915.....	115
“I Insist On My Right To Think and Speak”.....	116
Summary of Atlanta University Publications, 1896-1917.....	121
Methods.....	122
Theory.....	123
Atlanta University Contributions.....	126
Summary.....	129

Chapter VI

Atlanta University: The First American "School" of Sociology.....	130
Was Atlanta University A "School?"	130

Chapter VII

What About Atlanta University? Explaining Atlanta University's Sociological Negation.....	147
Conclusion.....	156

Bibliography	158
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PREVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people to whom I owe a wealth of thanks and praise. I must begin by thanking my mother, Sandra K. Wright, for her tremendous and unwavering economic and emotional support as I traversed through this minefield known as higher education. Mother, I want you to know that you are truly “The Wind Beneath My Wings” and without you I am nothing and could never be anything. I also want to thank my extended family for the support and encouragement they have offered. Specifically, they are Freddie Mae Davis, Ed Davis (deceased), Esther Redd (deceased), Charlotte and Frederick Green, Rubye Person (deceased), Marye (Mae-Mae), Chadrick, and Sylvester (Bubba) Bernard, Yetta Stevenson, Jessica Taylor, Desiree Boyd, James and Jeannie Kelly, Terrence and Carlotta Williams, Calvin and Sheila Cleaves, Earl Sr. and Helen, Sedaria and Tameka Wright.

Others who deserve recognition are Dr. Richard Jones and Dr. Dewitt Martin. In 1992 they took a young boy under their wings and in a matter of years molded him into an Omega man. I want to thank them both for serving as father figures, mentors, and friends.

I am the scholar that I am today because of several very special relationships established early in my career. Elizabeth Higginbotham and the faculty and students at the Center for Research on Women, University of Memphis, are recognized for providing the fertile ground for me to become the person that I am. Specifically, I will forever be indebted to Elizabeth Higginbotham for encouraging me to complete both the Masters and Doctoral degrees when I was on the verge of walking away from both. Also, I am indebted to the Center for Research on Women for providing an atmosphere where an

inner city kid from North Memphis could expand his world view by interacting with faculty and students at *the* best Masters sociology program in the nation.

While at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln I have been fortunate to meet many good mentors. Helen Moore, Keith D. Parker, Jennifer Lehmann, Melvin Jones (deceased), Lynn White, and Leon Caldwell all had a powerful and positive impact on me during my time in Lincoln. However, I must highlight one person. I met Thomas C. Calhoun as a master's student at the University of Memphis while at a conference in 1997. "Doc" and I met at a paper session and he quickly began to sell the sociology graduate program at the University of Nebraska to me. Although I had other options for graduate school, I decided to attend the University of Nebraska largely because of Dr. Calhoun. Over the past three years he has become a mentor, friend, and colleague. At times I placed him in difficult professional positions because of my strong will and determination. Nevertheless, no matter what situation I was in, Doc was there for me. TC I want you to know that I will forever be grateful.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my dissertation committee for their time and support. The members of my committee include Thomas C. Calhoun (Chairperson), Ronald Lee, Jennifer Lehmann, and Keith D. Parker.

DEDICATION

*This dissertation is dedicated to
the numerous Atlanta University researchers
whose sociologically negated accomplishments
contributed to the development of the earliest
and most preeminent urban sociological research
institution in the world-*

The Atlanta University Sociological Laboratory

PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

[T]here are social problems before us demanding careful study, questions awaiting satisfactory answers. We must study, we must investigate, we must attempt to solve; and the utmost that the world can demand is, not lack of human interest and moral conviction, but rather the heart-quality of fairness, and an earnest desire for the truth despite its possible unpleasantness. (Du Bois [1899] 1967:3)

The discipline of sociology is replete with historical data citing theoretical formulations, methodological advancements, and other significant contributions by some of the founders, advocates, and innovators of the discipline. Men such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx are canonized classical sociologists that every student of the discipline is required to study because their scholarship, presumably, exemplifies sociological excellence. Now included within many discussions of influential, yet historically overlooked, sociologists and social scientists are women such as Harriet Martineau, Ida B. Wells, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jane Addams and the women of the Hull-House settlement. The ideas of these women and men represent a vast continuum upon which a variety of sociological concepts, theories, methodologies, and investigations have contributed to the relatively young discipline. Many of the individuals who participated in the construction of sociology through their theoretical and empirical research efforts did not do so in a vacuum. Institutions of higher learning were very instrumental in the development and maturation of sociology. Institutions such as Kansas University, Columbia University, University of Nebraska, University of Michigan, and the

University of Chicago are locations where many American social scientists received institutional support and guidance, and were afforded the intellectual freedom to develop sociology into the area of study that we now recognize. These American institutions, through new advancements in sociological theory and methodology, seemingly, replaced Europe as the central locations of innovative sociological developments in the discipline during the late 1800's and early 1900's. One American university rose above the rest because of the tremendous institutional support that was provided for sociological as well as other types of research that resulted in groundbreaking theoretical formulations and methodological techniques.

In 1892 the University of Chicago established the first named sociology department in the United States. Founded through the philanthropic efforts of John D. Rockefeller, the University of Chicago, from its inception, placed an immense importance upon an extensive and ambitious research agenda. Research, as defined by the University of Chicago Committee on Development (1925), is "the employment of human curiosity for the purpose of enlarging the field of human knowledge in the interest of human progress"

(1). To that end, the Committee on Development proclaims:

'Here is to be found intellectual freedom.' [The University of Chicago] established as its official motto, and has kept it:

'Let knowledge grow, that life may be enriched.'

**By setting up lofty ideals of scholarship, by recognizing research as one of its primary aims, and by encouraging freedom of investigation as a prime condition of success in research, [The University of Chicago] began on a plane to which many other institution has been slowly ascending.
(P. 9)**

One beneficiary of the ambitious research agenda of the University of Chicago was the newly formed sociology department. Albion Small was chosen to lead this new department through its formative years. University of Chicago officials thought so highly of Small upon his hiring that they declared, "In Sociology, the name of a man like Professor Albion W. Small, Head of that Department of the University, stands for pioneer work in organizing a subject that belongs to the present generation and has made for a broader view of human society" (39). Despite the lavish praise bestowed upon Small, the sociology program at the University of Chicago did not become *the* school of American sociology until Robert Park, Ernest Watson Burgess, and the second generation¹ of University of Chicago sociologists entered the department and pioneered extensive urban research investigations. Nevertheless, Lester R. Kurtz (1984) suggests that "Although the notion of Chicago as a laboratory for social research is usually associated with Park and Burgess, [urban sociology] was part of the program much earlier" (60).² Kurtz's evidence of an earlier urban research program in the sociology department at the University of Chicago consists, singularly, of a general description of the aims of the sociology graduate program in the 1902 university catalog. If the first generation of Chicago sociologists

1 "The second generation [of University of Chicago sociologists] belonged to the Chicago school of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess which endured through the 1920's and into the 1930's" (Smith 1988, p. 3). First generation University of Chicago sociologists consists of those engaged in sociological activity, and affiliated with the university, during the early years of the program. Thus, Albion W. Small, Charles R. Henderson, George E. Vincent, William I. Thomas, as well as, Edward Bemis, Ira Woods Howerth, George H. Mead, Graham Taylor, and Charles Zueblin are included as first generation University of Chicago sociologists.

2 Examinations of the *American Journal of Sociology*, the leading journal of American sociology during this period, indicate that first generation University of Chicago sociologists engaged in urban sociological research projects. However, from 1895-1915 first generation University of Chicago sociologists published less than ten articles in the *American Journal of Sociology* and authored no books focusing on urban sociological issues.

initiated an institutional urban sociology research agenda as Kurtz suggests, why, then, does he not list any of their studies among the twenty-one “most important treatments of urban research at Chicago” (61)? Kurtz’s avowal could only be strengthened by including at least *one* example of an early urban research study initiated by a first generation University of Chicago scholar in his list of twenty-one. Kurtz’s exclusion of urban research studies conducted by first generation University of Chicago sociologists makes his argument tenuous at best. Although first generation University of Chicago sociologists are noticeably absent from Kurtz’s list, the second generation of University of Chicago sociologists are well represented.

The second generation of University of Chicago sociologists are generally credited for advancing urban research to such a level that the label, “Chicago School of Sociology,” has become an applicable moniker. Kurtz (1984) asserts that “the general outlines of urban research in sociology were first developed by Park and Burgess and their students” (60). Relatedly, Martin Bulmer (1984) alleges that “the Chicago school represented the first successful American program of collective sociological research” (xv). Bulmer, lauding the urban sociological accomplishments of the University of Chicago, further proposes that “what characterized above all the achievement[s] of the Chicago school of sociology was the ability to bring theory and research together in a fruitful way” (xv). When viewed in this manner, the contributions of the second generation of University of Chicago sociologists are, supposedly, some of the earliest and, perhaps, most important to the discipline of sociology- particularly, in the area of urban sociological research. Accordingly, there has been a plethora of historical research

conducted on the urban sociological accomplishments of the Chicago School of Sociology (i.e., Farris 1967; Matthews 1977; Bulmer 1984 and 1985; Smith 1988).³ After reviewing the urban sociological accomplishments of University of Chicago sociologists, one question remains to be answered and that is “Were any other American scholars engaged in urban research who could warrant the academic adulation bestowed upon the second generation of Chicago sociologists?” The answer to this question may be found in the historical records of one of the oldest sociological laboratories established in the United States-Atlanta University.

Although recognized as one of the first sociology departments established in the United States, the contributions of Atlanta University sociologists and social scientists are, mostly, omitted from classical and contemporary discussions concerning prominent and early scholars who contributed to the discipline of sociology during its formative years in America. This exclusion is astonishing given that Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the preeminent sociologists in the history of the discipline, was the chairperson of the sociology department from 1897-1910 and Atlanta University housed one of the first programs of collective sociological research in the world-the Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems. Between 1896 and 1924 Atlanta University regularly conducted extensive urban research investigations focusing on the condition of the formerly enslaved African American population of the United States. However, if one were to examine the existing literature, strictly seeking information pertaining to the

2 Lester R. Kurtz's *Evaluating Chicago Sociology: A Guide to the Literature, with an Annotated Bibliography* is an invaluable resource that contains a greater listing of the urban research investigations initiated by Chicago sociologists than listed here.

sociological accomplishments of Atlanta University sociologists, they will find a paucity of data. The omission of Atlanta University sociology from extensive investigation and analysis is even more fascinating when one takes into account that some supporters of the Chicago School of Sociology suggest those scholars to have been the first group of academic researchers to systematically and scientifically investigate urban social conditions with theoretical implications (Bulmer 1985). An exhaustive reading of the Atlanta University Conference Publications, a series of published sociological research investigations conducted between 1896-1917, suggests that, possibly, some achievements credited to University of Chicago sociologists (specifically, the creation of America's first school of sociology) were actually institutionalized at Atlanta University some twenty years earlier.

Early American sociology is generally viewed through the institutional accomplishments of the Chicago School, now including Jane Addams and the women of the Hull-House settlement, Columbia University, and other predominately white universities. This study is, quite simply, an investigation into the sociological negation of a group of scholars whose contributions to the development of American urban sociology have, largely, gone unnoticed and unappreciated by past and present sociologists. The findings presented in this exposition may contradict and/or debunk commonly held assumptions concerning the origin, methodologies, and theoretical assumptions of urban-based research in the United States. Therefore, this investigation should be viewed as an attempt at uncovering the accomplishments of a group of scholars who have been, heretofore, sociologically negated while adding to the historical sociology literature by

documenting the accomplishments of a small, yet influential, African American institution of higher learning- Atlanta University.

The objectives of this investigation are to uncover some of the sociological accomplishments of Atlanta University scholars and ascertain if Atlanta University housed one of the earliest American schools of sociology. Additionally, explanations for Atlanta University's negation by many past and contemporary sociologists are explored. These objectives are important because the findings may compel sociologists to redistribute credit concerning various urban sociological discoveries that could result in canonical status for the, seemingly, forgotten Atlanta University researchers.

The outline for this investigation is as follows. Chapter two examines the existing literature concerning the sociological accomplishments of Atlanta University. Chapter three reveals the methods of investigation used for this study. Chapter four details the founding of Atlanta University, the sociology department, and the origin and original plan of the Atlanta University Conferences on Negro Problems. Chapter five contains a detailed examination of every Atlanta University Conference Publication released between 1896-1917. Chapter six contains an application of Martin Bulmer's model of a school to Atlanta University. Last, chapter seven offers a sociology of knowledge theoretical perspective to answer the question, "How can the sociological negation of the scholarship of Atlanta University sociologists be explained?"

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature concerning the sociological contributions of Atlanta University is extremely limited (see Atlanta University and W. E. B. Du Bois bibliography).¹ The continuum upon which the existing literature acknowledges Atlanta University research investigations extends from a basic recognition of *some sort of research* taking place at the university, to general descriptions of certain Atlanta University Conference Publications, to basic summaries of entire series of Atlanta University Conference Studies, and culminates with examinations of the specific contributions of Atlanta University scholars. This research investigation departs from the existing literature through its presentation of the specific methods of research and theories offered for each Atlanta University Conference Publication, 1896-1917.

As indicated above, the continuum upon which Atlanta University scholarship is cited in the literature begins with a basic acknowledgment that research of some sort was

1 A wealth of articles acknowledge, but do not sociologically analyze, the Atlanta University Conference Publications. Eight categories have been created to identify the extent to which Atlanta University scholarship is acknowledged. It must be stated that the categories are not arranged in such a manner to prevent some works from being categorized differently. Nevertheless, the common theme in these works is that they mention Atlanta University, but do not investigate the contributions of the Atlanta University sociology department. The first category consists of works that analyze the sociological/social scientific contributions of Atlanta University. The second category concerns works pertaining to W. E. B. Du Bois and his professional relationships with various women scholars/activists. The third category consists of articles that investigate Du Bois' sociological contributions and his exclusion from canonized sociological status. The fourth category deals with Du Bois' intellectual sparrings with Booker T. Washington. The fifth category contains analyses of Du Bois' contributions to various academic disciplines (i.e., Anthropology, Criminal Justice, Economics, English, History, Philosophy, etc.). The sixth category consists of writings concerning Du Bois' communist and Pan Africanist ideology. The seventh category is replete with biographies of Du Bois at various periods in his life. Lastly, the eighth category consists of various works focusing on Du Bois' many theories and concepts (i.e., double consciousness, talented tenth, educational philosophy, etc.).

initiated by Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois at the small African American institution. For example, Charles Lemert (1994), in an article discussing the sociological negation of Dr. Du Bois' scholarship, asserts that "he began his first, and longer, tour of duty as a teacher of sociology at Atlanta University during which he conducted the annual Atlanta Conferences (1897-1914) on the sociology of Negro life in America" (385). Relatedly, Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver (1976) proceed toward the opposite end of the continuum by commenting that "[Du Bois'] *Atlanta University Studies* initiated the technique of measuring social change through continuous resurveys of particular social phenomena; they remain classic statements about conditions for blacks at the turn of the century" (309). Werner J. Lange (1983) further extends the continuum by incorporating Atlanta University Conference Publication data into his argument that W. E. B. Du Bois was the first scholar to scientifically study Afro-Americans. Lange's inclusion of Atlanta University data centers around the fact that:

Du Bois was appointed professor of economics and history at Atlanta University as well as director of the Sociological Laboratory and the Atlanta University Conferences in 1897. Two reports ('Morality Among Negroes in Cities' and 'Social and Physical Conditions of Negroes in Cities,' published in 1896 and 1897, respectively) had appeared prior to his arrival and a few were published after he relinquished his editorship in 1914. Every other number (no.3-no.18) carried the indelible mark of Du Bois. One characteristic feature of that mark, particularly after he wished 'to bring the whole subject matter into a better integrated whole,' was information on Africa. Accordingly, he devoted seven pages of his 1907 report (*Economic Cooperation Among Negroes*) to 'traces in Africa,' quoting liberally from the works of Ratzel, Schneider, Buechner and Hayford; the same report also contained a section, albeit less detailed than the African one, on the West Indies. (P. 144-145)

These examples are representative of a larger body of literature that simply cites the existence of social science research at Atlanta University. When viewed in this manner, Atlanta University research, although recognized in the literature, is marginalized and, the author suggests, mentioned only as an addendum because of its connection with Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois.

Scholars such as David Levering Lewis and Herbert Aptheker extend the Atlanta University Conference Publications continuum beyond the mere acknowledgment of the existence of research activity. Essentially, they provide summaries of some of the Atlanta University Conference Publications. Levering (1993), referring to the Atlanta University Conference studies in his biography of W. E. B. Du Bois, states that:

Du Bois' 1902 'Negro Artisan' study was one of his best in terms of methodology. From responses to comprehensive questionnaires sent to 1,300 skilled laborers in the South, he developed a wide-angle socio-economic photograph of labor and race relations at the turn of the century. There were comparative data gathered by collaborating African-American college graduates from thirty-two states, Canada, and Costa Rica, as well as analogous material from a large survey of black labor conducted earlier by the *Chattanooga Times*, a white newspaper. Wages, working conditions, skill levels, the extent of displacement by white people and the superannuation of certain crafts, and workplace race relations were tabulated and examined with the interspersed testimonials of the artisans themselves. Figures from organized labor revealed whole-sale exclusion of African Americans. Among 1.2 million union members nationally, Du Bois counted less than 40,000 nonwhites. Most were found among the organized workers in the Alabama, West Virginia, and Virginia coal mines, the New Orleans dock workers, and in the Louisiana timber camps. (P. 221-222)

Comparatively, Herbert Aptheker (1973), in an annotated bibliography of the Atlanta University Conference Publications, analyzes, and summarizes the same study.

The study itself commences on page 8; here, again, the scope and method of inquiry are laid out. A schedule of questions concerning biographical data, trade, trade-union connection, wages, relations to whites, education, etc., were answered by 1,300 'Negro skilled workers' mostly in Georgia. In addition, a schedule of questions was placed in the hands of numerous Afro-American college graduates and they sent in returns from 32 states and from Canada, Costa Rica, and Puerto Rico. Questions especially relevant to trade-union practices and status were sent to every trade union affiliated with the AFL and many others. Ninety-seven replied; 11 refused replies. Somewhat similar questions were sent to central labor bodies in every city and town in the nation; 200 representing 30 states replied. (P. 528-529)

The investigations cited here are insightful in that they identify some of the methods and some of the findings of the specific Atlanta University Conference investigation. Unlike this inquiry, they do not identify all of the specific methodological techniques or theoretical propositions offered for each Atlanta University Conference Publication.

The examples cited above demonstrate how the Atlanta University Conference Publications continuum extends from the simple recognition of Atlanta University research to more detailed presentations of the basic methods and findings of the conferences. To date, only Elliott Rudwick and Shaun L. Gabbidon, by placing the sociological/social scientific investigations of Atlanta University at the center of their research inquiries, have extended the continuum to its farthest end.

In "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro," Elliott Rudwick (1957) reviews the Atlanta University Conference Publications and concludes that, "The Atlanta Studies were of uneven quality in planning, structure, methods, and content; and in order to demonstrate this disparity, one set of monographs which were poorly done will be contrasted with another group which, in the present writer's

judgement, represents sounder research" (468). Rudwick selected *Some Efforts of Negroes for Their Own Social Betterment* (1898 and 1909) and *Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans* (1907) to represent poor examples of research conducted by Atlanta University investigators. *The Negro Artisan* (1902 and 1912) embody monographs that, according to Rudwick, possess quality structure, sound methodology, and outstanding content. Rudwick's critique of both sets of monographs is outlined below.

In his critique of the 1898 publication, *Some Efforts of Negroes for Their Own Social Advancement*, Rudwick identifies five structural, methodological, and theoretical issues that make this monograph problematic. First, Rudwick suggests that the sampling procedure utilized by Atlanta University researchers was questionable. Rudwick (1957) states that "[Du Bois] was not seriously troubled by the problem of sampling procedures, either in the selection of his type of cities or in the data to be located within them" (469). Secondly, although Rudwick applauds the inclusion of educated Atlanta community researchers, he criticizes Du Bois because "he gave very few instructions, beyond telling them to submit limited descriptions of some of the benevolent organizations within their own communities" (469). Thirdly, "[Du Bois] provided no method for checking the reliability or validity of the material sent to him" (469). This issue is of particular concern to Rudwick since Dr. Du Bois' early Atlanta University Conference studies often relied upon researchers to research themselves and their communities. Fourthly, "One also finds an absence of controls in reporting the smaller benevolent societies, and after reading one superficial list after another, there is a tendency to ask, so what?" (470). Lastly, each

Atlanta University Conference Publication ends with a set of resolutions designed to actively address the findings presented at each year's meeting. Rudwick insists that the "resolutions do not seem to have grown out of the inductive material presented, and most of them are only exhortations which do not suggest any specific techniques to accomplish the ends sought" (470). Rudwick's overall analysis of the 1898 study is summarized by his assertion that "Du Bois succeeded in amassing an encyclopedic array of facts (often with little connection to each other)" (470). The 1907 Atlanta University Conference Publication receives a similar critique from Rudwick.

Rudwick identifies three deficiencies in the 1907 Atlanta University Conference Publication- *Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans*. First, Rudwick is critical of this monograph because Dr. Du Bois did not utilize, comparatively, data collected in the 1898 study. Since *Some Efforts of Negroes for Their Own Social Advancement* and *Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans* both addressed economic issues and its effect on the "Negro" population, Rudwick argues that the 1907 study would have been strengthened by including previously collected data and utilizing it comparatively. Secondly, and relatedly, the 1898 investigation furnished data concerning a specific business, the Coleman Manufacturing Company, such as the working conditions faced by its African American owner and employees. When Atlanta University researchers returned to conduct their 1907 study nine years later, they discovered that "the founder died, and a white company bought the mill and is running it with white help. Here [is] an excellent opportunity for a case study of the failure of race enterprise" (470). Rudwick suggests that a case study, which included data collected during the years in which there was an