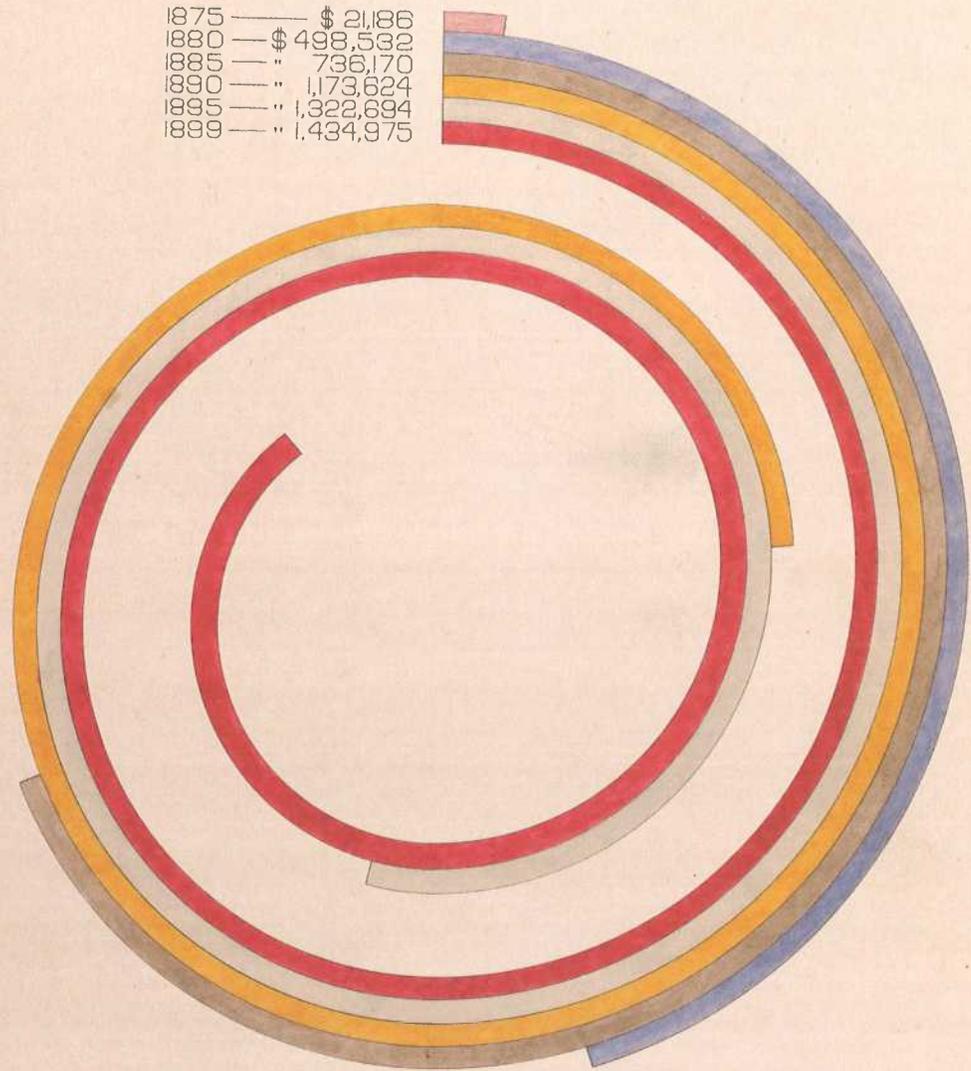


W. E. B. Du Bois's Data Portraits Visualizing Black America

THE COLOR LINE AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



WHITNEY BATTLE-BAPTISTE *and* BRITT RUSERT, *editors*

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THE W. E. B. DU BOIS CENTER
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Introduction

*Whitney Battle-Baptiste
and Britt Rusert*

In his little-known speculative fiction “The Princess Steel” (ca. 1908–10), scholar, writer, and civil rights leader W. E. B. Du Bois weaves a tale about a black sociologist who stages a magnificent experiment on the top floor of a Manhattan skyscraper overlooking Broadway. At the center of this short story stands a *megascope*, a fictive technology that looks like a giant trumpet, laced with “silken cords like coiled electric wire,” and equipped with handles, eyepieces, and earpieces. When hooked up to the megascope, users are able to view the “Great Near,” Du Bois’s term for the always present but usually invisible structures of colonialism and racial capitalism that shape the organization of society. The vision produced by the megascope—a fantastical feudal allegory of primitive accumulation centered on an epic battle between two knights for possession of an African princess whose hair is made of steel—is generated in part by data contained in a massive set of volumes lining

the wall of the laboratory, a vast set of demographic studies collected for over “200 years” by some kind of “Silent Brotherhood.” Dr. Hannibal Johnson, the sociologist and protagonist of the story, uses this data to plot what he calls the “Law of Life” onto a “thin transparent film, covered with tiny rectangular lines, and pierced with tiny holes,” and stretched over a large frame. He then goes on to plot what he calls “The Curve of Steel” onto a glittering, crystal globe suspended in the air and upon which the megascope’s feudal vision subsequently takes shape.¹

In a story populated by mysterious scientists, annoying lovebirds, towering skyscrapers, battling knights, glimmering treasure, and a regal princess, it’s easy to miss that Du Bois’s “Silent Brotherhood” likely refers to an actually existing school of black sociology in the US South at the turn of the century, headed by Du Bois himself at Atlanta University.² Furthermore, here at the beginning of his pulpy short fiction, Du Bois offers a narrative of what we would today call “data visualization,” the rendering of information in a visual format to help communicate data while also generating new patterns and knowledge through the act of visualization itself.

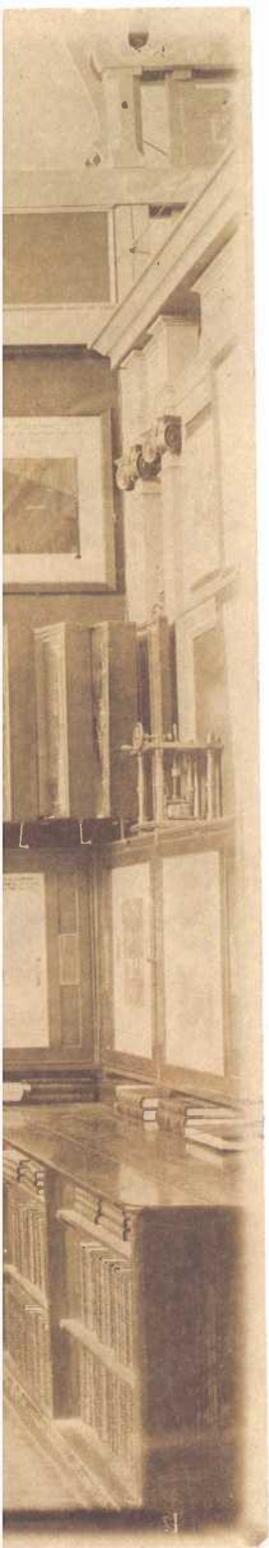
The visual projection of data in Du Bois’s sci-fi laboratory would be simply an interesting textual detail were it not for the fact that Du Bois himself had in 1900 contributed approximately sixty data visualizations, or infographics, to an exhibit at the Exposition Universelle in Paris dedicated to the progress made by African Americans since Emancipation. This *Exposition des Nègres d’Amérique* was organized by Thomas Junius Calloway, a lawyer, educator, Fisk University graduate, and editor of the *Colored American* newspaper in Washington, DC, who, with the endorsement and assistance of Booker T. Washington, successfully petitioned the United States government to include, as part of its showcasing of its industrial and imperial prowess as well as its

commitment to social reform, an exhibit dedicated to African American life. The American Negro Exhibit featured many contributions by students and faculty at the Tuskegee Institute, Howard University, the Hampton Institute, and other black colleges and industrial schools. The installations that comprised the American Negro Exhibit were meant to educate patrons about the forms of education and uplift occurring at black institutions and in African American communities across the US South. The exhibit featured an eclectic set of objects, images, and texts, including framed photographic portraits of prominent African American leaders and politicians; tools, harnesses, and other agricultural products from black industrial schools; a bronze statuette of Frederick Douglass; and an on-site collection of over two hundred and fifty publications authored by African Americans and compiled by Daniel Alexander Payne Murray, a black intellectual, bibliographer, and librarian at the Library of Congress.

Calloway reached out to W. E. B. Du Bois, his former classmate and friend from Fisk, in the hopes that he would be willing to contribute a social study about African American life to the exhibit. Du Bois used this invitation as an opportunity to contribute two unique sets of data visualizations to the American Negro Exhibit. Heading a team composed of students and alumni from Atlanta University, Du Bois created a collection of graphs, charts, maps, and tables that were generated from a mix of existing records and empirical data that had been collected at Atlanta University by Du Bois's sociological laboratory. Eugene F. Provenzo Jr., author of *W. E. B. Du Bois's Exhibit of American Negroes*, notes that "most of the information for the charts was drawn from sources such as the United States Census, the Atlanta University Reports, and various governmental reports that had been compiled by Du Bois for groups such as the United States Bureau of Labor."³



Exposition des Nègres d'Amérique,
Paris Exposition, 1900.

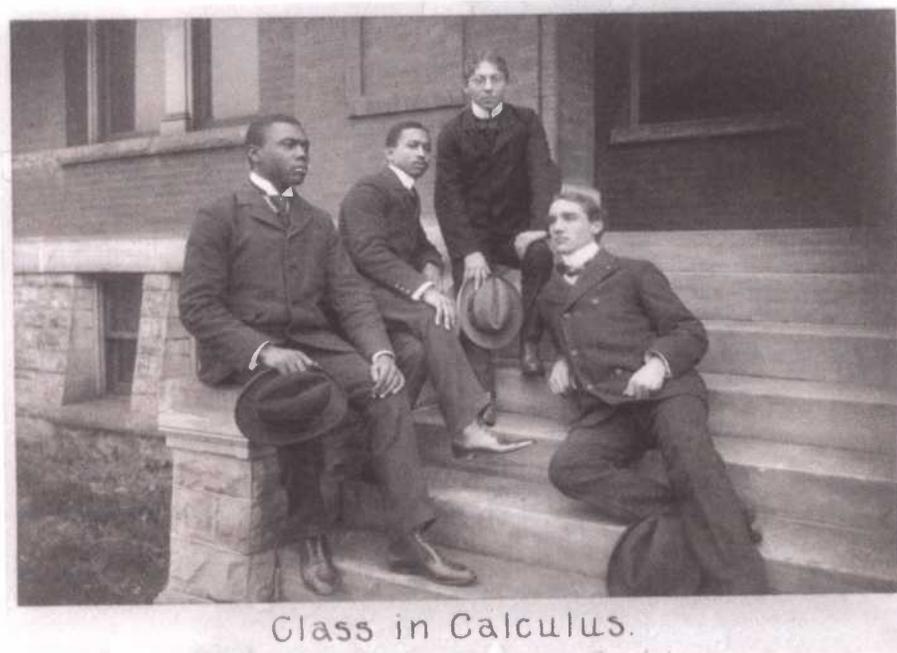


The first set of infographics created for the American Negro Exhibit was part of Du Bois's *The Georgia Negro: A Social Study*, the study he prepared specifically for the Exposition Universelle at the request of Calloway. Representing the largest black population in any US state, Du Bois and his team used Georgia's diverse and growing black population as a case study to demonstrate the progress made by African Americans since the Civil War.⁴ In addition to holding up Atlanta University's home state as representative of black populations across the country, Du Bois and his team were interested in establishing the Black South's place within and claim to global modernity.

The second set of infographics prepared by Du Bois and his team at Atlanta University was more national and global in scope. Titled *A Series of Statistical Charts Illustrating the Condition of the Descendants of Former African Slaves Now in Residence in the United States of America*, this set included renderings of national employment and education statistics, the distribution of black populations across the nation, a comparison of literacy rates in the United States relative to other countries, and other striking visualizations. Despite the existence of two separately titled series, important points of cross-reference and connection are visible across both sets of images. For example, the map depicting routes of the African slave trade (see plate 1), which served as the lead image for the Georgia study, situates Georgia (represented by a star) at the center of the map's diasporic cartography, bringing the Georgia study into the orbit of the global scope of the second series while also maintaining its more local orientation.

While scholars have thoroughly explored the American Negro Exhibit, especially the photo albums curated by Du Bois and also exhibited as part of the Georgia study, this is the first time that the data visualizations are collected together in book form and reproduced in full

color.⁵ We are particularly thrilled to present this collection of images in 2018, on the occasion of Du Bois's 150th birthday celebration, and in conjunction with the work of the W. E. B. Du Bois Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, which also houses the W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. In addition to contributing a new vantage on the history of the American Negro Exhibit and African American participation in world's fairs and expositions, we hope that the infographics might connect to



Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, ca. 1899.

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other genealogies of black design and data visualization, from the centrality of visual design and format in Harlem Renaissance and Black Arts-era publishing, to the role of abstraction and conceptual aesthetics in black visual art in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries.⁶ Produced at the *fin de siècle*, the infographics look back to a history of data visualization in the nineteenth century deeply connected to the institution of slavery, and the struggle against it, while looking forward to the forms of data collection and representation that would become central to representations and surveys of Harlem in the twentieth century. Indeed, these images anticipate the forms of “racial abstraction” that would come to define social scientific, visual, and fictional representations of Harlem beginning in the 1920s.⁷

Embedded within the consolidation of the social sciences—including sociology and statistics—in the late nineteenth century, the Du Bois data portraits reflect a moment just before the disciplines had hardened into the academic specializations and structures of knowledge that we are familiar with today. The cross-fertilization of visual art and social science here marks an important transitional moment in the history of the disciplines while offering alternative visions of how social scientific data might be made more accessible to the populations and people from whom such data is collected.

The collaborative nature of work that went into the construction of the images as well as their public exhibition illuminate Du Bois’s investment in a truly public sociology. Du Bois also turned to Atlanta alumni to construct a robust network of field researchers across the South. Black women were among the field researchers who contributed their expertise and labor to the Atlanta Studies.⁸ We might further speculate on how white working-class patrons touring the American Negro Exhibit in Paris interpreted and made meaning of this data on their own



Atlanta University, Georgia, ca. 1899-1900.

terms. Here, both viewers of the infographics and black study participants in the US South come into view as legitimate co-producers of sociological knowledge.

The striking aesthetic dimensions of the infographics are further worthy of reflection and study on their own terms. Indeed, the politics of visibility, and the very question of black visibility, were central to Du Bois's thought, and his theory of double consciousness was expressed in a distinctly visual register.⁹ Du Bois used the term "double consciousness" to describe the experience of always seeing oneself through the eyes of another—a psychic alienation and social isolation produced by the "peculiar" condition of being black in America. This double or doubled consciousness was also, according to Du Bois, a kind of "second sight" that might be transformed from a curse into a "gift" that offered a unique and superior perspective on turn-of-the-century race relations, sociability, and even existence itself.¹⁰ From his creation of the megascope in "The Princess Steel" to his appeal for a projector to enlarge and present his sociological data at Atlanta University, Du Bois's thinking on the politics of the visual also extended to an interest in photography, film, and other visual technologies, as well as to the politics of access to these technologies. In addition to the infographics, the Georgia study also included three photo albums that visually represented the industry, beauty, and dignity of African Americans in the state. Deborah Willis notes that Du Bois, working as a compiler and curator of images solicited from Atlanta photographer Thomas Askew and other black Southern photographers, "used the camera as a collector of evidence to support his sociological findings."¹¹ We invite further reflection on the relationship between the Georgia study photo albums and the fascinating set of data portraits collected here. These charts, graphs, and maps visualize African Americans in ways that speak to but also diverge from the



representational strategies used in black uplift photography at the turn of the twentieth century.

Looking back to his years at Atlanta University in his 1968 *Autobiography*, Du Bois wrote that he viewed the contribution of the infographics to the Paris Exposition as an opportunity to display the work of the Atlanta School of sociology to the “thinking world.” He goes on to note, “I got a couple of my best students and put a series of facts into charts. . . . We made a most interesting set of drawings, limned on pasteboard cards about a yard square and mounted on a number of movable standards.”¹² In a time when, as chronicled by Aldon Morris, the contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory were being obfuscated by the Chicago School of sociology, while a broader American culture was not ready to recognize the existence of a school of black sociologists in the US South, Du Bois turned to a visual medium—and the protomodernist aesthetics of turn-of-the-century data visualization—to gain the attention of an international audience.¹³ In opposition to the deeply allegorical and intentionally convoluted language that Du Bois deployed in his writings to convey the structures of oppression, alienation, and isolation under Jim Crow segregation—or what Du Bois termed “life within the Veil”—here Du Bois and his design team used clean lines, bright color, and a sparse style to visually convey the American color line to a European audience. This stylistic decision opens up questions about the *aesthetics of the color line* and their relationship to Du Bois’s famous proclamation in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line” (see also plate 1: *The Georgia Negro: A Social Study*).¹⁴ This focus on modernist design, as well as the diasporic sensibilities of the images, further points to Du Bois’s interest in representing the Black South as an integral part of modernity, a “small nation of people” who shared

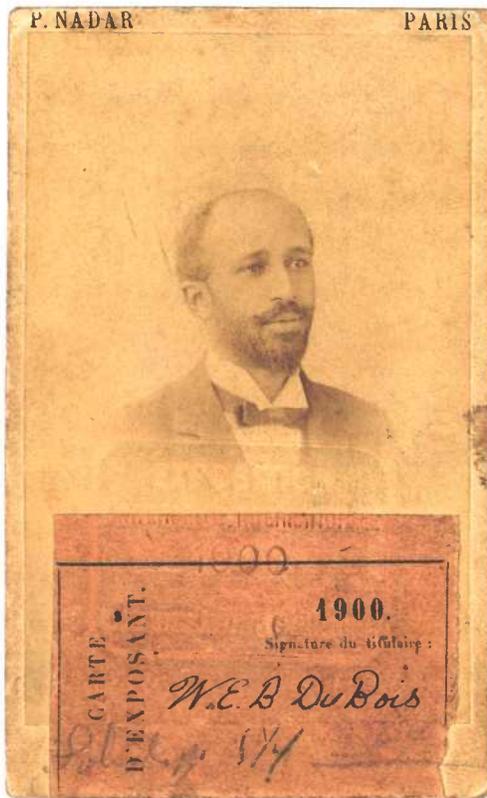
more in common with the broader, future-oriented “thinking world” than with an insular, backward-looking United States, where Jim Crow segregation was the rule of the land. (See Mabel Wilson’s essay for a further exploration of the robust cartographic imaginary of Du Bois’s Georgia study.)

Later in his life, Du Bois recalled the contingencies and difficulties that surrounded the completion of this work for the Exposition Universelle, as well as the financial circumstances that nearly prevented him from accompanying his own exhibit:

The details of finishing these 50 or more charts, in colors, with accuracy, was terribly difficult with little money, limited time and not too much encouragement. I was threatened with nervous prostration before I was done and had little money left to buy passage to Paris, nor was there a cabin left for sale. But the exhibit would fail unless I was there. So at the last moment I bought passage in the steerage and went over and installed the work.¹⁵

This image of Du Bois traveling across the Atlantic in steerage—in close proximity to the hold of the ship—does not sit comfortably with our own image of Du Bois as a cultural elite and famous intellectual, nor does it reflect the same vision of racial progress and modernity represented in the infographics themselves. We see instead a Du Bois whose own person was less mobile than the graphs and charts sent ahead to Paris; a Du Bois who worked within the financial constraints of a black Southern college and was subject to uneven and precarious grant funding to support his research and travel.

Moreover, although non-white patrons could be more sure of their admittance to expositions in Europe than in the United States, all world’s fairs in the period, including the Paris Exposition, were deeply



W. E. B. Du Bois's exhibitor card for the Paris Exposition, 1900.

invested in visualizing social Darwinist theories of civilization that placed Europeans and Anglo-Americans above non-white peoples; they endorsed a vision of industrialization that equated progress with Anglo-Saxon superiority. While the American Negro Exhibit displayed the positive influence of activism and uplift *within* black communities in the United States, the broader logic of the Exposition, which imagined the white race as lifting up the rest of the world out of barbarism and backwardness, was still an imperial one.

Beyond the material and symbolic constraints posed by what Du Bois would recognize not just as a national but global regime of segregation by the end of World War I, the infographics are also marked by more material reminders of the weighty impress of a history of oppression on Du Bois's present. A short write-up about the Atlanta University contribution to the Exposition Universelle in the *Bulletin of Atlanta University* (1900) includes a brief comment that one of the charts in the exhibit was displayed in a wooden frame carved by a former slave who lived in Atlanta.¹⁶ This elusive and fascinating detail regarding a physical object that has been since lost—a frame designed by an ex-slave—presents us with a stunning juxtaposition that points neither to historical progress nor to the overcoming of the slave past but to the ways that slavery continued to quite literally *frame* the present. Similarly, alongside the Georgia study's data visualizations and photo albums, Du Bois included a three-volume, handwritten compilation of the Black Codes of Georgia, stretching from the slave codes of the colonial and antebellum period to the segregationist policies and laws of the present. In other words, once the data visualizations are contextualized within the broader exhibit and its contents, a much more complicated narrative emerges about the purpose and significations of these images. The presence of Georgia's Black Codes, which sought to control and suppress black

movement and social organization at every turn, ultimately conveyed not a utopian and happy narrative about black progress in a forward-looking, modern nation, but a sense of the gains that had been made by African Americans *in spite of* the machinery of white supremacist culture, policy, and law that surrounded them. In this way, the data portraits actually challenged the dominant framework of liberal freedom and progress that characterized both the American Negro Exhibit and the Paris Exposition.

After the Exposition Universelle closed in November 1900, the entire American Negro Exhibit was packed up, shipped, and displayed at a number of world's fairs and other expositions back in the United States, gaining additional audiences—including African Americans—after its international debut in Paris. For example, a group of black clubwomen worked to bring the exhibit to the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, in 1901. It's clear that Du Bois also continued to think about the infographics he and his team prepared for the exhibit. In 1909, he even wrote Calloway to ask how he might secure the return of his exhibit from the Library of Congress, where artifacts and documents from the American Negro Exhibit had been deposited.¹⁷ The current existence of these images as a complete set in the collections of the Library of Congress (all of which have been digitized) suggests that Du Bois was either unable to secure their return or did not follow up with the library. While we can't know what future plans Du Bois had for the infographics, we do know that they might take on a new life today, from inspiring forms of design and art-making connected to social justice work to their traction within digital projects and other initiatives that are, like Du Bois and his collaborators, envisioning how data might be reimagined as a form of accountability and even protest in the age of Black Lives Matter.¹⁸

American Negro at Paris, 1900

Aldon Morris

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Industrial Revolution had transformed the modern world. Cultural producers from nations around the globe assembled at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris from April to November. Their purpose was to display artifacts signifying great national achievements and provide evidence suggesting even greater accomplishments in the new century. The fair presented a global stage for nations to strut their sense of national pride.

At the turn of the century, portrayals of black people as sub-human, incapable of attaining great material and cultural achievements, were commonplace throughout the western world. Yet, a different view emerged from the American Negro Exhibit at the Exposition. Here, African Americans were displayed in a series of photographs and artifacts as a proud people, dressed in splendor, as accomplished scholars and intellectuals studying the world with as much competence as one

would imagine from students of Plato, Copernicus, Alexander Crummell, and Frederick Douglass. Indeed, African Americans were depicted as students, lawyers, doctors, major inventors, purchasers of property, and warriors against illiteracy, making major contributions on the world stage in the new century. Organizers of the exhibit bestowed nationhood on the recently freed slaves, referring to them as a small "nation within a nation." This designation of a black nation conveyed the idea of a community with its own integrity, intricate culture, and complex social organization. This counterintuitive portrayal stunned throngs of world visitors who had never seen African Americans through this lens. The exhibit violated white thoughts about black people, especially Americans only three decades removed from slavery.

As the twentieth century approached, these ex-slaves found themselves exiled in their own land, where their unpaid slave labor had constructed one of the world's great empires. Rather than benefitting from this bounty, freedmen and -women found themselves homeless, penniless, stripped of the vote, unable to seek education, and patrolled by whites. Indeed, a new racial order was forged. The Jim Crow regime made sure state laws required black subordination in the former Confederacy. In 1896 the United States Supreme Court ruling *Plessy v. Ferguson* legalized Jim Crow rule across the land by declaring racial segregation constitutional so long as segregated facilities were equal. However, whites who never intended to establish equal facilities proceeded to support racial inequality under the guise of legality.

Lacking land, capital, and political rights, ex-slaves, now forced into exploitative relations with former masters, became sharecroppers with no power to benefit from these unequal relations, which predictably resulted in a system of debt peonage. Whites claimed that ex-slaves were the architects of their fate because of racial inferiority; this ideology

W. E. B. Du Bois
at Paris Exposition,
1900.



maintained that blacks were the wretched of the earth because God and nature planned it that way. The disciplines of sociology, anthropology, history, and humanities during Du Bois's time promoted scientific racism. In Du Bois's view, "science" justified this regime of racial exploitation, which in essence was slavery by a new name.

Racial subordination resulted from material powerlessness of the ex-slaves, who had little access to capital and land. African Americans were exploited economically because, despite being forced to provide



Paris Exposition gold medal award,
ca. August 1900.

intensive labor, they depended on meager incomes begrudgingly paid by white elites. Their extreme poverty exacerbated political powerlessness, and their low levels of education provided ideological justification for their servitude.

Although systematically disenfranchised and dispossessed, African Americans mobilized their agency to rebel and pursue economic survival and self-respect. Yet this agency produced by ex-slaves went unacknowledged, denied and disavowed because it conflicted with claims that African Americans naturally belonged at the bottom of the Jim Crow order. Nevertheless, there always existed people acutely aware of their agency and the progress gained during their journey from slavery to freedom. Finally, at the American Negro Exhibit, a narrative of black agency was placed front and center.

Negro Exhibit in Paris, 1900

There was nothing auspicious about the space assigned to the Negro Exhibit, nestled as it was in the right corner of a room in the Pavilion of Social Economy. To garner attention from this unenviable location, this exhibit would need to radiate its own sparkle and originality. It would require an imaginative resonance causing visitors to pause and marvel at the mysteries conveyed by the displays arrayed in the corner. This was no small task given the mission of the exhibit. The American Negro Exhibit successfully captivated thousands of curious visitors over the months it was on display. The exhibit garnered a number of prestigious prizes, including a gold medal awarded to Du Bois by Paris Exposition judges for “his role as ‘collaborator’ and ‘compiler’ of materials for the exhibit.”¹

The power of the American Negro Exhibit derived from its sociological imagination.² At the turn of the twentieth century, the discipline



of sociology was in its infancy, and its scholars sought to make it a respected social science in America. As a pioneer of scientific sociology in the United States, Du Bois was one of the discipline's leading lights. Du Bois's sociological genius drove the creativity animating the exhibit. Regarding the exhibit's sociological nature, Du Bois explained: "As one enters [the Pavilion of Social Economy], it is an exhibit which, more than most others in the building, is sociological in the larger sense of the term—that is, is an attempt to give, in as systematic and compact a form as possible, the history and present condition of a large group of human beings."³

The exhibit's sociological narrative was the result of meticulous planning, on the part of both Du Bois and Thomas Calloway. Calloway explained the goals of the exhibit, writing, "Thousands upon thousands will go [to the fair], and a well selected and prepared exhibit, representing the Negro's development in his churches, his schools, his homes, his farms, his stores, his professions and pursuits in general will attract attention... and do a great and lasting good in convincing thinking people of the possibilities of the Negro."⁴

The sociological content of Calloway's vision was remarkable. He made clear the exhibit would explore crucial aspects of the black American journey, including African American history, intellectual achievements, and advances in education and community building. Calloway was keen on depicting black agency, arguing that the exhibit should demonstrate "what the Negro is doing for himself" through his own organizations. Calloway's sociological imagination reached beyond a narrow focus on African Americans to include "a general sociological study of the racial conditions in the United States"⁵ that chronicled and interpreted the social conditions fueling racial inequality. Calloway meticulously examined the materials to be shown in the exhibit and

presented them to faculty and students at Atlanta University in order to receive feedback before they were shipped to Paris. Another African American, Daniel Alexander Payne Murray, played a crucial role in shaping the exhibit. Assistant librarian at the Library of Congress, Murray was a learned man who was an author, intellectual, and expert on black writers and black print cultures, including newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets. Calloway turned to Murray to acquire for the exhibit hundreds of published works by black writers in order to demonstrate black intellectual capacity and achievements in writing.

Du Bois was among the first professors in the nation to train students in sociological theory and empirical methodologies. He involved his students in fieldwork wherein they collected and analyzed data on the black community and race relations. Because these students were taught to think sociologically and engage in data analysis, the most advanced of the group became valuable assistants who compiled charts and graphs. Du Bois's current and former students at Atlanta University were also crucially involved in the development of the exhibit; they worked with him to produce the sociological charts and graphs, doing so on a short timetable. Nevertheless, without Du Bois's direction, training, and sociological imagination, the exhibit would not have blossomed into the masterpiece it became.

Du Bois's Experiences and the 1900 American Negro Exhibit

At the time of the Exposition, Du Bois's experience of living in a racist America prepared him to lead the effort to construct the Atlanta University exhibit. Unlike average members of the black community who grew up under brutal Jim Crow racism in the South, Du Bois began life in

the eastern United States in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Racism there was subtle and genteel. As a youth, Du Bois did not witness the horrors of lynching and racial violence. Nevertheless, because racism was national in scope, Du Bois first experienced racial discrimination while attending elementary school in Massachusetts. With this first encounter, Du Bois pledged to outperform whites: "Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others, or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination time, or beat them at a footrace, or even beat their stringy heads."⁶ Although he experienced discrimination as a child, it was not until he headed to Fisk, a black university in Nashville, Tennessee, that he was faced with extreme prejudice. Entering the land of Jim Crow, which bore striking resemblances to slavery, Du Bois witnessed a virulent, open, and violent racism. It would not take Du Bois long to engage in activism to counter naked racism.

Rather than accept the bombardment of scientific racism, Du Bois launched intellectual and political attacks against it: "When I entered college in 1885, I was supposed to learn there was a new reason for the degradation of the coloured people—that was because they had inferior brains to whites. This I immediately challenged. I knew by experience that my own brains and body were not inferior to the average of my white fellow students. Moreover, I grew suspicious when it became clear that treating Negroes as inferior, whether they were or not was profitable to the people who hired their labor. I early, therefore, started on a personal life crusade to prove Negro equality and to induce Negroes to demand it."⁷ In the South, Du Bois had to obey Jim Crow laws and

customs, which applied to all aspects of southern life. He had to ride in the rear of trains where accommodations were filthy and filled with tobacco smoke. He ate meals with blacks and relieved himself in segregated toilets. Despite being a highly educated scholar, the elevated status routinely conferred on similarly situated whites eluded Du Bois. He never adjusted to these racist insults; rather, they often caused him to become angry in five languages. In his crusade to overthrow racism, he developed expertise as a social scientist, historian, philosopher, journalist, novelist, and poet. Du Bois, as he did throughout his life, utilized these talents to develop his contribution to the American Negro Exhibit. Given the talents Du Bois employed to challenge racist views and discrimination, and his dogged persistence, he was able to make inroads on many fronts. In so doing, Du Bois secured his stature as a towering activist of the twentieth century.

Sociological Logic of the Exhibit

Du Bois's own achievements were jarringly inconsistent with the myth of black inferiority. By age twenty, he had earned a bachelor's degree from Fisk University. Three years later, he earned both a bachelor's and master's degree from Harvard. By twenty-five, Du Bois had completed two years of advanced graduate studies at the University of Berlin. At the age of twenty-seven, Du Bois reached a milestone by becoming the first African American to earn a PhD from Harvard. His dissertation, *Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America*, became the inaugural volume of Harvard's 1896 series of Historical Studies. Du Bois's 1899 book, *The Philadelphia Negro*, was the first American sociological study of an urban community. At this time, social scientific studies tended to have a social philosophy orientation un-

supported by empirical data. The use of charts and graphs was rare, especially those that were aesthetically pleasing to the eye and the intellect. The achievement of *The Philadelphia Negro* was that it was steeped in empirical data with charts and graphs, which enabled Du Bois to chronicle and analyze the experience of black Philadelphians at the turn of the twentieth century. Du Bois had become one of the most talented sociologists in the nation by the time the idea of a Negro exhibit in Paris took root. However, despite his talent and the innovative nature of his work, white social scientists largely ignored Du Bois's scholarship.

Although subverting scientific racism was a formidable task, Du Bois proceeded undeterred. In keeping with his sociological training at Harvard and Berlin, Du Bois was an astute analyst of the casual forces inhering in social conditions. His expertise included historical, statistical, and comparative analyses, enabling him to unveil the vexing effects of social conditions. Du Bois eschewed ahistorical accounts because he believed that an understanding of people resulted only from examining them in their historical contexts. To understand black people, and their journey from slavery to freedom, required examination with the historical microscope. Du Bois railed against unscientific conclusions based on hearsay and sloppy measurements. His advanced statistical training enabled him to critique and deplore uncritical applications of statistics, especially in studies pertaining to people of African descent. Du Bois pioneered the nation's most sophisticated quantitative research on race and the black population.

The exhibit enabled Du Bois to attack white racist beliefs on a grand stage unavailable in the academy, where white scholars were driven by numerous prejudiced beliefs about African Americans. For instance, by subscribing to the social Darwinist paradigm that theorized the survival of the fittest, white scholars maintained black inferiority would

inevitably lead to the population's extinction. The distinguished white statistician, Frederick Hoffman, declared in 1896, "A combination of these traits and tendencies must in the end cause the extinction of the race."⁸ Constructing blacks as a unique race constituted another flaw in studies by white scholars. This belief stemmed from the assumption that people of African descent were not full-fledged members of the human family, which would make comparisons between blacks and whites spurious and unnecessary. Du Bois, who possessed encyclopedic knowledge of social conditions in numerous countries, especially those in Europe, made numerous comparisons between African Americans and Europeans to demonstrate that similarly situated populations acted amazingly similar given shared social conditions. In this sense, Du Bois demonstrated that social conditions trumped race in accounting for social inequality. His contributions to the American Negro Exhibit relied on historical, statistical, and comparative data to challenge the racial stereotypes that were pervasive throughout the academic establishment.

Innovations and Effectiveness of the Exhibit

Du Bois was aware that while unmovable prose and dry presentations of charts and graphs might catch attention from specialists, this approach would not garner notice beyond narrow circles of academics. Such social science was useless to the liberation of oppressed peoples. Breaking from tradition, Du Bois was among the first great American public intellectuals whose reach extended beyond the academy to the masses. Du Bois was able to achieve this feat by using a variety of writing styles ranging from scientific prose to lyrical outpourings across a number of genres that deeply touched readers' emotions. To make their contribution to the American Negro Exhibit captivating, Du Bois and his Atlanta

team decided to produce modern graphs, charts, maps, photographs, and other items that appeared to sparkle. They constructed hand-drawn graphs, charts, and maps arrayed in lively, vibrant colors punctuated by artistically intersecting lines. Bar data contained blocks of contrasting colors documenting the black experience. However, the art did not distract from science; it served to reinforce the comprehensive scientific data chronicling the African American journey. Looking at the images, one is reminded of William Wordsworth's muse: "Dull would he be of soul who could pass by / A sight so touching in its majesty."⁹ Indeed an array of dry displays at the exhibit would have been ineffective in subverting the social Darwinist paradigm.

Along with a general approach used to describe the black population nationally, Du Bois employed the case method for his work in the Georgia study. The case method relies on the in-depth study of a single case to reveal details and nuances of phenomena not attainable in a general study. The case method has become commonplace in sociology and anthropology because it allows the analyst to provide specificity to accompany macro-level analysis. Du Bois chose Georgia as a typical state to study African Americans in minute detail in order to add specificity to the national picture; Georgia was an ideal subject because it contained both urban and rural communities and was located close to Atlanta University, where Du Bois's sociological laboratory was housed. Charts, graphs, statistics, and photographs from Georgia accompanied the data visualizations that depicted the United States more generally. Du Bois concluded, "It was a very good idea to supplement these very general figures with a minute social study in a typical Southern State."¹⁰ Together, these methods, art, and analyses generate a powerful sociological narrative of the black experience that ranges in scope from local to international.

The essence of the exhibit's narrative declared that African Americans had made amazing progress over just thirty-five years since Emancipation on most dimensions crucial to human well-being. This progress was remarkable given that black Americans had endured over two centuries of slavery, two decades of Jim Crow, and all the oppressive conditions associated with subjugation. The exhibit suggested that black progress since slavery compared most favorably with that of any human group faced with similar barriers.

Du Bois presented statistical data showing that the black population was increasing rather than decreasing, a direct refutation of social Darwinist theories. Comparative data in the exhibit demonstrated black fertility rates were as robust as that of many European countries. With a slap at the black extinction hypothesis, Du Bois declared, "A comparison of the age distribution with France [shows] the wonderful reproductive powers of the blacks." Du Bois utilized the exhibit to refute the notion that black people were intellectually inferior, uninterested, and incapable of learning. He accomplished this by presenting graphs that showed the black illiteracy rate was rapidly declining and school enrollments were climbing. In graphs comparing black illiteracy rates with those of numerous European countries, Du Bois showed that black "illiteracy is less than that of Russia, and only equal to that of Hungary."¹¹ The Georgia study also contained hundreds of photographs depicting the physical and social heterogeneity of black people across the Southern state, as well as their dignity. This display of photographs made it difficult to reach any conclusion other than that the people reflected in these images embodied a beauty and grace of their own not describable by white standards of beauty.

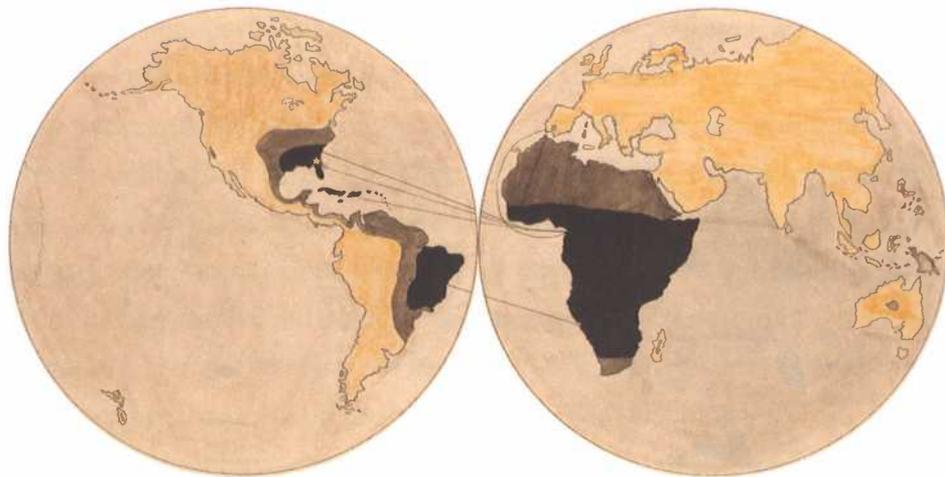
The compilation of data displayed at the exhibit stressed one message: black progress since slavery. The colorful hand-drawn illustrations

showed that ownership of black property and land was increasing. Black businesses were rising and so were the number of patents for black inventions. Such inventions overturned the white view that they “never knew a negro to invent anything but lies.”¹² Black institutions of higher learning were moving firmly in the direction of educating the race. Other black institutions, including the church and mutual aid organizations, were increasingly fueling black agency. The collection was a masterpiece of sociology, celebrating black humanity on a world stage.

Du Bois was acutely aware that the packaging of the exhibit was as important as the data depicted. He understood what Duke Ellington expressed thirty years later: *It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing*. Du Bois and his students, working under a short deadline, analyzed volumes of data before converting them to succinct tables, graphs, and maps. Incredibly, they also mastered the art of drawing numerous illustrations with lively combinations of colors, creative lines, and eye-catching circles. Such visual sociology was rare in these early years of the discipline. In 1900, Du Bois was a pioneer in this form of sociology as he presented the black experience for the world to view at the Paris Exposition. It foreshadowed new possibilities of communicating sociological knowledge to the wider public. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, the innovative sociology contained in the exhibit continues to stand the test of time.

The Cartography of W. E. B. Du Bois's Color Line

Mabel O. Wilson



The first plate of W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Georgia Negro: A Social Study* depicts two circles of a globe split in half. In one circle appears Asia, Europe, Africa, and Australia, and in the other North and South America. The plate, hand drawn on a twenty-two-by-twenty-eight-inch sheet of heavy paper, also includes an introductory statement written in neat script: "This case is devoted to a series of charts, maps and other

011224

Conjugal condition of American Negroes according to age periods.

Condition conjugale des Nègres Américains au point de vue de l'âge.

Done by Atlanta University.

MALES.

FEMALES.

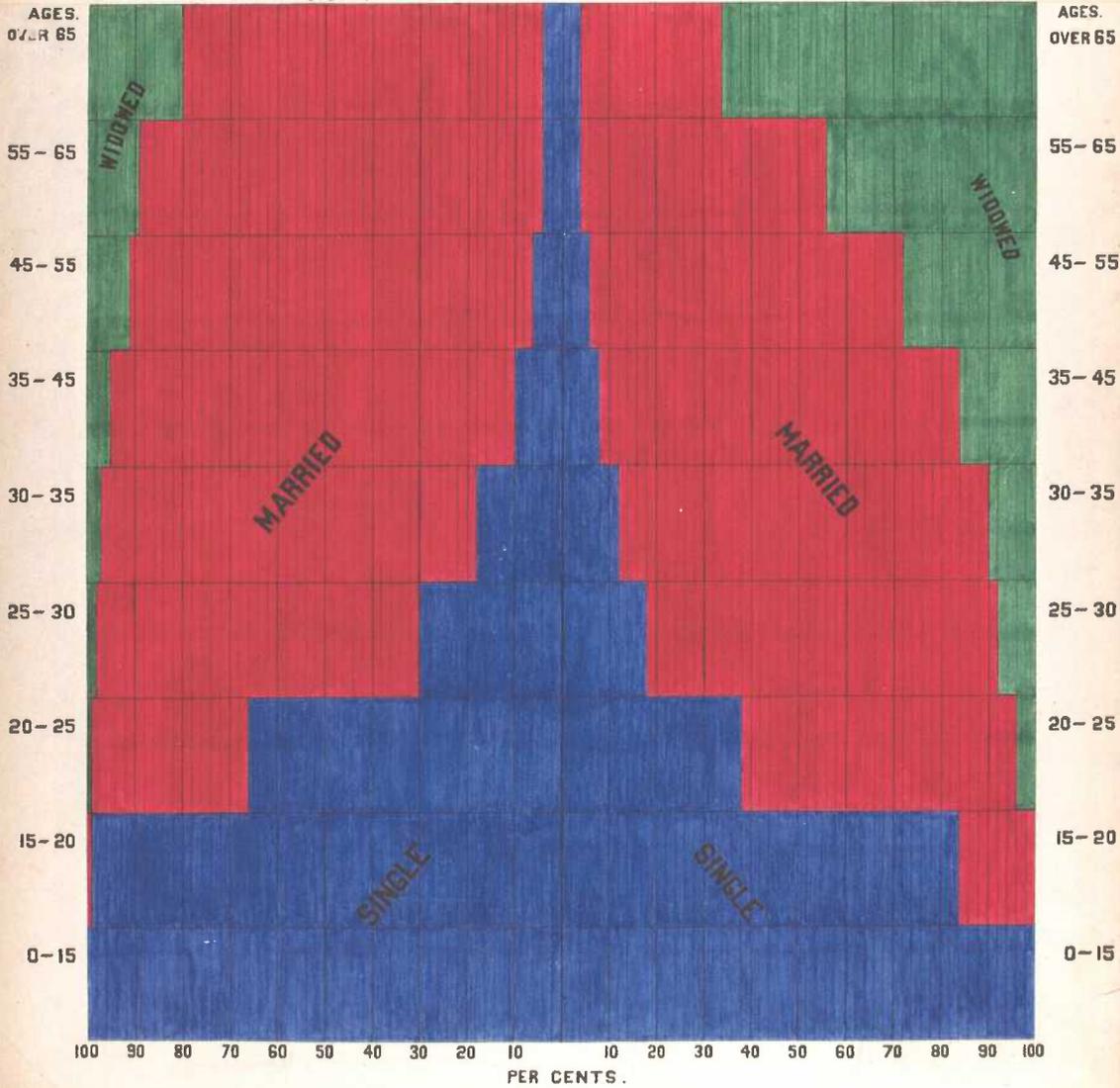


Plate 53 This complex grid, area chart, and bar chart is a vibrating combination of color and shape. Split down the middle into "males" and "females," each half of the nearly symmetrical chart is further broken down by color-coded grids: a green zone for widows and widowers, a red zone for married couples, and a blue zone for single people—the data set is closely related to plate 10. The typography is laid out with a tight structure around the outside of the colored matrix. However, inside the grid, type is set at dynamic angles in a manner that would later become a hallmark of 1920s Russian constructivism and the 1960s conceptual text-based art of Lawrence Weiner.³¹ Here, similar to Weiner's body of work, a distinct rigid typographic treatment is used as an image to reinforce a repeated conceptual motif.

