Pioneering the Social Sciences at the Periphery

By Krista Johnson, Associate Professor

Introduction

An important and growing body of scholarship by historians and practitioner-historians has exposed the centrality of race, racism and imperialism to the core theorists and theories of the incipient American social sciences, and, more fundamentally, the co-production of race and the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, but also political science and international relations. (Magubane 2016, Blatt 2018, Gordon 2015, Morris 2015, Vitalis 2015). As Blatt and Gordon have argued, it was race research in the early decades of the 20th Century that helped establish the authority and relevance of social science disciplines outside the narrow confines of academia. With the rise of scientism and new behavioral methodologies, and supported by new kinds of private and government support, academic institutions and prominent white social science scholars established well-funded research programs and centers that have shaped U.S. racial hierarchy and race relations until the present.

Of course it was W.E.B. DuBois in 1903 who prophesized that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line”. (DuBois 1903) Yet, while the “race problem” or as Alain Locke referred to it “race contacts and interracial relations” (Locke 1992) would become a, if not the, central intellectual debate in most of the social science disciplines, black scholars and black institutions were actively marginalized and excluded from employment, publication and funding opportunities in the field. In this regard, debates on the race problem were also intimately tied up with a second major

debate that persists today, and that is the politics of knowledge production, or what has been referred to as the geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo 2002). Race debates and research fundamentally entailed defining who the agenda setters would be, and who would be able to define critical social, ethical and political concepts to be broadly adopted by a national audience. I use the geopolitics of knowledge to highlight the notion that also at stake is the location of the authoritative speakers - both their social location, epistemic location (subaltern status), and physical location (second-class/inferior institutions).

This paper discusses the contributions of Howard University scholars to debates on the race problem, and their own efforts to address the geopolitics of knowledge during the 1930s-1940s. By the 1930s, Howard had assembled a critical mass of stellar black intellectuals, part of what DuBois termed the Talented Tenth. In the midst of turbulent years in American race relations, Howard scholars not only sought to practice socially relevant social science and advance a public intellectual model by linking their scholarship and teaching with intellectual activism, they aimed to put in place an institutional architecture that embodied the commitment to using interdisciplinary social science, global perspectives, and transcultural forms of knowledge to inform social action. The Howard scholars initiated a series of annual conferences, lectures and forums intended to institutionalize an approach to American race relations that was situated in the politics of global anti-colonialism, and that presented race and class as inextricably intertwined. It was through these institutional spaces that this cohort of radical black scholar-activists engaged the national and global public around the salient

issues of the day, and forged meaningful personal and professional networks cemented in a world-spanning, transcultural community.

Among the distinguished faculty at Howard during this time were: philosopher Alain L. Locke, the first African-American Rhodes Scholar and a leader of the Harlem Renaissance; Sterling A. Brown, English professor, author, poet, and critic; historians Rayford Logan and Charles Wesley; Merze Tate, historian and specialist on disarmament; Charles Thompson, founder of the Journal of Negro Education; William Leo Hansberry, a pioneer in African history; economist Abram Harris; sociologist E. Franklin Frazier; Eric Williams, political scientist and first Prime Minister of independent Trinidad and Tobago; and Ralph Bunche, political scientist and Nobel Prize winner.[1]

Michael Winston references the Howard scholars as a 'policy research nucleus' which not only criticised public policy, but boldly proposed innovative strategies and prescriptions designed to counteract system challenges around race nationally and globally. (Winston, 1971). Charles Henry (1995) and Robert Vitalis (2015)[2] refer to this constellation of black intellectual leaders as "the Howard School". This paper builds particularly on the work of Vitalis who demonstrates that these scholars embraced 'a project of liberation [which] was from its inception (and by necessity) a world-spanning

[1] Howard's distinguished faculty at the time also included Ernest Everett Just, an internationally known biologist; Law School Dean William H. Hastie, the first black governor of the Virgin Islands and the first black federal judge; Charles H. Houston, vice dean of the law school and architect of the NAACP legal strategy; surgeon Charles R. Drew, the pioneer developer of blood plasma; linguist and sociologist Lorenzo Turner; chemist Percy Julian; W. Mercer Cook, professor of Romance Languages and later ambassador to Senegal and Gambia; and theologian and university president Mordecai W. Johnson.

[2] Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*, (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2015). See also Charles Henry, "Abram Harris, E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche: The Howard School of Thought on the Problem of Race", *The National Political Science Review*, volume 5 (1995)

political and theoretical movement in response to the theory and practice of white supremacy'. (Vitalis, 2015; 2) They were unique among their generation of professors for the relationships they forged with liberation activists and theoreticians and the future leaders of independent Africa and the Caribbean nations.

Instead of emphasizing the intellectual contributions of the Howard scholars, this paper roots this intellectual history in the institutional architecture they forged at Howard at the time. I argue, as part of a larger effort to confront the coloniality of knowledge and forge an academic and activist decolonial agenda, the Howard scholars established institutions and academic spaces of knowledge production that were unique in the American academy in their organization, mission, vision and methods of research, and played a vital role in sustaining critiques and alternatives to mainstream thinking on race. The Howard scholars sought to establish an African American counter-public sphere that could shape public opinion within the black community but also broader American society.

The institutional scaffolding the Howard scholars erected to push forward their agenda included important initiatives such as the creation of the *Journal of Negro Education* as a platform to promote not only the scientific study of African American schooling but also political economic and social structural analyses of race and racism. The second institutional case discussed in this paper is the the Annual Conferences of the Social Sciences Division. These conferences sought to institutionalize the role of Howard scholars as public intellectuals engaged in socially relevant social science and intellectual activism, and aimed to build an informed global citizenry.

Indeed, these black intellectuals' vision for Howard University was grand. They sought to position Howard as the premier institution engaged in research on race relations

and minority problems globally. The conferences and forums they organized, far from a one off event, were intended to act "as the clearing house of the latest and best opinion and experience dealing with the problems of minorities." (A. Locke 1939)

The Capstone of Negro Education

Founded in 1867 in the wake of a brutal civil war and in the midst of the bitter Reconstruction debate over the future status of freedmen and the intellectual capacity of blacks, Howard defied the naysayers and rapidly became a national symbol of progress of the race since emancipation. (Michael Winston 1998). Frederick Douglass wrote in 1870 that in the city of Washington which had known Negroes "only as property", there had arisen an institution "vieing in attractiveness and elegance, with those of the most advanced civilization, devoted to the classical education of a people which a few years ago, the phrenologists, archeologists and ethnologists of the country told us were wholly incapable of acquiring even a knowledge of the English language." (Ibid.) The Founders and supporters of Howard University believed in the value of education, and in educating blacks as a means to improve race relations and uplift the race. However, blacks at Howard University were expected to be consumers of "classical education", not knowledge producers themselves.

Early on, however, some students and faculty understood the need for the University to make a commitment to the systematic, scholarly study of people of African descent. Early efforts to institutionalize the study of blacks and black culture were spearheaded by Kelly Miller, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (1907-1918). As early as 1901 he proposed to the Board of Trustees that the University support the

studies of the American Negro Academy. This proposal was declined by the Board. Later he developed a plan for a Negro Museum, and to this end was responsible for persuading Dr. Jesse Moorland, a Howard alumnus (1891) and Trustee to donate to Howard in 1914 his sizable private library on the Negro in Africa and America.[3]

But it was Philosophy Professor Alain Locke who was the visionary - instrumental in molding the social sciences at Howard over the next four decades. In 1915, Locke petitioned the Board of Trustees for approval of a systematic course on race and race relations. The Board denied his request, but with persistence and determination from two student organizations, Locke put together an "Extension Course of Lectures" in 1915 and 1916 titled "Race Contacts and Inter- Racial Relations: A Study in the Theory and Practice of Race". (Locke 1992) Far ahead of his contemporaries, and foretelling what would become a new consensus on race about thirty years later, Locke offers a comprehensive examination of all of the social phenomena associated with race, and concludes that race is sociological - a social construct. In particular, the new sociological theory he lays out explains that race is not a biological but a historical phenomenon. (Locke speaks of culture stages and of social evolution in his sociological theory of race, but such aspects are extrinsic to the race, representing the social context in which races are cast rather than intrinsic characteristics.) (See Henderson 2017, Stewart in Locke 1992)

[3] Moorland's collection comprised the bulk of what at the time was known as the Library of Negro Life. With the acquisition of other collections and materials, most notably the library of Arthur Springarn, the Library changed its name to the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, and now boasts one of the world's largest repositories dedicated to the culture and history of people of African descent.

Another highlight of Locke's discussion is his explanation of the political and practical deployment of race, and in particular its relations to imperialism. Demistifying the functionality of race, not only in justifying systems of domination and oppression, but also as a source of group solidarity became a hallmark of his thinking on race. Equally notable, however, were his consistent efforts to place race in comparative perspective, in his lectures citing European and Asian illustrations of some of his more suggestive points.

The interwar years only sharpened Locke's conviction that a relational approach to the study of race and race relations was necessary, and that the fate of African Americans and race relations in the United States was tied to international policies around the future of African people's and dependent territories. To this end, in 1924 Locke submitted his first proposal to Howard's Board of Trustees to create an Institute of African Studies. His proposal was not only rejected, but Locke was dismissed from Howard, in part for even proposing such an Institute. (Stewart in Locke, 1992: Mangeon 2010)

In 1927 he was rehired by Mordecai Johnson, the first black president of the university. He wasted no time submitting a new memorandum for a Department of African Studies in June, 1928 at the end of his first year back. But this project was no more approved than his 1924 proposal. Novel at the time and noteworthy even today, Locke's vision of such a Department again stressed the need to "study the problems of Negro life", and hence the racial question, on a global scale. In addition, he laid out an interdisciplinary structure for the Department, with courses taught across the social sciences.

That Howard's administration was unwilling, and at times hostile, towards the institutionalization of a robust program of research and scholarship, reflects the hold white supremacy had on society at the time, and the power relations between the two racial groups. As Michael Winston has described, "whites have had the dominant role in determining both the character and degree of support to Negro schools", and their attitudes towards the education of blacks has been "conditioned by three powerful and very often conflicting motives: guilt, fear, and sentimental philanthropy." (Winston, 1971; 680). Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) situated at the bottom of a racialized academic hierarchy, were for the most part seen as the "intellectual periphery" (Edward Shils 1967), and chronically suffered from low faculty salaries, excessive teaching loads, minimal library allocations, negligible research support and no faculty travel funds. (Blackwell and Janowitz 1975). Indeed, it's impossible to understand the development of scholarship by black Americans, and any efforts to institutionalize robust research programs at HBCUs without considering the racial attitudes of the larger society and of the American academy that actively propagated anti-black views and thought designed to trap blacks in a position of social and economic inferiority. (Winston, 1971: 684)

Clearly these points of view prevailed, even on Howard's Board of Trustees. For example, Albert Bushnell Hart, a distinguished Harvard historian and influential figure in American scholarship, and HU Board member for 23 years wrote - "the theory that the Negro mind ceases to develop after adolescence perhaps has something in it." (Winston, 1971:686)

Against this background, it is not surprising that most administrators at black universities, both black and white, and even some faculty were resistant to research programs that overtly challenged the dominant cultural ideology or the segregationist status quo. In an America that defined itself as the heir to White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, those who raised the possibility that Africans and those of African descent had their own unique cultural contributions were marginalized, if not silenced altogether. For many black intellectuals supportive of integrationist efforts, Africana and race research was vulnerable to being reinterpreted to justify and reinforce, in the name of racial atavisms, policies of racial discrimination and segregation. Historians have cited a form of self-censorship that reigned in black universities, where Africana programs and proposals of the kind Locke and others proposed were cautiously avoided. (J. Harris, 1981: 5-18, Harris and Molesworth 2008: 120)

Another factor working against black scholars was the fact they lacked funding, and often cooperation from benefactors and white scholars at the large universities. By the late 1920s, several foundations, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation and the Phelps-Stokes Foundation, began systematically supporting black colleges in order to “prepare the potential leaders of the race.” (Edwin Embree’s words, quoted in Winston, 1971: 695). However, when it came to funding on race relations and conditions of blacks, these private foundations tended to favor white researchers who were perceived as being more objective and less biased on the subject. (Mangeon 2010) Under the cover of scientific objectivity and neutrality, white gatekeepers steered foundation funding towards themselves and the establishment of research centers at white universities.

Black scholars routinely found their projects denied funding or stifled by long delays or insufficient funding.[4] Equally disturbing, while denying black scholars the opportunity to establish intellectual think tanks on black campuses, these white gatekeepers and foundations routinely relied on the research, intellect and expertise, contacts, and manpower of black scholars in the production of major research projects, and the creation of influential think tanks/centers of research and learning on white campuses.[5]

In sum, others have ably written on how what was at stake in these academic debates were not just ideas but what would be major intellectual and policy approaches. (Gordon 2015). Elsewhere, I focus on the anti-colonial cosmopolitanism of the Howard scholars as a model of decoloniality[6], geared towards changing the terms of conversation, not only its content. (Johnson 2020). However, their ability to fully delink from the overall imperial/colonial structure of knowledge was limited by their dependence on conservative administrators and funders hostile towards decolonial thinking. Instead, their worldview was disseminated through courses, seminars, workshops and mentoring of students.

---

[4] For example, Locke's earlier grant proposal on Colonial Administration and Policy in African was denied by the Carnegie Corporation on the advice of Charles T. Loram, a white South African educator who was positioning himself to be a leading voice on race and race relations. On Melville Herskovits role as gatekeeper to black scholars and institutions, see J. Allman 2019.

[5] Gunnar Myrdal's study An American Dilemma (1944) exemplified the practice among funders, namely the Carnegie Corporation, to recruit non-black, and in this instance foreign, scholars to conduct research on race issues in the United States. The irony of course is that the study was relied heavily on the research and expertise of black scholars, including Ralph Bunche, E. Franklin Frazier, Charles S. Johnson, and W.E.B. DuBois.

[6] W. Mignolo and C. Walsh 2018 *On Decoloniality*: Olivia Rutazibwa, 2018. Understanding Epistemic Diversity: Decoloniality as Research Strategy. https://issblog.nl/2018/07/04/epistemic-diversity-understanding-epistemic-diversity-decoloniality-as-research-strategy/. (Accessed 4 July, 2018).

Welcome to the Mecca

By the 1930s, as the second generation of black scholars came on the scene, several black institutions, and notably Howard University, benefitted from a swell of highly gifted faculty who were still excluded from teaching at white institutions. (Winston 1971) This was the first real opportunity for blacks to pursue highly productive scholarly agendas, what some have described as "the golden age" of scholarship[7], as this pool of tremendous talent was concentrated on a few black campuses. At the time, Howard University boasted by far the largest concentration of black PhDs anywhere in the United States, and the world, thanks in large part to the leadership of the university's first black president appointed in 1926, Mordecai W. Johnson. One of Johnson's first and perhaps his smartest action as president was to re-hire Alain Locke, setting the stage for Howard to become the leading center of black scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. Locke, a Harvard PhD in Philosophy (1918) and a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford (1907), was instrumental in bringing together the network of scholars to theorize race on a global scale. In 1928, Locke and his Howard colleagues hired the 25 year old Ralph Bunche to teach political science. He had an MA in political theory from Harvard, and went on to receive his PhD in government from Harvard in 1934, with a specialization in comparative colonial administration. Bunche forged close ties with fellow Howard faculty member, E. Franklin Frazier who received his PhD in sociology in 1931. Together, they lured Trinidadian-born Eric Williams to join the political science department. Williams, who received his DPhil from Oxford in 1938, revised his

[7] Greene, "Sixty Years of Doctorates Conferred Upon Negroes", p. 35; Winston, 1971, p. 695

dissertation into the seminal book *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). Marxist Abram Harris arrived at Howard University in 1927, and received his PhD in economics from Columbia University in 1930. In the history department, Rayford Logan, who received his PhD from Harvard in 1936, joined Howard's faculty in 1938. He invited Merze Tate, the first black woman to receive a doctorate in international relations, from Radcliffe College in 1941, to join the history department, after her hire in political science was denied by Bunche and Williams. (Vitalis 2015:12)

Howard University in the 1930s fostered a unique, cosmopolitan environment in which many of its leading academics engaged in research overseas. Ralph Bunche's dissertation research alone took him to Paris, London, Geneva and West Africa.[8] Alain Locke studied at Oxford in England and in Germany, and made frequent trips to Europe throughout his career. Locke also planned an extensive research tour of Africa, but only made it to Egypt. Frazier researched folk high schools and the cooperative movement in Denmark; Harris completed a post-doc at Oxford; Williams studied capitalism and slavery at Oxford; and Logan conducted primary research on the mandate system in Geneva, at the League of Nations headquarters. Merze Tate was probably the most well-traveled of all the Howard Scholars. She studied at Oxford, completed a Fulbright in India, conducted fieldwork in Indonesia, Africa, and throughout the Pacific.

Overseas, Howard scholars had the opportunity to engage with African and Afro-Diasporan students and intellectuals. Alain Locke, for example, would form a lifelong friendships with, among other subaltern nationalists, Pixley Seme, founder of the African

[8] Later he would conduct research in South Africa and Kenya. See Pearl Robinson, 2010.

National Congress in South Africa, while at Oxford.[9] He was also a member of the London-based International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. (Robinson 2010) Bunche's interactions in Britain with Eric Williams, C.L.R. James, George Padmore, who was one of Bunche's students at Howard, and Paul and Eslanda Robeson were formative in his intellectual development. (Skinner 2010)

Howard's campus was also a 'black mecca' of sorts for international visitors particularly from Africa, the Diaspora, and non-European territories such as India and China, given its location in the nation's capital. The critical mass of African and Caribbean students had a definite influence on the university culture and curriculum. They also connected campus intellectual and political life with the emerging tide of anticolonial nationalism. (Robinson 2010)

The problems of colonial policies, imperialism, and the changing status of the darker peoples of the world were main elements of the emerging Howard School paradigm. Their unique brand of Afro-Diaspora internationalism sought to replace imperial internationalism with the ideology of cosmpolitanism at the pivotal historical moment of the interwar and WWII era. Such cosmopolitan philosophies reflected their unique worldview and their aims to improve the plight of darker people worldwide.

The Journal of Negro Education

An important catalyst for the convergence and dissemination of such black cosmopolitan thinking was the *Journal of Negro Education*, which was founded by

[9] The links between SA and the US, and specifically between Alain Locke and Pixley ka Isaka Seme are well discussed in two recent books: Bongani Ngqulunga, The Man who Founded the ANC: a Biography of Pixley ka Isaka Seme (2017) and Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, The Land is Ours (2018)

Charles H. Thompson in 1932. Thompson, Professor of Education and Dean of the Graduate School at Howard, sought to establish the only journal committed explicitly to the scientific study of African American schooling. According to historian Michael Winston, under thirty years of Thompson's editorship, the Journal became "the most potent continuing critique of public policy of segregation." (Winston, 1971: 697).

But from the outset, Thompson defined education broadly. In a 1943 editorial, Thompson wrote " The Journal has always conceived education to be a social process as broad as life itself; and assumes that the definition of our educational problems depends upon an understanding of the social background and setting of those problems."[10] Thus the Journal, best understood as a civil rights journal, covered a range of issues related to the African American struggle for equality. (Ray, 2012: 37) Indeed, from its founding in 1932, the Journal provided a platform for an interdisciplinary group of social scientists to dialogue with political activists, civil rights litigators, educators and social workers. (Gordon, 2015: 146) Leah Gordon contends " the JNE was a site where the 'Amenia ideal', a vision of social scientific purpose that prioritized social scientists 'commitment to political engagement, flourished." (Gordon, 2015: 146).

The organization of the Journal was thoughtful and intentional. Each Journal's content included discussions on new issues of national and international significance, as well as publication of review of books, not just on African American education, but international education, history, and the social sciences. Thompson wrote incisive

[10] C. Thompson, JNE Editorial, vol. 12, no. 3 Summer 1943, pp. 263-67 Yearbook - American Negro in World War I and World War II

editorials on important social issues for each of the publications that were intended to build consensus among activists. His editorials offered shrewd assessments of the status of black institutions as well as the shifting tides of public policy. Most notably, as articulated in his editorials, Thompson sought to cultivate black cosmopolitan thinking, and encourage blacks to adopt a global orientation to racial oppression. In 1943, as the United States was being drawn into World War II and black Americans were wary of supporting the war effort, Thompson wrote "One of the major weaknesses of the Negro's effort toward betterment of his status in America has been the fact that he has viewed his special disabilities in too narrow perspective, both temporally and geographically. I..am..deeply concerned that during these critical times..that Negro youth shall view their special disabilities as an integral part of the problem of oppressed peoples throughout the world; and that their attempts at solution be cast in a world frame of reference...For only by establishing freedom for all peoples can we assure it for ourselves."[11]

Indeed, an aim of the Journal, targeted in part at educated African Americans, was to build an informed and engaged citizenry that would begin to agitate for change in the schools but also in society. Another feature of the Journal was an in-print symposia for debating controversial ideas. But perhaps the most important feature of the Journal was the publication of the annual Yearbook, which included comprehensive studies of a wide range of problems related to people of color. In fact, a number of the Yearbooks were devoted to broader subjects not necessarily assumed by the Journal's name. For example, the 1946 edition of the Journal Yearbook was titled "The Problem of Education

[11] Thompson, JNE Editorial, Summer 1943, pp. 263-267

in Dependent Territories", and included articles by Ralph Turner on imperialism, Rayford Logan on international trusteeship, and DuBois on colonies and moral responsibility. Read by a wide audience, including black educators, the Journal was instrumental in disseminating a worldview of race.

Even a partial listing of the Yearbooks reveals the scope and significance of this path-breaking undertaking in the social sciences:

Vol. 10, no. 3 - July 1941 - Racial Minorities and the Present International Crisis, Yearbook Number 10

Vol. 12, no. 3, Summer 1943 - The American Negro in World War I and World War II, Yearbook Number 12

Vol. 13, no. 3, Summer 1944, Education for Racial Understanding, Yearbook Number 13

Vol. 15, no. 3 - Summer 1946 - The Problem of Education in Dependent Territories - Yearbook Number 15

The stellar collection of seasoned scholars displayed an epistemic and methodological commitment to the colonized and subaltern, and connected the differential fortunes of the people of the metropole with those at the periphery. For example, the Journal's contributors diverged sharply with the mainstream political thinking and theorizing on fascism by engaging seriously with the racialized politics of fascism, and reading anti-fascism as related to anti-colonialism, as related to struggles against racial oppression in the United States.[12] Such relational and dialectical analysis

[12] See Featherstone 2013 for more on black internationalism unique approach to fascism.

is on full display, for example, in the 1943 special Yearbook edition of the Journal on "The American Negro and World War I and World War II", which included a piece by Merze Tate, "The War Aims of World War I and World War II and Their Relation to the Darker Peoples of the World" in which she offers a direct and passionate rebuke of her white contemporaries' writing on global peace. Tate argues that the dangers to world peace lie in the European powers perpetuating the "imperialist mentality" of "master and subject peoples". She remarked, "The way the United States behaves toward its coloured citizens and the way Great Britain behaves toward India and Africa represent the criteria by which Anglo-American war aims must be judged" (Tate 1943: 531).

Also notable in this article is Tate's expansive definition of "darker peoples of the world", in which she includes people of African descent in the United States, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as the people of Africa, India, Burma, Malaysia, the Chinese, the Japanese, and people of color in the Pacific. Her analysis connects a series of abuses of empire, including land seizures, wage and labor exploitation, anti-democratic and authoritarian political practices, the denial of self-government, exploitative tax systems, and a master-servant economy, across multiple regions of the world.

Although Howard had built an identity as the center for class-based thought on race (Gordon 2015), echoing the central interests of the interwar interracial left, the cohort of contributors to the Journal generally expounded a cosmopolitan view of race, and a vision of worldwide progress and peaceful coexistence that required intercultural bridgework (Miriam and Nilanjana 2013) and forming alliances across differences. Such critical black cosmopolitanism was operationalized through the Journal which afforded a

space for both dialogue and critique. The Journal's writers consistently centered people of color and positioned themselves as advocates for those subject to imperial rule. Dedicated to the proposition that social science should be used to inform social action, the Journal forged a language of black cosmopolitanism that was anti-imperial, and pushed against methodological nationalism in its world-oriented approach to social change.

Indeed, black scholars of the time provided a critical counter-network embedded in the anti-colonial movements, the pan-Africanist movement, the Harlem Renaissance, and workers movements as well as American social science networks. One of the most consequential contributions of the Journal in this regard was the publication of papers from the National Conference on the Economic Crisis and the Negro (1936, Vol. 5, no. 1). The conference, held in May 1935, was organized jointly by the Social Science Division at Howard and the Joint Committee on National Recovery. It offered a candid and comprehensive survey of the social and economic condition of blacks, and included appearances by high level government officials as well as black workers and farmers, and academics and activists. The papers published in the Journal were instrumental in disseminating information regarding the plight of blacks under the New Deal, and more importantly prompted policy changes within the Roosevelt administration. Well into the postwar era, the Journal offered one of the few outlets for the interracial left to put forward a civil rights agenda for the U.S., and to continue to disseminate its theorizing on race and imperialism globally.

Annual Conferences

The Howard scholars were also apt to use a variety of public vehicles, including commentaries in the black press, articles, speeches, books and other forms of expression such as poetry and artistic writing, to change the terms of the political debate and advance a paradigm shift in thinking on race, imperialism and hierarchy. One of the notable arenas for this kind of engagement was the numerous conferences, events and meetings held on Howard's campus at this time. In particular, the Division of Social Sciences held annual conferences that drew stellar line-ups, including DuBois and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and addressed the pressing issues of the day. These conferences were always very well attended[13], and included not only academics, but labor leaders, industrialists, and government officials and other professionals.

Opening the annual conference on "The Post-War Industrial Outlook for Negroes" in 1944, Alain Locke explained the rationale behind the annual conferences as follows:

"At the seat of the national capital, deriving a large part of its support from government subsidy, the University has always felt it its particular duty to try to prepare its constituents for citizenship, and there is, of course, no more important orientation for the youth who study at this institution than to be informed by experts on the state of the world with particular reference to themselves, and the state of the country with particular

[13] Merze Tate in her summary of the Trusteeship conference noted an audience of over 2000 people! That conference included Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt as a speaker. Other conferences included Ambassadors, U.S. government officials, senior NGO and IGO officials. (See M. Tate (ed.), "Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories", Papers and Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Conference of the Division of the Social Sciences, *The Howard University Studies in the Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 1, MSRC)

reference to the working out of the social issues of race and of class which so seriously condition and so seriously handicap a large part of the people whom they represent."[14]

The Howard scholars viewed the conferences as an extension of the patterns of instruction in the Division, and placed great emphasis on objectivity, expertness, theoretical grounding, and application to practical issues and problems. The conferences brought together a diverse mix of radicals and militant liberals, and offered a venue for progressive scholarship and activism. Indeed, the conferences should be seen as strategic policy interventions that used their professional position and their location in the nation's capital as a bully pulpit for a range of ideas that represented a commitment to political change in the service of social justice.

Perhaps the earliest social science conference convened at Howard was the 1917 Sociological Conference "Fifty Years of Progress by the American Negro". In 1935, with the Division of the Social Sciences only a couple of years old, and under the Chairmanship of Charles H. Wesley, the convening of an annual conference of the Division was institutionalized. That year, there would be two conferences. The first was held in April and titled "Problems, Programs, and Philosophies of Minority Groups".[15] This remarkable event represented perhaps the most extensive intellectual examination of what was arguably one of (if not the) most pressing question in international relations

[14] (Conference proceedings edited by Kurt Braun, HU Press 1945)

[15] Officially the first conference of the Division of the Social Sciences was the conference on "The Position of the Negro in our National Economic Crisis" held over the course of three days in May, 1935. In some respects this conference usurped the spotlight from the April conference, because it mobilized such a broad coalition of stakeholders and laid the groundwork for the formation of the National Negro Congress, a national movement formed to undermine and fight against America's Jim Crow system of racial and economic exploitation.

at the time. The symposium was organized as a series of lectures and discussion conferences and held over two weeks. Organized primarily by philosopher Alain Locke, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier and political scientist Ralph Bunche, the symposium "aimed to stimulate a broader, comparative approach to the study of the question by the inclusion of other minority group situations such as the Jew, the American Indian and the colonial situations of modern imperialism." (Locke 1939) Participants in the symposium included Marxists, Zionists, prominent scholars including Political Scientist Raymond Leslie Buell, and sociologists W.E.B. DuBois and Robert Park, as well as scholars aligned with Bahai faith, Rabbi's. Panels were organized around the themes of "Alternatives to Minority Status", "Minority Tactics and Techniques of Minority Assertion", "Cultural Reciprocity", "Racialism vs. Assimilation", "Racial and Cultural Aspects of Minority Issues", "The Economic Position of Minorities".

The conference was a huge success, and was widely covered not only in the black press but also in the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Tribune*, and the *Times Herald*. Howard President Mordecai Johnson received many commendations and in turn wrote several letters of praise to the conference organizers.[16] Following the conference, the Division of the Social Sciences adopted a plan to develop a scholarly research program on minority problems and programs, positioning Howard as a premier academic institution in the study of minorities. The Board of Trustees granted the Division $500 to support future conferences and publication of conference proceedings.

The analytical and methodological framework they had in mind for such a research program was decidedly world-oriented, and relational. In his memorandum to

[16] Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 41

President Johnson to establish a strategic center for research study, Locke impressed on President Johnson, “It was decidedly the opinion of this section of the faculty that the study of the Negro situation and its issues was unsound and unprofitable in specialized isolation, and that the more scientific approach was that of broad inclusion and wide comparison of majority-minority relations and problems of culture contacts and conflicts the world over.”[17] Such a perspective was operationalized in the structure and organization of the conferences. At this first conference, W.E.B DuBois’ paper on “Militant Tactics as Illustrated by Negro Experience” was read in tandem with Rabbi Weinstein’s paper on “Militant Tactics as Illustrated by Jewish Experience”. Alain Locke’s paper on “The Negro Paradox” was read in tandem with Rabbi Eisenstein’s paper on “The Jewish Problem”, and Dr. Das’ paper on “The Position of the Oriental in the Present-Day World”. Ralph Bunche’s paper on “Colonial Status: Mandates and Indirect Rule” was read in tandem with E. Franklin Frazier’s paper on “Bi-Racialism in the United States”.

In subsequent years, the Division continued to organize conferences on the most pressing issues of the time, amassing a diverse group of contributors that sparked rich debates. The following list of the first nine conferences demonstrates the depth and breadth of the topics covered.

1935 “The Position of the Negro in our National Economic Crisis”

1936 “The Crises of Modern Imperialism in Africa and the Far East”

1937 “The Present and Future of the Social Sciences at Howard University”

[17] ALP MSRC, Box 41

1940 “The Negro in the Americas”

1941 “Minorities in the Present International Crisis”

1943 “The Economic Future of the Caribbean”

1944 “The Post-War Industrial Outlook for Negroes”

1947 “Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories”

1948 “Human Rights: Civil and Cultural”

Despite persistent lack of funding, the papers and proceedings of the conferences were published, typically in the *Howard University Studies in the Social Sciences*. Some conference paper collections, such as the 1935 conference on “the Economic Crisis and the Negro”, were published in the *Journal of Negro Education*. A consequence of grossly inequitable resources, as well as the shortsightedness of administrators at Howard who chose not to invest in the university press, the institutionalization and dissemination of this groundbreaking research was stymied, as were the aspirations of the Howard faculty to build a premier research center. Michael Winston chides administrators for their part in not supporting research, and quotes E. Franklin Frazier who lambasts the “ignorant administration of Negro schools which have refused the intelligent proposals of Negro scholars”. [18] It is dismaying, “In the period of Howard’s greatest research productivity, white university presses or private publishers had to be relied upon for publication opportunities.[19]

[18] Winston, “Through the Back Door”, p. 707
[19] Winston, “Through the Back Door”, p. 707

Conclusion

Writing in the *Boston Review* forum at the height of the #Black Lives Matter movement, Robin Kelley proclaimed “Universities will never be engines of social transformation. Such a task is the work of political education and activism.” (Kelley 2016). The #Black Lives Matter movement in the United States and the #Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa have, once again, made college campuses the focus of activism against racism and economic oppression. Race-related protests disrupted business as usual at many universities, as student demanded greater diversity among students and faculty, the decolonization and/or Africanization of the curricula, significant investments in African and African American Studies, and the dismantling and/or renaming of architecture and symbols of racist past. Yet, as students pushed universities to deliver on their promise to be post-racial havens, Kelley lamented that cannot happen if they remain surrounded by a sea of white supremacy. Furthermore, he draws our attention towards the contradictory impulses within the movement: “tension between reform and revolution - between desiring to belong and rejecting the university as a cog in the neoliberal order.” (Kelley 2016)

Howard scholars efforts to delink from the logic of coloniality, and construct critical, alternative, subaltern paradigms reflects some of the challenges of scholars of color today. Operating in the context in which hegemonic social science paradigms, shaped by Eurocentric rationality were omnipotent, Howard scholars frequently found

themselves constantly depending on western categories and concepts while developing critical, post-colonial pedagogies and paradigms. Moreover, they were significantly hindered by lacking of funding and publication outlets to disseminate their work. Yet, their writing offers a rich archive from which to draw in our efforts to foreground the complex issues of race, imperialism, and hierarchy in the international system.

Furthermore, Howard scholars exhibited contradictory impulses to, on the one hand, to be accepted and included by elite white scholars and institutions while at the same time calling out the racialized social and epistemological architecture upon which modern universities are built. In a very tangible sense, their efforts to confront the geopolitics of knowledge required that they begin by positioning Howard as a site of knowledge production and dissemination. Yet, Howard presented no blank slate upon which to build anew. Instead, it was largely steeped in the culture and practices of white supremacy manifest throughout the surrounding society.

It is in this context that the epistemological institution building undertaken during these decades in Howard's history are noteworthy and instructive. The *Journal of Negro Education* and the Conferences of the Division of the Social Sciences are just two examples of how the Howard scholars developed institutional models that reflect a different way of knowing, and a different way of learning. They modeled for future generations the creation of institutions based in the academy but grounded in the community, and the repurposing of university resources to instruct themselves and others using black cosmopolitan narratives.

References

Allman, J. (2019). #HerskovitsMustFall? A Meditation on Whiteness, African Studies, and the Unfinished Business of 1968. African Studies Review, 62(3), 6-39. doi:10.1017/asr.2019.40

DuBois, W.E,B. (1903) *The Souls of Black Folks*. A.C. McClurg and Co. Chicago

Featherstone, D. (2013). "Black Internationalism, Subaltern Cosmopolitanism, and the Spatial Politics of Antifascism", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103(6): 1406-1420.

Gordon, L. (2015). From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Greene H.W (1971). "Sixty Years of Doctorates Conferred Upon Negroes", *The Journal of Negro Education* 6(1): 30-37.

Harris, J. E. (1981) "William Leo Hansberry, 1894-1965, Profile of a Pioneer Africanist", in L. Hansberry (ed.), *Pillars in Ethiopian History, African History Notebook*,

Harris, L. & Molesworth, C. (2008) *Alain L. Locke, Biography of a Philosopher*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press.

Henderson, E. (2017) "The Revolution Will Not be Theorised: DuBois, Locke, and the Howard School's Challenge to White Supremacist IR Theory", Millenium: Journal of International Studies

Henderson, E. (2015). "Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in International Relations Theory", in Anievas, Manchanda and Shilliam (ed.) (2015), *Race and Racism in International Relations.* New York, Routledge.

Henry, C. (1995). "Abram Harris, E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche: The Howard School of Thought on the Problem of Race", *The National Political Science Review*, 5.

Henry, C. (1999). *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* New York, New York University Press.

Henry, C. (2004). "The Legacy of Ralph J. Bunche and Education: Celebrating the Centenary Year of His Birth", *The Journal of Negro Education* 73(2): 137-146.

Holloway, J. (2002). *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1914-1941.* Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

Kelley, R. (2016) "Black Study, Black Struggle", Boston Review, March 7. http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle

Johnson, K. (2020) The Howard School: Lessons for Curricular Transformation", in *From Ivory Towers to Ebony Towers: Transforming Humanities Curricula in South Africa, Africa and African-American Studies*, Shireen Motala and Oluwaseun Tella (ed.) Jacana Publishers, South Africa.

Locke, A. (1992) *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race*. J. Stewart (ed.) Howard University Press, Washington DC

Magubane, Z. (2016). "American Sociology's Racial Ontology: Remembering Slavery, Deconstructing Modernity, and Charting the Future of Global Historical Sociology", Cultural Sociology, Vol. 10, issue 3

Mignolo, W. (2002). "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference", The South Atlantic Quarterly 101:1 Winter

Morris, A. (2015). *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. DuBois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* .Oakland, CA, University of California Press.

Ray, L. (2012) Charles H. Thompson: Policy Entrepreneur of the Civil Rights Movement, 1932-1954, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing

Robinson, P. (2010). "Ralph Bunche the Africanist: Revisiting Paradigms", *Trustee for the Human Community: Ralph J. Bunche, the United Nations and the Decolonisation of Africa*. Athens, Ohio University Press.

Rutazibwa, O. (2018). Understanding Epistemic Diversity: Decoloniality as Research Strategy, 4 July. https://issblog.nl/2018/07/04/epistemic-diversity-understanding-epistemic-diversity-decoloniality-as-research-strategy/ (online document).

Savage, B. (2014). "Professor Merze Tate: Diplomatic Historian, Cosmopolitan Woman", American Political Science Association Meeting, August.

Skinner, E. (2010). "Ralph Bunche and the Decolonisation of African Studies: The Paradox of Power, Morality and Scholarship", *Trustee for the Human Community: Ralph J. Bunche, the United Nations and the Decolonisation of Africa.* Athens, Ohio University Press.

Sober-Denton, M. and Bardhan. (2013) *Cultivating Cosmopolitanism for Intercultural Communication: Communicating as a Global Citizen.* Routledge

Tate, M. (1943). "The War Aims of World War I and World War II and Their Relation to the Darker Peoples of the World", *Journal of Negro Education* 12(3): 523-31.

Thompson, C. (1943) "Editorial Note: The American Negro in World War I and World War II", *Journal of Negro Education 12:3*

Vitalis, R. (2015). *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations.* Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press.

Williams, Z. (2009). *In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University, Public Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race*. University of Missouri Press.

Winston, M. (1971). "Through the Back Door: Academic Racism and the Negro Scholar in Historical Perspective", *Daedalus*100(3): 678-719.