

Workshop on Structural Racism and Rigorous Models of Social Inequality

National Academies of Sciences

May 16, 2022

Evelynn M. Hammonds, PhD

Barbara Gutmann Rosenkrantz Professor of the History of Science

Professor of African and African American Studies

Professor, Dept. of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Harvard T.H. Chan School of
Public Health

Harvard University

What is Race and Race-Making? How is Race Used to Control Populations?

- **Race** - “...stands for the conception or the doctrine that nature produced humankind in distinct groups, each defined by inborn traits that its members share and that differentiate them from members of other distinct groups of the same kind but of unequal rank.” (16)
- **Race** is an already read script.
- **Racecraft** - “...an ongoing set of social practices that continuously misconstrue racism for race.” (18-19)
- **Racism** - “...the theory and practice of applying a social, civic, or legal double standard based on ancestry, and to the ideology surrounding such a double standard.” (17)

Source: Karen E. Fields and Barbara. Fields, *Racecraft: the Soul of Inequality in American Life* (NY: Verso, 2012)

Further definitions

“*Racecraft* is first and foremost an ongoing set of social practices that continuously misconstrue *racism* for *race*.” (Benjamin 683)

“*Racism* is a function of power and inequality whereas *race* is purportedly grounded in biology and culture.” (Benjamin 683)

“*Racism* is not an emotion or state of mind, such as intolerance, bigotry, hatred, or malevolence.” (Fields & Fields 17)

“*Racism* is first and foremost a social practice, which means that it is an action and a rationale for action or both at once.” (Fields & Fields 17)

R. Benjamin, “Culturing difference, concealing inequality: A brief tour of *Racecraft*,” *Theor. Soc.* (2014) 43:683-688)

Example: In the wake of the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. One might describe events as -

“ An unarmed teenager (Michael Brown) was shot because he was black. **Racecraft** converts power into difference insofar as the young man’s race, his *being black*, is given agency – an ontology- thereby veiling the work of multiple forms of racism that led a law enforcement official to shoot this young man to death...F &F remind us that Brown ‘s blackness did not pull the trigger, as the original formulation mistakenly asserts. “ (Benjamin 684)

“Brown was not shot because he was black. *He is black because he was shot*. That is race “is the result of the power some people have over others.”(F&F 170) “ (Benjamin 684)

“Too often, in the way scholars formulate questions and the way public discourse makes sense of social disparities, subjugation is posited as an inevitable outcome of inherent racial difference even when the historical record does not support it.” (Benjamin 684)

The work of understanding how both race and racism are historical then requires that we “...map the relations of power, the patterns of contestation and struggle out of which such social constructions emerged.” (Holt, 18)

T. Holt, *The Problem of Race in the 21st Century*, (2000)

W. Battle-Baptiste and B. Rusert, eds., *W. E.B. DuBois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America – The Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (2018)

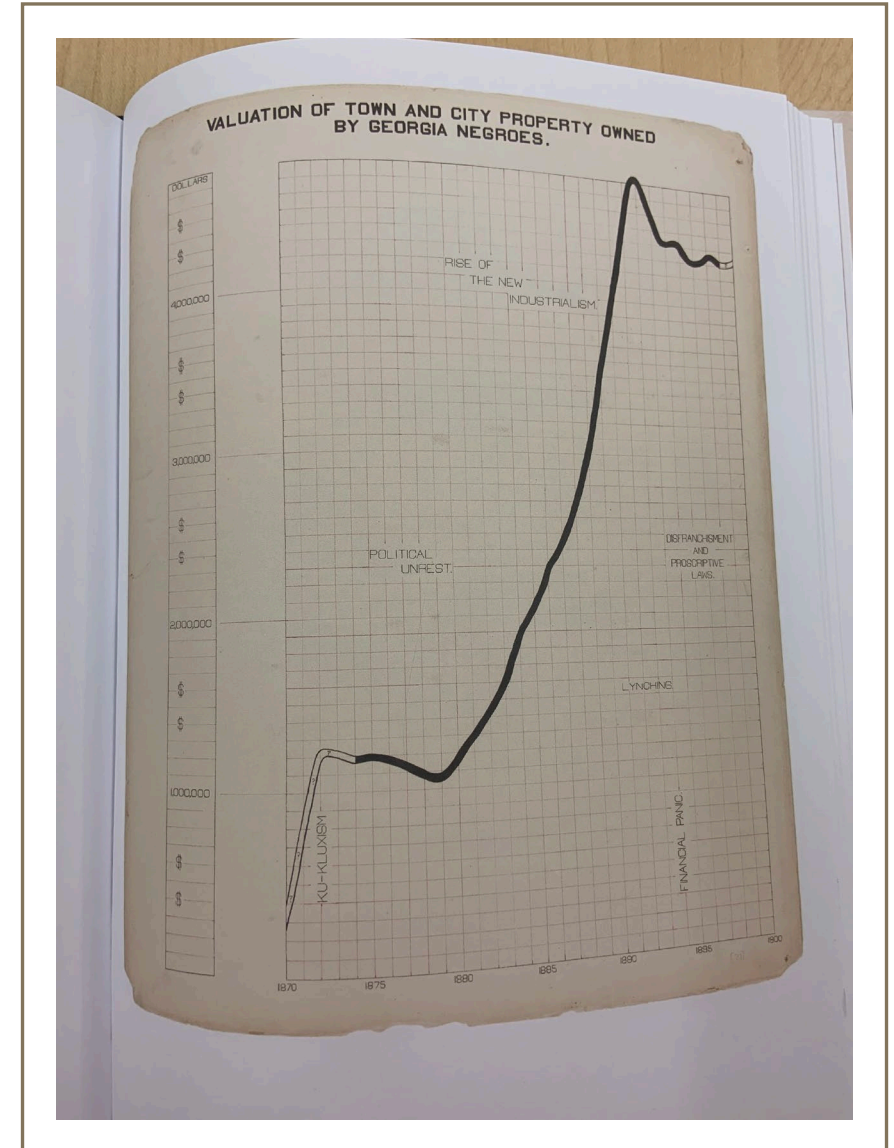
- In 1900 DuBois contributed 60 data visualizations , or infographics , to an exhibit at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, dedicated to the progress made by African Americans since Emancipation.

The exhibit featured an eclectic set of objects, images, and texts including framed photographs of prominent African American leaders and politicians; tools, harnesses, and other agricultural products ... and on-site collection of over 250 publications authored by African Americans..etc. and a collection of graphs, charts , maps and tables that were generated from a mix of existing records that had been collected at Atlanta University by DuBois's sociological laboratory.

Valuation of Town and City Property Owned by GA. Negroes, 1870-1900

- This is one of the most overtly political charts in DuBois's study of Black people in GA. An undulating black line shows extrapolated property values in outline and actual property in solid black crossing a red grid of squares.

Tucked into the grid is a series of disquieting socioeconomic and political trends: the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and political unrest in the 1870s; new industrialism in the 1880s; followed by lynching, financial panic, disenfranchisement in the 1890s.



“This diagram powerfully links the economic progress of black Georgians to larger regimes of violence against African Americans, pointing to the widespread disenfranchisement and dispossession of black people in the post-Reconstruction era.”

“When DuBois rendered a geographic history of the African slave trade and mapped present conditions in Georgia, he sutured the two together and illustrated through evidence - black lines on white pages – how centuries of racial oppression and exploitation, not a lack of natural aptitude, had shaped the current abysmal conditions of black life world wide...”

Conclusion

- Why not start with DuBois?

In his work he consistently collected data in context – the context of a US society structured by racial inequality that continued to reproduce such inequality over time. Gathering data on a wide range of topics:

- % of Blacks in the US population – in rural and urban areas

- % of women in the Black population

- % of Blacks by educational level

- % of Blacks in various occupations

- % of Blacks w health insurance

- Such social statistics – make visible and remind us of the structural aspects of how race and racism are made and re-made over time.