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Black America

in the

Twenty-First Century

Edited by

Juan Battle,

Michael Bennett,

and Anthony J. Lemelle, Jr.

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Introduction

W.E.B. Du Bois famously said, in his groundbreaking 1903 treatise *The Souls of Black Folk*, “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.” It has been one hundred years since Du Bois made that prescient statement, which naturally leads to the question: “What is the problem of the twenty-first century?” We asked the contributors to this book to address just that question. We invited them to engage in some prescience of their own by taking us from the past to the present and then beyond in speculating about the problems, challenges, and opportunities that confront Black America in the new millennium. As we look forward to the next five, ten, fifty, and even one hundred years, what can we expect these years to hold for African Americans, specifically, and for people of color in the United States in general? Some of the following contributions face this question directly, referring to Du Bois and speculating on his twenty-first century legacy. Others deal with the question tangentially. But all are concerned with issues that are of vital importance to Black America as we move into a new century.

In thinking about what the twenty-first century will be like for Black America, we suggested a range of possible topics of importance: race, gender, class, sexual orientation, globalism, migration, health, politics, culture, and urban issues. All of these topics are addressed in some fashion in one or more of the following essays. And, of course, many of the contributions address multiple topics. We also set out to have contributors bring a range of disciplinary perspectives to these diverse topics. Thus we have contributors who are trained in traditional disciplines—Sociology, English, Political Science, Psychology—and in more contemporary interdisciplinary areas—African American studies, women’s/gender studies, race theory, cultural studies, and lesbian and gay/queer theory. We asked that contributors think not just in terms of problems that Black America will face but also in terms of solutions and prospects. In other words, we asked not just “Where are we now?” but also “Where do we go from here?”

The first contribution—by sociologists Paul Attewell, David Lavin, Thurston Domina, and Tania Levey—utilizes survey data, including the U.S. Census and the Current Population Survey, to describe the status of the black middle-class at the turn of the millennium. Turning to the future, the authors assess the barriers to the growth of this class, focusing on theories of

marriageability and the possibility of downward mobility among affluent black families.

Next is an essay by cultural theorist Joy James that examines the modern relationship between democracy and captivity. Professor James shows us through reading contemporary cultural narratives that incarceration is an analog of slavery used to organize present-day black subordination.

Next we present an essay by political scientist Todd C. Shaw, "Two Warring Ideals," that addresses what is surely one of the defining moments of the twenty-first century: the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Based on his work with focus groups at a large midwestern public university, Shaw concludes that, in the wake of 9/11, race will not only fundamentally shape one's sentiments about patriotism, but also determine those to whom one expresses such sentiments.

Juan J. Battle and Natalie D.A. Bennett examine the intersection of race and sexual orientation to better understand racism, homophobia, and secondary marginalization in the context of African American cultural values in the new century. They observe that the larger black community has not been open and affirming when it comes to issues of homosexuality but insist that injustice associated with sexual minorities is a necessary development in the protection of rights for African Americans generally.

Medical and gender studies sociologists Verna M. Keith and Diane R. Brown provide an assessment of black health status. They show that the elimination of health disparities, disparities that have been organized largely by race, has been uneven and checkered in development. They provide health policy recommendations for addressing America's continuing struggle with health disparities. Related to this is the rise of HIV/AIDS in the African American community. Anthony J. Lemelle, Jr. and BarBara M. Scott address the continuing spread of HIV among blacks from a structural perspective. They show that the fight against HIV has been largely influenced by bio-medical individualism when in fact among blacks the spread is largely social and institutional. They stress the need for policies that produce inclusion and diversity among HIV prevention strategists in contrast to policies that promote the singular leadership of cultural whiteness.

Robert A. Brown's "The Color Line of American Politics," suggests that blacks and whites differ greatly when it comes to their opinions on government social policy. This study focuses on a more general political problem that will face Black America as the century progresses, the growing chasm between African Americans and European Americans with regard to their views of the government's obligation to address citizens' basic needs.

Sandra L. Barnes contributes a powerful analysis of the promises and problems of the contemporary black church. Professor Barnes begins with the assertion of the importance of the Black church from the assessment of Martin Delany writing in the mid-1800s. At that time Delany pointed out that the

church was the beginning and the end of black struggle for equality. Barnes examines some of the religious, economic, and socio-cultural features of the contemporary black church, challenges it faces, and its ability to be adaptive and resilient. She then makes an assessment of future strategies for black church activism.

Turning to issues of racial consciousness and sexual identity as viewed from a sociological perspective, H. Alexander Welcome's "White is Right" details instances where whiteness has been improperly employed as a basis for the analysis of black experiences, while Antonio Pastrana's "Black Identity Constructions" revisits Du Bois's theories about the problems facing black people, utilizing modern and postmodern conceptions of identity politics to analyze how blackness has been articulated since the United States Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Welcome examines ways in which scholars can extricate themselves from white ontological perspectives in order to contextualize the study of blacks in the specific social circumstances that are navigated in their everyday lives. Pastrana argues that inserting observations about intersectionality, bisexuality, and Latinidad into conceptions of black identity may lead to more integrated analyses of blackness in the U.S.

Finally, we turn to three contributions from the humanities and one from the social sciences. Ajuan Maria Mance hypothesizes that African American Studies' scholarship will become less and less consumed with exploration and documentation of interracial differences, and more and more concerned with the relationships between those diverse constituencies that exist *within* ethnic groups. She focuses, in particular, on the field of African American literature, arguing that this shift in focus will have a particularly dramatic impact on the study of gender relations during periods like the Black Arts Movement. Providing an almost entirely opposite perspective, Rosamond S. King's "Sheep and Goats Together" explores literary embodiments of the increasing prevalence of interracial relationships in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. King examines the use of sex with white women as symbolic revenge, the connection between love and sex, and the portrayals of White women in fictions by African American and Caribbean men. Michael Bennett's "Cities in the New Millennium" looks at the problems and opportunities facing Black Americans from the perspective of urban studies. He suggests that environmental racism and anti-urban policy—twin manifestations of the spatialization of race—should be addressed within the framework of an expanded environmental justice movement, combining the best of the 1960s War on Poverty with 1990s ecological activism to shape a new vision for Black America in the twenty-first century. Last but not least, Yasser Arafat Payne looks at participatory action research in the context of Black men with street orientations. He explores the structural conditions that situate everyday living by black street men and the boundaries of social justice in the lives of his subjects.

As this volume indicates, the issues facing Black America are by no means monolithic. Further, the tools needed to understand these phenomena are heterogeneous, as reflected by the diversity of scholars included here. In the range of essays that follow, some contributors use the term black, some African American, some white, some European American; some capitalize these terms, while others do not. This diversity in nomenclature is related to our effort to exhibit the multiple subject positions inhabited by those people of African descent living in the United States.

Slightly over one hundred years ago, in developing his concept of the talented tenth, Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* acknowledged class differences within Black America. The collection of scholars in this volume have not only acknowledged greater diversity within Black America, they have—by including analyses of multiethnic and multiracial interactions, by contributing to more nuanced discussions of class, by introducing perspectives from different genders and sexual orientations—described the complexity of today's Black America and prescribed strategies for the success of tomorrow's.

As editors—two black social scientists and one white humanities scholar—we purposely chose to include voices that represented people of varying races, sexual orientations, ages, and academic disciplines. Our reviewers, too, were from very diverse demographic and academic backgrounds. It is our belief that it is impossible to confront the problems of Black America without also addressing the problems of all America and of the world in which we live.

Du Bois died on the same day that Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech (August 28, 1963). Both men knew all too well how interrelated humans are across the globe. More specifically, they believed that none of us are free, until all of us are free. In that search for freedom in Black America and beyond, we have embraced as our mission the closing words from King's “I Have a Dream” speech:

And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children—Black men and White men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants—will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last.”

Juan Battle
Michael Bennett
Anthony J. Lemelle, Jr.

1

The Black Middle-Class: Progress, Prospects, and Puzzles

Paul Attewell, David Lavin, Thurston Domina, and Tania Levey

It is exactly a century since W.E.B. DuBois published his celebrated essay about the Talented Tenth, the most educated and affluent part of the black community of his time, people whom DuBois viewed as the leaders of the race. It is instructive to investigate what has happened to the Talented Tenth over the last century, and consider the challenges still facing the African American middle- and upper-classes at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We do so in this paper by analyzing recent statistical and demographic data on the African American population, drawn from the Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys (CPS) for 1998-2002 and the U.S. Census for 2000.

One thing quickly becomes clear: the Talented Tenth has outgrown that label. As we detail below, at least a quarter of today's African American families are middle-class in terms of income, occupation, or education; by some measures over half of African American households are middle-class. This is not the impression that one gets from the mass media or from many social scientists, whose portraits of black America still focus on the inner-city poor, as if they were the black mainstream, while treating the African American middle-class as a small elite. In reality, since the civil rights era, a large portion of black America has moved decisively upward, passing substantial numbers of whites along the way.

One way to observe this is in terms of household incomes. In 2001, the top 5 percent of black households in America had higher incomes than 85 percent of white households. Among the former are the black business executives, athletes, and media stars who dominate the headlines, but today's black middle-class extends well beyond this elite. The top 20 percent of African American households have higher incomes than 62 percent of white households, and the

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top 40 percent of black households earn more than the bottom 41 percent of white households, making them middle-class in relative terms.

The growth of the black middle-class has coincided with shrinkage in the proportion of black families living in poverty: from 34 percent in 1967 to 21 percent in 2001. Clearly many black families have not moved upward and still live in poverty. Addressing their needs is crucial, but they no longer constitute the standard for African American households.

A similar trend upward appears when we look at educational credentials. When the Harvard-educated DuBois wrote his essay in 1903, there were about 9 million African Americans in the United States, but college-educated folk were so scarce that he was able to count all 2,300 black persons with college degrees. The total African American population has nearly quadrupled since then: in the 2000 census, about 35 million persons identified themselves solely as black or African American. Of those, nearly 2 million hold bachelors degrees, and almost a million more have graduate or professional degrees. That's more than a thousand-fold increase in black degree holders in a century.

As Table 1.1 shows, most of this educational progress has taken place over the last thirty years. Although the African American growth in educational attainment has been faster than for whites, a troubling educational gap remains, an issue we'll return to below.

The occupational progress of African Americans has been equally striking, as Bart Landry (1987) noted. He categorized working people as middle-class if they or their spouse were employed in a white-collar or sales occupation, and he also added police and firefighters into the middle-class. One could object that classifying all white-collar workers as middle-class is too sweeping. Nevertheless, we follow Landry's definition in updating his numbers to 1998-2002 in Table 1.2 below. In addition, we provide figures based on a more restrictive definition of Landry's that counts only professional and managerial workers and their spouses. By either definition, the occupational progress made in a half-century is impressive.

Increased black educational attainment, occupational mobility, and movement up the income ladder—these are the major factors underlying the expan-

Table 1.1
Educational Growth and the Black Middle-Class

	<u>% with 4 years of high school</u>		<u>% with 4 years of college</u>	
	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
1947	14 %	35 %	3 %	6 %
1970	34 %	57 %	5 %	12 %
1990	66 %	79 %	11 %	22 %
2000	79 %	88 %	17 %	28 %

Table 1.2
Occupational Growth of the Black Middle-Class

	<u>Occupationally Middle-class:</u>		<u>Professional or Managerial:</u>	
	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
1950	10 %	40 %	5 %	18 %
1976	31 %	53 %	14 %	28 %
1998-2002	52 %	67 %	25 %	41 %

sion of the black middle-class. However, immigration has also played a significant role: migrants from the Caribbean and Africa have joined the black middle-class in large numbers. The Current Population Surveys (CPS) identify individuals who are foreign-born, and those who are the offspring of such immigrants. We find that 8.7 percent of the current adult African American population was born overseas (known as “first generation” Americans) and that the U.S.-born offspring of immigrants (“the second generation”) constitute another 1.8 percent .

Immigrants and their offspring constitute a disproportionately large and successful segment of the black middle-class. Although the two immigrant generations together constitute about 10 percent of the total adult U.S. black population, they comprise 16 percent of all African Americans with bachelors degrees and 20 percent of those with masters and advanced degrees.

What holds back the further expansion and economic progress of the black middle-class?

In answering this question, we necessarily turn to difficulties that the African American middle-class faces. We limit our consideration to those economic and demographic features that can be addressed by Census and CPS data.

Unequal Pay

African Americans continue to earn less than white workers, even when one considers only year-round full-time workers with equal amounts of education, as the following table demonstrates:

If we broaden our focus to include part-time and part-year employees, the racial earnings gap widens: the average black male worker today earns 64 percent of his white counterpart’s annual earnings, or \$19,227 less per year. Compared to white men, black working men on average have fewer years of education, and hold occupationally less prestigious jobs. On average, black men work about 200 fewer hours per year, are more likely to live in low-income states, and are also somewhat younger than white men. Black men also

Table 1.3

Black Earnings as Percent of White Earnings, By Education.

(Based on median earnings for year-round full-time workers only, aged 25 to 65.)

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
Less Than High School	83 %	89 %
High School Graduates	78 %	88 %
Bachelor's degree	79 %	94 %
Higher Degrees	74 %	89 %

work in government more often than white males do; fewer are in the private sector or self-employed. Each of these factors tends to lower black earnings relative to whites.

When we remove all those differences using a statistical adjustment we discover what the average black male worker *would earn* if he was identical to the average white male employee in terms of education, hours worked, region, and so on. After making this adjustment, we find that a smaller but still substantial wage gap remains between black and white men. This adjusted gap in average male earnings is \$10,0759 per year. On average, black men would earn 80 percent of what white males earn. Many scholars attribute this remaining gap to discrimination and prejudicial employer attitudes, though some suggest that the gap would narrow further if adjusted for differing skills and work experience of both groups.

In a recent review, McCall (2001) emphasized the loss/lack of manufacturing employment, a lack of union coverage, and the frequency of flexible or casual employment conditions as central to explaining the current black-white male wage gap. Grodsky and Pager (2001) stressed the over-concentration of black men in low-paying occupations, but also reported that the black-white wage gap in the private sector grows larger as one moves up the occupational or income hierarchy. In sum, the enduring wage gap between black and white men disadvantages black professional men, as well as black men in low-paid jobs, and retards the economic well-being of African American families.

The situation for black working women is not the same as for black men. The average working black woman earns \$4,520 per year less in the U.S. than the average working white woman, or roughly 85 percent of the average white woman's earnings, a smaller gap than for men. Again, there are measurable differences between the races in amount of education, hours worked, region, and occupation. When we make a statistical adjustment and ask what the average black woman would earn if she had identical years of education, hours worked etc., as the average white woman, we find that on average black women would *earn more than* equivalent white women, about \$2,865 per year more.

Gaps in individual earnings are important for understanding racial inequality in the labor market, but, as we shall see, these earnings differences become overshadowed or overlaid by differences in *household incomes* between middle-class blacks and whites. Household income is affected by marriage/partner patterns and the number of earners in a household, as well as by education and wage levels. We turn next to a consideration of these interwoven factors, as they shape the fortunes of the black middle-class.

Marriageability and the Black Middle-Class

In his study of the black urban underclass, William Julius Wilson (1987) advanced the concept of *marriageability* to explain low rates of marriage among the black poor. Many young black males in the inner city are unemployed. Young black women, Wilson suggested, aren't motivated to marry unemployed young black men since they cannot support a family. He concluded that this shortage of "marriageable" young men explains the lower rates of marriage found among poorer African Americans.

There are two conceptual elements underlying Wilson's thesis. One is the idea that there is a social definition of a suitable marriage match. Wilson focused on employment, but we will also consider other possible criteria for marriageability, including education and earnings level. A second element underlying Wilson's theory is the notion of a demographic imbalance leading to a numerical shortage of *suitable* members of one gender. Wilson (1987) showed that there were insufficient employed young men for the number of young single women. The result was an unbalanced marriage market leading to a depressed marriage rate. If there had been equal numbers of employed marriageable men and single women, men and women could have found suitable partners and the marriage rate would not be depressed.

Viewed in this way, Wilson's theory is a special case of "assortative mating" a term geneticists use to denote "the preference or avoidance of certain people as mates for social or physical reasons." Wilson's theoretical innovation was to combine assortative mating with the notion of a numerical imbalance as an explanation of a market-wide failure to match prospective mates.

There is good empirical evidence for the relevance of marriageability criteria beyond employment. For example, researchers have documented a widespread preference for finding a partner with an educational level close to one's own, what demographers term *educational homogamy* (Smits et al., 1998; Qian, 1998; Raymo and Xue, 2000). As we shall see, a gender imbalance does exist among African Americans at higher levels of education: there aren't nearly as many college-educated black men as college-educated black women. This could lead to a shortage of educationally-suitable male marriage partners and a depressed marriage rate, among the black middle-class relative to whites.

Earnings can also function as a factor in marriageability. One could imagine an earnings minimum, beneath which a male ceases to be marriageable.

This would reduce the number of marriageable men, unbalancing the numbers of marriageable men and women, leaving some women unable to find a partner (cf.. Oppenheimer, 1994). This would predict very low marriage rates at low levels of male earnings, an idea close to Wilson's unemployment thesis.

A quite different version of earnings marriageability argues, like Mare (1991) Lichter (1990), and Lindberg et al. (1997, p. 2) that:

“women need to find men with greater opportunities than their own. Therefore, women's increased income or education would result in a smaller pool of potentially eligible partners, thus creating a barrier to their marrying...”

Their logic implies that very highly-educated women and women with very high earnings face the greatest difficulty in finding a marriage partner because there are relatively few potential husbands who earn more or have higher educational credentials than these highly-successful women.

Yet another version of imbalance allows that a new norm has emerged in recent decades that requires homogamy in earnings: both men and women want to find a partner who can earn as much or even more than themselves (Goldscheider and Waite, 1986). It follows that if an imbalance occurs between the number of men and women in a given earnings bracket, one gender or the other would face insufficient numbers of marriageable mates, and the marriage rate could suffer.

Not all scholars accept the imbalance/shortage logic. Lindberg et al. (1997) mention “an iconoclastic view” that high-earning women could afford to marry men who earn less, increasing their pool of mates and thus increasing the marriage rate for professional women (Lichter et al., 1992, Biddlecom and Kramerow, 1998). This, one should note, is the opposite of Mare (1991) and Lichter's (1990) thesis.

Before examining the data in the light of these hypotheses, we should consider what dependent variable is appropriate. The dependent variable that William Julius Wilson used was marriage, presumably because marriage indicates a relatively durable commitment towards a spouse and children. But in less affluent communities, common law marriages (ones not formally licensed or sanctioned) are a longstanding practice. In recent decades, living together without marrying has also become widespread among affluent educated people, who often refer to their “partner.” Moreover, the Current Population Surveys show that substantial numbers of survey respondents say they are married—and do not report being separated or divorced—but when called upon to enumerate who lives in their home, indicate that their spouse doesn't live there.

To cope with these complexities, we have adopted a more inclusive concept than being married. We focus instead on whether a person shares a residence with someone whom they identify either as their spouse or as their partner. We term this living arrangement *cohabiting*, and we refer to the *co-*

habitation rate rather than the marriage rate, but we remind the reader that most of these *cohabitators* are married. (In the CPS, about 6 percent of white and 11 percent of black cohabitators are unmarried partners; the rest are married.)

Absent Black Men

The first question we examine is whether there is an overall gender imbalance among African Americans that leads to a shortage of marriageable males (irrespective of education or earnings). The Current Population Survey deliberately surveys the civilian population, and therefore excludes persons in prison, in military barracks, or in group quarters. The result is a survey population with an *unequal* number of African American men and women: about 55 percent of the surveyed black adults between twenty-five and sixty-five years of age are women. By our definition of cohabitation—*resident* spouses or partners—any black men that the CPS sampling procedure excludes cannot be cohabiting. If all the black adult men remaining in the CPS population were to marry or partner, the imbalance of 55 percent females to 45 percent males would still leave an excess of unpartnered women. As a result, the theoretical maximum cohabitation rate for black women would become 82 percent (or 45/55), rather than 100 percent.

Interracial Marriage and Partnering

Interracial cohabitation is another force that could further lower the marriage or partnering prospects of black women. In the CPS civilian population of twenty-five to sixty-five-year-olds we find that about 10 percent of those non-Hispanic black males who do cohabit have spouses or partners who are not African American. Interracial unions are less frequent among black women: 3.8 percent have spouses or partners who are not African American.

Contrary to stereotypes, there doesn't seem to be much of a relationship between income and the likelihood of interracial marriage or partnering. Among black men with incomes less than \$20,000, 9.6 percent cohabit with someone who is not African American, while for black men earning over \$75,000 per year, the rate is 10.1 percent.

Adding interracial marriage to the previous gender imbalance lowers the theoretical maximum cohabitation rate for adult black women to 77 percent. This means that even if every black woman decided to marry, there would only be enough black men for 77 percent of the women to marry. However, the *actual* cohabitation rate for black women aged twenty-five to sixty-five in the CPS is much lower than this maximum: it is about 41 percent. The intellectual puzzle is to understand why the black cohabitation rate is so much lower than its potential maximum.

Educational Homogamy

Our first step is to see whether black cohabitation rates are related to the gender imbalances evident at different levels of education, to understand

whether “marriageability” is leaving less-educated black men out in the cold.

Table 1.4 reports contrasting education-gender imbalances for white and black adults aged thirty to sixty-five. At higher education levels, white women are outnumbered by white men. The opposite trend is apparent for African Americans: college-educated black women outnumber black college men. Marriageability theory suggests that this gender imbalance would lead to a dearth of marriageable black men and lower cohabitation rates for educated black women. Yet despite the gender imbalance, we observe that the more educated a black women is, the *more likely* she is to be living with a spouse or partner.

Table 1.4 also shows that black women are far less likely to live with a spouse or partner than their white counterparts, and more likely to have never married, at every level of education. The *most educated* African American women are much less likely to be living with a spouse or partner than the *least-educated* white women. Therefore imbalances in the numbers of college-educated black men and women—understood as educational homogamy—does not account for the lower black cohabitation rate.

Income Homogamy

We next consider marriageability from an earnings perspective, to see whether, among working adults, income is associated with the rate of cohabitation.

Table 1.5 considers only working men and women aged twenty-five to sixty-five: non-workers are excluded. In the left hand column is the proportion of working women within each personal income bracket and in the next, the percent of working women in that bracket who cohabit. The first column suggests there are large imbalances in the numbers of men and women employees at both ends of the income scale: for both whites and blacks, women outnumber men at the low income end, and men far outnumber women at the

Table 1.4
Cohabitation by Education Level

	<u>Black Women</u>			<u>White Women</u>		
	proportion female	% cohabit	% never married	proportion female	% cohabit	% never married
<HS	.55	32 %	30 %	.47	64 %	9 %
HS	.53	42 %	29 %	.53	75 %	6 %
BA	.55	48 %	25 %	.49	76 %	11 %
MA+	.58	53 %	22 %	.44	73 %	13 %

Table 1.5
Ratio of Employed Women to Employed Men by Income Level

	<u>Black</u>		<u>White</u>	
	female proportion	% women with a partner	female proportion	% women with a partner
<u>Income:</u>				
Under \$20,000	.64	39 %	.68	74 %
\$20K-30K	.55	43 %	.55	69 %
\$30K-40K	.49	44 %	.45	68 %
\$40-50K	.44	46 %	.37	67 %
\$50K-75K	.39	49 %	.28	67 %
>\$75K	.27	43 %	.17	67 %
Overall:	.53	42 %	.46	70 %

high income end. If marriageability theory applied to income groups, we would expect greater imbalances in the numbers of men and women in an income stratum to be associated with lower marriage rates. Contrary to marriageability theory, however, higher gender imbalances are not associated with lower rates of cohabitation in this income data.

Table 1.5 also documents an extremely large difference in cohabitation rates between whites and blacks at each earnings level. A white women in the lowest income bracket is more likely to have a resident spouse or partner than an African American women in the highest income bracket. For men—data not shown—the cohabitation rate increases with income and again there are large differences in cohabitation rates between whites and blacks of similar income.

Wilson(1987) asked why so many poor black men weren't married, and concluded that their unemployment made them unmarriageable. Consistent with Wilson's notion, we find very low cohabitation rates for low-wage black men and women. But we also observe two additional features that don't easily square with his theoretical explanation. The first is that poor white men are substantially more likely to cohabit than poor black men. If low income renders poor black males unmarriageable, why would it not equally disqualify white men with low income?

Second, and of greatest relevance to this paper, black cohabitation rates remain quite low relative to whites even among middle-class black men and women who have high incomes. Overall, only 42 percent of black women are living with a spouse or partner. This is a much smaller proportion than could be explained by gender imbalances in education or income. There are many very "marriageable" women and men in the African American middle-class who do not live with spouse or a partner. Such findings are not explainable

within a context of demographic imbalances. They require some other type of theory to explain why African Americans who are materially well set up for marriage or cohabitation nevertheless do not live in couples as often as economically-comparable whites.

The Economic Consequences of Fewer Couples

The lower rates of marriage and partnering among African Americans, including those in the middle-class, have a profound impact on black household finances. Resources that could be combined in a married/partner household are instead often divided across two households. As table 1.6 shows, the impact falls heavily upon black women. While black and white women's median *earnings* are roughly equal, black women's *household incomes* are very much lower than white women of equivalent education, largely because fewer black women have spouses or partners to contribute to their household income.

We estimated the economic consequences of lower marriage and partnering rates, using a multivariate model predicting household income for black women, some of who were cohabiting and some of who were not. This model provided an estimate of the average difference that a male partner or husband made to household income. We then estimated how much greater the average black woman's household income would be if the proportion of married or partnered couples among African Americans were equal to the proportion of cohabiting couples found among whites. The model uses the current earning-levels of black partners, so it does not "wish away" discrimination or unequal pay; it simply asks what would happen if there were a higher proportion of partnered

Table 1.6
Women's Earnings and Household Income by Education
(includes working and non-working women)

		% women living w. partner	Median female earnings	Median household income
Less Than High School	All Black	31 %	\$531	\$18259
	All White	64 %	\$1031	\$30010
High School Graduates	All Black	40 %	\$13201	\$30222
	All White	75 %	\$13000	\$50411
BA	All Black	46 %	\$31860	\$57650
	All White	73 %	\$27630	\$79117
MA+	All Black	52 %	\$40000	\$71605
	All White	72 %	\$39319	\$91050

black women. This methodology suggests that the average black woman's household income would be 15 percent higher or increase by \$7,500 per year if the frequency of marriage/partnering in the black community equaled the level for whites.

The legal marriage rate in the African American community has been declining over time, even as the black middle-class has grown. This acts as a brake upon household incomes. The more that marriage and cohabitation rates shrink over time, the greater the economic braking effect becomes. Conversely, if marriage or cohabitation rates were to rise, the growth of black families with middle-class incomes would accelerate.

Passing the Torch: The Prospects for Middle-Class Black Children

The continued growth of the African American middle-class depends upon more black families moving upward occupationally, but it also depends on African American children who are born and reared in middle-class homes holding onto their family advantage by getting a good education and moving into good jobs.

Many Americans of all races fail to meet their parents' level of education. However, downward mobility is considerably more widespread among African Americans than among whites. Many middle-class black families are unable to pass their educational advantages on to their children. Table 1.7 reports our estimates of educational downward mobility, using the latest national data available to us.

These surveys cover different cohorts and different time frames, so it is not surprising that the amount of educational downward mobility varies from study to study. However, each survey exhibits a pattern that is consistent with previous studies of earlier decades: compared to whites, a higher proportion of African Americans are educationally downwardly mobile relative to their college-educated parents. It seems that the African American middle-class is trapped in a game of chutes and ladders. While increasing numbers of African Americans become more educated and climb upward occupationally, substantial numbers of children from black middle-class families slide back down. White families face these same possibilities, except that their chutes seem less crowded.

There are many theories as to why so many middle-class black youth fail to equal their parents' level of achievement. The first, which focuses specifically on the children of immigrant black families, suggests that many American-born youths from immigrant families identify as African American rather than (say) Jamaicans, and adopt the behavior patterns of poorer African American students. This, according to a theory known as "segmented assimilation" has negative implications for the education and mobility of the second generation (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997; Lee, Neckerman, and Carter, 1999; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Not all research supports that view, however. Kalmijn(1996), for example, reports that both immigrants from the British

Table 1.7
Race and Educational Downward Mobility Relative to One's Parents

Percent of offspring who did not get as far as a four-year college, when parents had:	<u>Some college:</u>	<u>Bachelors degree:</u>
NELS*:		
Black Males	23	7
Black Females	12	3
White Males	12	3
White Females	8	3
PSID:		
Black Males	33	26
Black Females	35	31
White Males	19	14
White Females	21	15
GSS:		
Black Males	30	24
Black Females	28	21
White Males	18	14
White Females	19	14

* The NELS is the National Educational Longitudinal Survey of 1988. The PSID is the Panel Study of Income Dynamics; the GSS is the General Social Survey.

Caribbean and their children are financially more successful in the U.S. than African Americans.

In our analyses using the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys, we find no evidence of downward assimilation among the children of black immigrants to the U.S. On the contrary, we discover that on average the black second generation is more highly educated and affluent than their parents: 38 percent have BA or higher degrees, compared to 26 percent of the first-generation black immigrants to the U.S., and 16 percent of native-born African Americans. Likewise 20 percent of second-generation African Americans have family incomes over \$75,000 compared to 12 percent of the first generation, and 9 percent of the native born. This suggests that the educational downward mobility we observe among black Americans as a whole is *not* being driven by children of immigrants; it occurs mainly among the native-born black middle-class.

Scholars have advanced numerous explanations for educational and economic failure among affluent native-born black youths. Patillo-McCoy (1999) in an ethnographic study of a black middle-class suburb described students from privileged black families who became involved in drugs and crime. She

noted that affluent black neighborhoods are often close to poorer crime-ridden neighborhoods, and that the “street culture” of poorer neighborhoods appeals to many affluent black youth. She also argued that the schools that middle-class African Americans attend are inferior to those of whites in terms of resources and academics.

Ogbu (2003), in a recent study of an up-scale integrated suburb, found that middle-class black students trailed their white schoolmates in academic performance. Black students, he asserted, were academically disengaged compared to whites and did not work as hard. They had less understanding of the linkages between their effort in school and their ultimate job goals, and they often turned to sports and other sources of status, rather than to academic achievement. Middle-class black parents, he observed, did not participate in school events as much as their white counterparts, and were less likely to supervise their children’s homework, and tended to leave matters to educational professionals. The school’s tracking system began in elementary school, and tracking clearly disadvantaged black students, but few black parents or children understood or struggled against this, according to Ogbu (cf.. Lucas 1999).

Both Ogbu’s and Patillo-McCoy’s books review earlier work and locate their findings within the context of prior theories that black students disengage academically because they want to avoid “acting white” and feel authentically black; or that teacher’s have lower expectations of black students; or that racial linguistic or dialectal differences affect schooling; or that black students perform poorly due to stereotype threat (Steele and Aronson 1998) or because of “self-sabotage” (McWhorter 2001).

These debates are ongoing, but in focusing on these challenges to progress, we should not overlook the larger trends over time. CPS data reveal that despite substantial amounts of downward mobility and problems in the schools, a record proportion of African American students are graduating from high school. In addition, the proportion of black high school graduates going on immediately to college has grown from about 40 percent in the early 1970s to a high of 60 percent by the late 1990s . In the twenty-five to twenty-nine-year old cohort, the proportion of African Americans receiving bachelor’s degrees has risen from 7.3 percent in 1970 to nearly 18 percent in 2002.

Conclusion

This is steady progress, but it is far from equality. White high-school graduation rates are only 5 percent ahead of the black rate, but among twenty-five to twenty-nine-year-olds twice as many whites as blacks have a baccalaureate degree (35.9 percent v. 18 percent). This racial gap in BAs is serious not only because of its large size, but also because the black-white difference is larger for younger cohorts than for all persons over twenty-five (28 percent v. 17 percent; see table 1.1). In relative but not in absolute terms, then, the educa-

tion gap between the races is getting worse because the proportion of young whites with degrees is now climbing faster than among African Americans.

DuBois would probably be delighted that the Talented Tenth has transformed into a black middle-class that encompasses somewhere between a quarter and a half of African American households. He might also be chagrined that progress hasn't been greater, and that the gulf remains so large between black and white. When DuBois began his research on the Talented Tenth, he emphasized the relative numbers of college-educated blacks and whites. A century later, that educational disparity, more than any other factor, still limits the future of the African American middle-class.

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The Mesh: Democracy and Captivity

Joy James

Infused as they are with economic and ethnic-racial bias, the current massive incarceration and detention apparatuses constitute a crisis in contemporary American democracy. In critiques of the incarceration industry, what is reasonably contested is not the need and responsibility to contain people to prevent them from harming themselves or others; what is contested is containment fashioned as enslavement, and policing and imprisonment shaped by racial and economic status rather than by criminal or criminalized act.

The most disturbing features of contemporary incarceration are its abuses of humanity and its racially and economically driven punitive characteristics. Poor people comprise the majority of those imprisoned and on death row. Some 70 percent of the more than 2 million incarcerated in U. S. prisons, jails, and detention centers are African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian; approximately 1 million or 50 percent of the incarcerated are African American (Mauer, 1999). The racially driven features of punishment, detention, and imprisonment are documented. The Sentencing Project (2005) has noted sentencing disparities such that blacks convicted of the same crimes as whites are much more likely to be sent to prison. The American Bar Association (1997) has advocated for a moratorium on executions because of the rampant racial bias in determining death sentences, which means that the race of both defendant and victim is the primary factor in capital punishment. Those convicted of killing a white person are significantly more likely to receive the death penalty, particularly if they are not white themselves. This differential in human capital or worth is part of a historical legacy; one retold and reinvigorated through legal narratives.

Naming Black Captivity or the American Racial Carceral

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any

place subject to their jurisdiction. (Thirteenth Amendment, Section 1, U. S. Constitution)

This epigraph presents one of the founding statements of a subgenre I identify as the “(neo)slave narrative.” (Neo)slave narratives emerge from the combative discourse of the captive “slave” as well as the “master” state. (Neo)slave narratives focus on the punitive incarceration and containment of designated peoples in the United States (and its territories, such as the prisons at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and Abu Ghraib in Iraq). Such narratives include those of the government (which reinvents slavery through the Thirteenth Amendment), those of the abolitionist and prisoner-rights advocate, and those imprisoned and non-imprisoned blacks who Wilderson (2002) calls the “prison slave” and the “prison slave-in-waiting.” Ideologically, these narratives range from conservative and liberal to radical and revolutionary; they illustrate how there is no one view of black freedom or emancipation. The entertainment sector manufactures and disseminates (neo)slave narratives in memoirs, fiction, films, theatre, and music. It is a profitable trade. “Gangsta rap” and HBO’s prison series *Oz* sell to those who buy a false familiarity with the violence and trauma of penal reality. (Neo)slave narratives have historically proven to be financially as well as politically profitable, for some. Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852) made a considerable fortune on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; while Sojourner Truth reinvented and supported herself through her biography (Painter, 1996). In variations of nineteenth-century literary travelogues, such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, contemporary narratives of the slave or prison slave are recycled in spin-offs as diverse as: Edward Ball’s (1998) *Slaves in the Family*; Daniel Bergner’s (1998) *God of the Rodeo: The Search for Hope, Faith, and a Six-second Ride in Louisiana’s Angola Prison*; and Asha Bandele’s (1999) *The Prisoner’s Wife*.

Of the state narratives, the most significant to this inquiry into the future of black freedom is the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. (Neo)Slave narratives can seek to expand or expel freedom; only those that seek to diminish or destroy slavery are abolitionist. Abolitionist discourse can also refashion shackles as in the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery during the civil war only to legalize it today. This Amendment ensnares as it emancipates; in fact, it functions as an enslaving anti-enslavement narrative. In contradistinction, slain prison rebel, author, and theorist George Jackson—his 1971 death at the hands of California prison guards would spark New York’s Attica rebellion months later—calls into question the very right of the state (as master) to exist with his assertion that “as a slave, the social phenomenon that engages my whole consciousness is, of course, revolution.” (Jackson, 1972, 7). In black rebel narratives for a future freedom, such as those offered by Jackson, what is sought is not the mere abolition of slavery or segregation or penal society dehumanizing blacks, but the abolition of all masters, including

the state-as-master or master-state. Not all abolitionists seek the same “freedom” or even freedom at all. Some seek management and containment of social or state violence. At times, both a visionary freedom and an immediate emancipation are sought.

In some abolitionist texts, what is sought is not “freedom” per se, because the master-state will not or cannot offer that. It cannot provide what it does not possess. What the master-state grants, and often what the incarcerated acquiesce to, is emancipation. Yet this emancipation cannot fulfill the conditions for a decent life or livelihood. Consider that in referring to the California Youth Authority, MSW candidates in California universities speak disquietly about the “emancipation” of children who are wards of the state in the foster care system (also a prison, according to some who were warehoused there during their youth). One is “emancipated” when s/he reaches the age of eighteen (the word “emancipation” suggests that, prior to that moment, children were in bondage). Upon emancipation, technically no longer on the rolls to have their actions directly dictated, that is no longer the direct property of the state, they are “free.” Essentially at age of eighteen, whether or not they have matriculated from high school (such students would disproportionately not graduate by age eighteen having had their schooling delayed because of frequent moves, familial disruption, and childhood trauma), formerly captive children, now free adults, are put out—without housing, without advanced schooling and with no income. As in 1865, slaves would ask, emancipated for what end—subsistence, starvation, or entry into the underground economy?

I have argued that emancipation is *given* by the dominant, it being a legal contractual and social agreement; freedom is *taken* and created by the subordinate captives—that is, it exists as a right against the captor and/or enslaver and a practice shared in subordinated communities. Freedom is an ontological status—only the individual or collective, and perhaps a god—can create freedom. There is a long, turbulent and painful history of black resistance to repressive societies and master races. Narratives of penal slaves seek and demand freedom—no matter for how limited a time, or in what limited space. However, penal captives or slaves conditioned by the state sometimes see freedom and emancipation as one and the same. As a consequence, not all of our “freedom” stories or narratives offer new visions of freedom. Some yearn for *emancipation* (from individual personal plights) but not *freedom* (from structures and systems), which depends upon the political agency and risk-taking that could realize it.

Where can we find our future? Partly by looking to our past. Racially fashioned enslavement shares similar features with racially fashioned incarceration. Plantations, historically, were penal sites—prisons for the dehumanization of human beings and the exploitation of agricultural, domestic, and industrial labor. Prisons are the modern day manifestation of the plantation. The antebellum plantation ethos of dehumanization was marked by master-

slave relations revolving about sexual terror and domination; beatings; regimentation of bodies; exploited labor; denial of religious and cultural practices; substandard food, health care, and housing; forced migration; isolation in “lockdown” for punishment and control; denial of birth family and kin. That ethos is routinely practiced and re-inscribed in contemporary penal sites. Robert Jay Lifton (2004), referencing the abuses in Iraqi prisons committed by U. S. personnel, describes warfare and military prisons as an “atrocious producing situation.” Atrocious producing situations also exist in ordinary civilian prisons. Physical, emotional, sexual, and economic exploitation and violence are visited upon bodies with equal abandon and lack of restraint in sites that are disappeared from conventional scrutiny. The old plantation was a prison; and the new prison is a plantation. Both reconfigure the rural landscape, receiving and processing bodies forcibly transported, at times from “black” spaces into often culturally unfamiliar territory. In alien terrain, isolated captives witness and participate in a conditioning in which their civil or human rights are reduced to the rights of slaves.

There are heated arguments about the “legitimate” usage of the term “slavery.” Certainly, ambiguities exist concerning the definition of “slavery” in modern usage and its relation to black “freedom” in the twenty-first century. Often, the debates center on the deniability of contemporary enslavement—as a non-criminal or state enterprise—in a western, democratic nation-state. For example, Matthew Mancini (1996) argues in *One Dies, Get Another* that the convict prison lease system did not constitute slavery. While Orlando Patterson (1985) suggests in *Slavery and Social Death*—by his failure to mention the Thirteenth Amendment and to analyze U. S. penal slavery—that “slavery” is not terminology applicable to the post-emancipation United States. Despite the demurrals by these and other noted scholars, the presence of slavery in the United States is a post-emancipation reality. The state has explicitly identified the slave; its narratives, as a subset of (neo)slave narratives, both illuminate and obscure the racialized body of the slave and/or prisoner. According to the U.S. Constitution, “other persons” (racially fashioned without any racial marker in the text to designate them as “black” or African), and later, according to the Thirteenth Amendment, “other persons” (criminally fashioned again with no apparent racial referent) are designated real and potential slaves. I highlight the Thirteenth Amendment to argue that the state does not create legal categories in abstraction. Legal narratives manifest in political practice(s). Within its possessions and territories, in the very act of (re)naming involuntary servitude, the United States recreated rather than actually abolished slavery.

Generally, most abolitionist or antiracist, anti-prison/police discourse (excepting radical discourse) tends to avoid the debate over naming, and to focus on the rights of the incarcerated (or enslaved). Consequently, the important contributions of advocacy organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and various policy and organizing groups tend to empha-