

The Paradox of “Race”: How African American Scholars Deployed Segregated Spaces to Critique Racism

Le paradoxe de la « race » : comment les universitaires africains-américains ont déployé des espaces ségrégués pour critiquer le racisme

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Abstract

The startling paradox at the heart of anti-racist struggles is that the destruction of racist institutions would not have been possible without the space for intellectual and political mobilizations that race-identified institutions provided. This article examines the apparent contradiction that predominantly black institutions, especially historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's), were essential spaces anchoring challenges to the American racial order between the 1860s and the 1930s. It analyzes the diverse forces shaping the political consciousness and experiences of the two generational cohorts of Black scholars who passed through the HBCU's. It shows how this history, as well as similar developments later such as the Civil Rights Movement, puts into question contemporary notions of “racial blindness” and/or the erasure of racial identities.

Résumé

L'étonnant paradoxe au cœur des luttes antiracistes est que la destruction des institutions racistes n'aurait pas été possible sans l'espace de mobilisation intellectuelle et politique qu'offraient les institutions ségréguées racialement. Cet article examine la contradiction apparente selon laquelle les institutions à prédominance noire, en particulier les collèges et universités historiquement noirs (HBCU), ont été des espaces essentiels pour ancrer les contestations de l'ordre racial étasunien entre les années 1860 et les années 1930. Il analyse les diverses forces qui ont façonné la conscience politique et les expériences des deux cohortes générationnelles d'universitaires noirs qui sont passées par les HBCU. Il montre comment cette histoire, ainsi que des développements similaires ultérieurs tels que le mouvement des droits civiques, remettent en question les notions contemporaines d'« aveuglement à la race » et/ou d'effacement des identités raciales.

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A PARADOX IN ANTI-RACIST THINKING AND POLITICAL PRACTICE

Over the past decade, ostensibly anti-racist reasoning has taken an odd, indeed, contrary turn on both sides of the Atlantic world.¹ On June 29, 2023, in a six to three decision, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed a half-century precedent when it endorsed the idea that the American constitution is “race-blind,” thus ironically rendering two universities’ anti-racist remedial programs unlawful because they—necessarily—recognized race (Oyez 2023). Meanwhile, in France, the notion that even speaking the word “race” is an inherently racist act has gained advocates among left-leaning as well as openly racist right-wing academics and politicians. In each case, moreover, institutions of higher education have been ground zero for such conflicts. By outlawing “affirmative action” in American universities’ admissions decisions, the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision quite literally threatens the life-chances of structurally disadvantaged minority youths. The decision also threatens to reshape university scholars’ work environment by undermining the racial and social diversity of their student bodies, and thus inevitably the learning environment as well as the very content of instruction. In its aftermath, the quaint notion to not speak or read about race has been used in one southern state to justify the exclusion from public school classrooms and curricula of many classic works addressing America’s racist history.²

Thus do many of even the more liberally inclined opponents of “race-talk” propose alternatives to addressing the century-old phenomena of racial differences as if they were merely a personal misunderstanding that people can be talked out of as opposed to historically embedded structures that must be vigorously critiqued and dismantled. Consequently, the idea of “race” becomes merely a category error that people can be taught to think differently about rather than something embedded in social, economic, and political structures inherited from the past that continue to be reproduced in

diverse and insidious ways in the present. This is an error that bold, uncensored scholarship might well address; its censorship threatens seriously adverse implications for intellectual life and scholarship, as well as for the various institutions that support them. And, indeed, ultimately, it threatens sincere and effective efforts to achieve social justice and equality.

Even among some putatively well-meaning academics, the “race-blind” conviction appears to be rooted in an appealing, though deceptive, proposition that “race” is not “real,” or at least not in ways that racists have historically invoked it—as an inherent biological disability, a genetic reality shaping character, culture and thus behavior. What such “race-blind” convictions miss, however, is that notwithstanding the error of treating race as a biological reality, it is nonetheless a social belief system that has shaped communities and institutions historically, and thereby the conceptual predispositions and sense of self of their inhabitants; in short, a given peoples’ sense of self.

An even greater irony, moreover, is that race consciousness has been crucial, historically, to projects aimed at dismantling racist structures and institutions. One need not assume that such a proposition necessarily romanticizes these institutions. Certainly, racially segregated institutions can also stifle intellectual creativity in ways similar to the potentially negative effects of institutions organized around religious, ethnic, gender, or class identities. Nonetheless, the most striking aspect of—indeed, the startling paradox at the heart of—anti-racist struggles are those moments when the destruction of racist institutions would not have been possible without the space for intellectual and political mobilizations that race-identified institutions provided. In short, at such moments, ironically, race-blind convictions would have undermined the progress of anti-racism. I will argue further that at the heart of—and a driving force in—these mobilizations were scholars who had experienced a profound sense of alienation in their need to mobilize around their racial identity in order to critique and defeat racial oppression. Thus, did race consciousness ultimately shape *anti-racist* struggles.

There is no better example to illustrate this proposition, I would argue, than the role played by predominantly African American colleges and universities

¹ This article is an revised version of the paper “Alienated Scholars: How African American Scholars Adapted Racially Segregated Spaces for Racial Critique during the Inter-war Decades”, presented at the conference “Rethinking Race, the Colonial and the Postcolonial in Contemporary France”, University of Chicago Center in Paris, December, 13–15, 2022.

² The state of Florida made such demands of the College Board, which initially protested but then caved to them (Mandler 2023; Hartocollis and Fawcett 2023).

(what we now call HBCU's)³ before and during the American Civil Rights Movement, notwithstanding that this movement was launched, ironically, to create a "race-blind" nation. HBCU's had emerged shortly before or soon after the American Civil War (1861-1865) and flourished in the early 20th century. For roughly a century, then, these institutions would become the indispensable spaces anchoring political as well as intellectual challenges to the American racial order that had emerged over the half century following the abolition of slavery. Thus, as recent scholarship has demonstrated, did these institutional spaces provide the essential breeding ground and support structures for the American Civil Right Movement that would emerged in the 1950s and 1960s (Holt 2021; Carson 1995). Not only were most of the key leaders and participants in that Movement products of HBCU's, but the Movement itself is a prime example of how race-conscious institutions could be crucial breeding-grounds for anti-racist initiatives. At the very least, then, this history should give pause to ostensible anti-racists who advocate the adoption of policies promoting "racial blindness," that is, the purported virtue of erasing racial identities in intellectual thought and political practice.

Certainly, the young people drawn to the Movement were united in a mission to create a more just society, which they would have defined—at least in its earlier stages—as a society in which race would not matter.⁴ And yet, the Movement itself was only possible because it was not simply supported by but embedded in historically specific racial communities and institutions. Indeed, its organizational capacity, funding, and logistics were all made possible, at least initially, by communities that were not only organized around institutions such as Black churches and schools that enabled its mobilization, but that also shaped its core ideology, values, and thus the character of that mobilization. Equally striking was the fact that the majority of

the foot-soldiers of the early Movement emerged from high schools and universities, all of which (in the South, at least) were racially segregated. And, yet, paradoxically, the *racial integration* of schools was one of the earliest—and long remained—among the principal demands that the Movement sought to achieve.⁵

For example, Howard University nurtured many of the principal leaders of the youth wing of the Civil Rights Movement. Among the first black universities and colleges established shortly after the American Civil War to educate former slaves, Howard was also exemplary of the paradoxes posed by a race-blind advocacy. Shortly after the Civil War, its hospital and medical school were established to serve the newly emancipated slaves and sometime later its Law School faculty would hone the legal strategies that challenged segregation in colleges, grade schools, and other areas of public institutional life. Howard was, then, exemplary of the paradox of an institution historically rooted in and animated by a mission of racial uplift and yet simultaneously committed to challenging and defeating racial separatism.

ALIENATED SCHOLARS⁶

The self-conscious mission of the many colleges, universities, preparatory schools, and civic organizations founded in the wake of Civil War reflect the larger pattern of black institutional and intellectual life over the century that followed, notwithstanding variations in the details of their origins and sources

⁵ Although there were occasional protests designed to expose the hypocrisy of segregated white churches, there were very few sustained or serious demands for their integration. The reason, no doubt, is that such a move would have threaten the existence of a precious community resource. For one of the few exceptions, see (Green 2007, 247–48).

⁶ The origins of this sub-title, "Alienated Scholars," is a challenge by a faculty mentor during my graduate studies at Yale University reminding my class cohort that we necessarily occupied positions of alienation within a university that was historically founded on and ultimately continued to a large degree to function on principles and purposes at odds with our own, as black students and future teachers of black studies at the university-level. Now, by that he meant that our very rationale for being there was to challenge and ultimately transform the power relations and intellectual assumptions that supported the exercise of that institutional power. This did not imply any personal animosity but simply our structural relation to the institution that would credential us. The relevance of that experience for this article is to note that we were simply the latest generation of scholars, stretching back more than half a century, to confront that paradox. Although at that moment resting on the struggles of past generations, we were oftentimes much less clear-headed about our institutional and intellectual standpoint than many of our forebearers had been.

³ Historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's) are institutions of higher education established in the United States to serve African Americans, who were largely deprived of education beyond elementary school. Most were established during the Reconstruction era (1865-1877) by religious missionary organizations, and they were primarily located in the southern states. Responding to federal funding of agricultural and technical curriculum in the late 19th century, southern state governments began to fund black colleges, as well. Uniquely, in the nation's capital, Howard University, established in 1867, was funded by the Federal government.

⁴ My qualification acknowledges that by the late 1960s, many Movement veterans were drawn to a more nationalist, racial exclusive vision of movement goals and organization (Bloom and Martin 2016).

of support. Far more important were the diverse forces shaping the political consciousness and experiences of the roughly two generational cohorts of Black scholars who passed through those institutions. The first cohort were the men and women who began their professional careers in the late 19th century. They were the generational cohort born or coming of age either during or shortly after the destruction of slavery and who had lived through the failed effort to radically reconstructed southern society in its aftermath. Undoubtedly, the most famous—and in many ways the male role models for that group—were W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) and Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950), both of whom not only shaped the contours of academic studies of the African American experience for generations hence, but also established important institutional structures for the development of future generations of scholars.⁷ The second group, coming of professional age during the early decades of the 20th century, would be decisively shaped by the social and economic changes set in motion by the First World War and consolidated during the interwar decades that followed.

Notwithstanding the different formative forces shaping their life experiences, the males in each of these groups would unabashedly identify themselves as “race men,” a self-description initially embraced by that turn-of-the-century generation of Black male leaders. Ironically, these male leaders would justify their elite class status by framing the ultimate purpose of their work as one promoting the welfare of Black peoples as a whole; or as Black women leaders would articulate it “to uplift as we climb.”⁸ As the latter slogan indicates, the women as well as the male leaders considered their personal successes as refutations of racist characterizations of Black peoples’ character and capabilities and thus as benefiting the race as a whole. In each case, moreover, the work of “advancing the race” was to be achieved through their publications on the Black experience and fostered by the organizations they founded to encourage and sponsor collective work. Thus, as a young professor at Atlanta University,

for example, Du Bois organized annual meetings devoted to specific topics of inquiry about Black life and institutions, for instance “The Negro Church” (1903) and “The Negro Family” (1908). Each of these studies drew on the resources of southern Black communities and thus relied in large part on the data-gathering and local knowledge that the conference participants could supply (Holt 2025).

Meanwhile, working largely as teachers in public and church-supported elementary and high schools, Black women leaders trained and nurtured the generation of mostly male leaders who would gain prominence in the first decades of the 20th century. The most prominent exemplars among this first generation were Anna Julia Cooper⁹ (1858–1964) and Mary Church Terrell¹⁰ (1863–1954), each of whom taught at the famed M Street High School in Washington, D.C. In addition to their work as teachers, both of them would also publish significant analyses of their racial experiences (Cooper 2017; Terrell 2021).

By some measures, Carter G. Woodson would emerge as an even more consequential institution-builder than Du Bois (Dagbovie 2014). He was the second African American after Du Bois to earn a Ph.D. at Harvard, where like Du Bois he was also mentored by the distinguished historian Albert Bushnell Hart¹¹ (1854–1943), who taught the first course on American History at Harvard. However, Woodson’s career unfolded somewhat more slowly than that of his distinguished predecessor. Before continuing to graduate study, he had pursued a brief but personally and intellectually formative experience as

⁷ Both Du Bois and Woodson were born during the Reconstruction era and were privileged to earn doctoral degrees from Harvard University in 1897 and 1912, respectively. Both went on to publish influential scholarship on the black experience and, as discussed below, founded important organizations devoted to advancing African American interests and welfare.

⁸ This slogan, coined by Mary Church Terrell to characterize the mission of the black suffrage movement and adopted by many Black women’s organizations, was also part of the self-concept of their male counterparts (Parker 2020).

⁹ Born in slavery in North Carolina, Anna Julia Cooper would go on to become a leading educator and feminist scholar and activist in the early 20th century. Educated at Oberlin College, from which she graduated in 1884, she would later receive a Ph.D. from the University of Paris-Sorbonne, becoming just the fourth African American woman to earn a doctorate. A strong feminist, her principal occupation was as a high school teacher molding succeeding generations of scholars, teacher and administrator, most notably at the famed M Street School (later Dunbar) in Washington, D.C., which produced many of the leading black male scholars and scientists of the early 20th century (Grant, Brown, and Brown 2016).

¹⁰ Mary Church Terrell, a leading activist, journalist, and educator, was educated at Oberlin College, from which she graduated in 1884 with a degree in Classics followed by a master’s degree in education four years later. She taught at M Street School in Washington, D.C. and was active in the Black women’s club movement and the women’s suffrage movement (Parker 2020).

¹¹ Albert Bushnell Hart was a pioneering historian and professor of government at Harvard from 1883, supported graduate training for mixed-race students like Du Bois and Woodson, but was skeptical about the intellectual capacities of black people more generally (The Presidential Committee on the Legacy of Slavery 2022, 47–49).

a teacher in the US-occupied Philippines between 1903 and 1907, which undoubtedly shaped some of his later research interests (Mount 2018, 152–204). Shortly after receiving his doctorate, Woodson took a leading role not only in facilitating the development of African American history as an academic field but creating infrastructure for its popular support by founding the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) in 1915, establishing the *Journal of Negro History* a year later, and inaugurating Negro History Week in 1926. Each of these activities engaged laypeople as well as university-trained academics in discussions and research, much as Du Bois's Atlanta Studies conferences had attempted to do on a more limited regional scale a decade earlier. Under Woodson's leadership, the ASNLH was firmly committed to "the scientific study" of the African American experience, even as he saw no contradiction in drawing on the resources and energies of the larger Black public to achieve that end. Thus, well into the mid-twentieth century, non-academics were welcomed into the membership and conventions of the Association. Much like Du Bois's early work, that of Woodson and his associates in that organization—Charles Wesley,¹² Luther Porter Jackson,¹³ Lorenzo Greene,¹⁴ and others—deployed social science methods to create an archive of empirical resources and data on Black institutional and social life and labor.

Arguably, however, the most long-lived and successful institution builders during this period were Black women scholars. Exemplary of this group were Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Church Terrell, both of whose lives bracketed the century framed by the post-Civil War Reconstruction and the 20th century Civil Rights struggle (Terrell died just months after the Brown v. Board of Education decision was announced and Cooper in the year that the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed). Both were southern-born women who had earned BA and master's degrees

at Oberlin College in the 1880s (in mathematics and Classics, respectively) before undertaking activist careers that shaped future generations of scholars as well as the welfare of Black communities. For many years, Cooper was the principal of M Street High School (later re-named Dunbar, after the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar [1872–1906]) in the nation's capital and Terrell also taught there. M Street nurtured many of the most accomplished Black professionals of the early 20th century, of whom the most well-known were Charles Richard Drew (1904–1950), who pioneered techniques for safer blood transfusions during World War II, and Charles Hamilton Houston (1895–1950), who devised the legal strategy that won the 1954 Brown decision desegregating public schools (Love 1996; McNeil 1983).

It is notable, nonetheless, that unlike the men of their generation, these women taught mostly in secondary schools rather than in universities. No doubt that exclusion fueled their powerful intellectual interventions condemning gender inequities as well as racism. The institutional fruits of those interventions were anti-lynching campaigns and the organization of Black women's clubs, especially the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. These organizations gave crucial support to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP) in 1909 and sustained other anti-racist initiatives over the first half of the 20th century.

None of this is to suggest that there was not conflict—sometimes quite fierce conflicts—among these high-achievers. For example, although Du Bois and Woodson were roughly of the same generational cohort, they were as often antagonist as collaborators. Nevertheless, each fostered institutions that anchored and facilitated Black intellectual life and thus mentored key figures among the generation of Black scholars who emerged during the early 20th century and the interwar period. Like their elders, the members of that successor generation also began their careers in the Black colleges and universities that had been established over the three decades between the Reconstruction era and the turn of the 20th century. These schools promoted a sense of mission: the expectation that their graduates would take up the burden of advancing the race.

The specific character of the mission embraced by the initial cohort of institutions was to prepare teachers to staff the public grade schools established

¹² Charles Harris Wesley (1891–1987) graduated Harvard in 1925 and then pursued a career as an African Methodist Episcopal minister and university president while also authoring fifteen books on diverse topics in African American history (Wesley 1997).

¹³ Luther Porter Jackson (1892–1950), a child of previously enslaved parents, earned his doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1937. A prolific scholar, Jackson's dissertation on free Negro labor and property holding in antebellum Virginia was a pioneering work in black social and labor history.

¹⁴ Lorenzo Johnston Greene (1899–1988) worked closely with Carter G. Woodson at the Negro History association from late 1920s to early 1930s before taking a professorial post at Lincoln University. Greene did pioneering studies of black labor, especially during the colonial period in New England (Wilson 2006; Greene 1989).

during the Reconstruction Era and those supported by religious missionaries thereafter. By the final decades of 19th century, federal support for technical and agricultural training encouraged several southern states to establish Black colleges to pursue such training as well. In contrast with the colleges established earlier and supported largely by missionary societies, however, the state-funded institutions were more constrained in how they interpreted the mission to "uplift the race." Only the advent of a more militant student population and alumni pressures during the interwar decade pressed them to pursue increasingly bold anti-racist actions.¹⁵

However, none of the state-funded and just a few of the private institutions offered graduate degrees. Consequently, practically all of the leading Black scholars of the earlier generation received their doctoral or professional training at a select group of elite white universities, most notably at Harvard, the University of Chicago, Columbia, and Yale. Although well-served professionally by the prestige of these degrees, many, if not most, of these scholars encountered alienating treatment during their studies at these institutions notwithstanding the opportunities they provided. For example, Francille Wilson's examination of the correspondence between Charles Wesley and Edward Channing (1856-1931), Wesley's dissertation adviser at Harvard, is illustrative of the difficulties several Black students encountered there.¹⁶ Not only did Channing selectively use material from Wesley's student essays without appropriate attribution, but his letters of recommendation credited Wesley's intellectual accomplishments to his "white blood" (Wilson 2006, 166-67). Nor was Channing the only problematic professor Wesley encountered. His dealings with Albert Bushnell Hart appear to have been only slightly less egregious, notwithstanding the latter's reputation as a racial liberal. Although Du Bois does not describe any similar tensions with Hart, who was his principal thesis adviser, as well, Carter Woodson reports encountering condescension similar to Wesley's. Given this pattern, one might well read in a somewhat different light Du Bois' trenchant observation that he considered himself "in Harvard but not of it" (Lewis 1993, 80).

¹⁵ Several of these colleges were shaken by student rebellions during the 1920s, which drew support from their distinguished alumni. See, for example, Du Bois' support of student strikes at Fisk (Lewis 2000, 139-48).

¹⁶ Edward Perkins Channing trained many doctoral students at Harvard from 1883 to 1929 and authored a six-volume *History of the United States* for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1926 (Joyce 1974).

Given the unapologetic racial exclusions of the American professorate even at what were reputedly the most racially liberal universities and colleges of that era, it is not surprising that even their most accomplished Black graduates had to find employment in Black colleges and universities. On the other hand, given their often expressed moral and political commitment to use their training to advance the race, such employment was perhaps as much chosen as imposed.

SECOND GENERATION

With the emergence of the second cohort of Black scholars during the second and third decades of the 20th century, the character and mission of those elite Black institutions would also be challenged and forced to change. First, a post-World War I generation of students mounted campus protests that led these institutions to replace their white presidents with Black scholars from the earlier generational cohort.¹⁷ In most cases, the students won powerful support from faculty who were also the products of elite white universities. Thus, both Du Bois and Wesley were outspoken in their support of student rebels at Fisk, while Chicago alumnus E. Franklin Frazier¹⁸ (1894-1962) and Abram L. Harris¹⁹ (1899-1963) did the same at Howard.

However, the scholarship of the generation of scholars that matured during the interwar period shifted its presumptions and emphases from those of the earlier generation. As one of the younger members of that generational cohort, John Hope Franklin (1915-2009), described it, they "looked less to Afro-American achievements and more to the interactions of blacks and whites, and more to the frequent antagonisms than to the rare moments of genuine cooperation. They tended to see Afro-American

¹⁷ Among the most prominent were University of Chicago graduates Mordecai W. Johnson (1890-1976) at Howard in 1926 and Charles S. Johnson (1893-1956) at Fisk in 1946. Brown University graduate John Hope (1868-1936) became president of Atlanta University in 1929.

¹⁸ E. Franklin Frazier was a University of Chicago trained sociologist. Having earned his doctorate at Chicago in 1932, Frazier went on to do pioneering work in the sociology of the black family while teaching at Howard University. His major work was *The Negro Family in the United States*, published in 1939 (Holloway 2002).

¹⁹ Abram L. Harris was professor and chair of Economics Department at Howard University from 1936 to 1945, where he collaborated with Ralph Bunche and E. Franklin Frazier, followed by professorship at the University of Chicago until his death in 1963. Harris earned his doctorate at Columbia University and wrote influential Marxist interpretations of the economic history of black Americans (Holloway 2002).

history in a larger context, insisting that any event that affected the status of Afro-Americans was a part of Afro-American history even if no Afro-Americans were directly involved” (Franklin 1986, 16).

Indeed, this second generation began their professional careers in the interwar period and would participate in the most racially integrated cohort of intellectuals and political activists since the Reconstruction era. Many of them, having experienced the Great Depression, were attracted to Marxist analysis and several would take leave from university teaching to work in Franklin D. Roosevelt’s (1882-1945) New Deal shaping social policy. They would also go on to fight a second world war—once again purportedly to “save the world for democracy”—from which they would emerge to lead the mid-20th century struggle for racial equality and economic justice.

In contrast with earlier generations, they were much less likely to be ministers and fewer of them were otherwise aligned with religious institutions. Most of all, they were convinced that to be effective, their work must be grounded in the history of the African American experience. That commitment led them to a more eclectic intellectual approach; and they were clearly at ease crossing conventional disciplinary borders and boundaries. Thus, they embraced a far broader range of disciplines than their predecessors. Among them were sociologists like E. Franklin Frazier, political scientists like Ralph J. Bunche²⁰ (1904-1971), economists like Abram L. Harris, literary critics like Sterling Brown²¹ (1901-1989), and historians like Rayford Logan²² (1897-1982) and Merze

Tate²³ (1905-1996). Several of them took short leaves to work in socially relevant government programs during the Depression. Some were active in the NAACP, turning it briefly toward a more radical-labor oriented agenda, while others joined insurgent groups like the National Negro Congress and the Communist or Socialist parties. Several could be found leading militant street protests at one time or another. As noted, this was a period of widespread unrest on Black college campuses and Frazier and Harris in particular often lent support to students in these campus insurgencies. In sum, they were the public intellectuals of their day, and perhaps the most impressive since.

Out of this group would emerge challenges to the American racial order, especially (perhaps ironically) the segregation of higher education; the very institutions that had molded them. Some of them—like Sterling Brown—would famously mentor the Black student generation that launched the Civil Rights Movement.²⁴ In their view, although the biological marks of race were visible, they were ultimately ephemeral. The social structures and power relations that give them life were far more durable; embedded in the culture, engrafted in institutions, and consequently more resistant to change. Thus, effective initiatives for social progress required that one not confound racial identity—which can have positive effects—with the racism, which cannot. Having been nurtured in a largely Black world in their youth and then negotiating sometimes hostile, oftentimes alien, worlds in their professional preparation, these scholars were particularly sensitive to the difference. Given their professional experience, it is unlikely that many of them would have embraced a “race-blindness” that risked obscuring the injuries of racist thought and its institutional supports. Given their life experience, it is unlikely that they would have been oblivious to the anti-racist resources that their communities of origin provided to challenge racial oppression.

²⁰ Ralph J. Bunche began his career as a leading interpreter of black politics before becoming an outstanding diplomat and Nobel laureate for his work in the Middle East. After graduating from the University of California, Los Angeles, he earned his doctorate in political science from Harvard in 1934. From 1928 to 1950, he chaired the Political Science Department at Howard University (Henry 1999).

²¹ Sterling A. Brown, a student of black American culture and American literature, studied at Williams College and Harvard University. Kwame Nkrumah, Toni Morrison, Ossie Davis, and Stokely Carmichael were among the students he mentored while teaching at Howard University. Most famous for his poetry collection *Southern Road*, a study of black life in the United States south (Gabbin 1994).

²² Rayford W. Logan earned his Ph.D. in history at Harvard in 1936 and taught at Howard University from 1938 until 1965. During World War II, Logan served in France with the 93rd Infantry Division, which undertook combat missions with French units. He remained in France after the war, helped co-ordinate arrangements for the 2nd Pan-African Conference in Paris in 1921 and immersed himself in French culture and history. He undertook fact-finding mission that was critical of U.S. occupation of

Haiti in the 1930. He published several works on Haiti as well as black life in America (Janken 1993).

²³ Merze Tate was the first woman to attend the University of Oxford and first to earn a doctorate in international relations from Harvard. She was also one the first two female members in Howard University’s Department History (Savage 2023).

²⁴ In his poetry and literary criticism, Brown (my beloved undergraduate teacher) sought to recover and celebrate the distinctive voice of the African American folklife, even as he simultaneously *integrated* it into the larger American literary canon. Race mattered, but it was not all that mattered.

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