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“Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of the World”: A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education

Ronald E. Butchart

W. E. B. DuBois once argued that the proper education for oppressed groups such as African Americans had a special, critical purpose. He knew, as have all serious educators since Socrates accepted his cup, that education was always and everywhere political. For the oppressed, the political role of schooling had to be aimed precisely at finding the means to end the oppression. In 1930, speaking before the graduating students at Howard University, he put the issue this way: “Let there be no misunderstanding about this, no easy going optimism. We are not going to share modern civilization just by deserving recognition. We are going to force ourselves in by organized far-seeing effort—by outthinking and outflanking the owners of the world today who are too drunk with their own arrogance and power successfully to oppose us, if we think and learn and do.”¹ It is clear from his own life’s work that to “think and learn and do”—the “outthinking and outflanking”—required schooling.

If history is to have value beyond a literary form of collecting antiques, it must provide a guide to action. For those struggling against oppression and for justice, history must appraise the past to suggest political, social, and economic strategies for the present and future. Like schooling, history, too, is inescapably political. Our purpose here is to

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¹ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906–1960*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York, 1973), 77. The history of education is intimately related to all other areas of history and cannot be understood in isolation from political, social, economic, and institutional history. Nowhere is this clearer than in African American history, in which the social embeddedness of education is sharply illustrated. However, in order to keep this discussion within reasonable bounds, this essay and accompanying notes are limited to the scholarship specifically related to the history of black education, with a handful of exceptions.

assess the historiography of African American education in terms of its appraisal of the black struggle for learning and its ability to contribute to action for the emancipation of black America. We shall do so by examining the historiography in distinct periods, evaluating the topical and thematic content and the dominant interpretive stances of each period.

For nearly a century, historians have traced the relationships between education and the struggles of the Afro-American community. The resulting historiography breaks rather naturally into three distinct eras, each with its own subject matter, themes, and interpretations. The first era dates from before the turn of the twentieth century into the depression. Two tendencies dominated the period: a triumphalist history arising from the Dunningite tradition and a corrective, vindicationist history written as a defense against the fabrications of the former. That era was replaced by a second period that lasted from the early 1930s into the late 1960s, with echoes still being heard into the 1980s. Embracing neither the white supremacist pretensions of the triumphalist historians nor the defensive posture of the vindicationists, writers in the second era spoke from liberal progressivist assumptions. Finally, emerging from the political crisis of liberal progressivism, a third era has blossomed in the last two decades. Marked by iconoclastic revisionism, this period has produced the broadest range of studies, the least unity of interpretation, but perhaps the greatest commitment to a liberatory political agenda.²

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The earliest scholarly writing on black education's history dates from the 1890s. It ushered in a tradition that extended well into the depression decade. During that time two mutually exclusive traditions vied for attention. Black historians dominated one tradition, writing corrective histories; white southern historians dominated the other, producing white supremacist accounts.

The black scholars' interests were eclectic. Antebellum black schooling for slaves and free blacks received classic treatment in Carter G. Woodson's *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*. Others supple-

² For alternative periodization, see Vincent P. Franklin, "Introductory Essay: Changing Historical Perspectives on Afro-American Life and Education," in *New Perspectives on Black Educational History*, ed. Vincent P. Franklin and James D. Anderson (Boston, 1978), 1-18; and August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980* (Urbana, Ill., 1986). Franklin relies on a traditional historiographic periodization; Meier and Rudwick are less concerned with changing interpretation than with the growth of black history. Both add important dimensions to the dialogue, much of which I have not sought to repeat in this essay.

mented his work on religious education under slavery. Higher education and other specialized forms of postsecondary education, along with studies of more informal educational forces and institutions such as newspapers, magazines, and literary societies, also appeared as important foci of early writing on black education's history. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the South was the almost exclusive focus for these early writers. Indeed, virtually the sole sources of historical information on black education in the North to emerge in this period were portions of W. E. B. DuBois, ed., *The Negro Common School*, and of Woodson, *Education of the Negro*.³

In this early period, postbellum southern black education received greater emphasis than the antebellum or northern efforts. Perhaps because of its drama, its heroism, and its promise, the early years of the postbellum period, the era of freedmen's education, received special attention. W. E. B. DuBois, writing some of the first and finest African American education history, set the terms for the subsequent debates on post-emancipation education. Northern aid and "the crusade of the New England schoolma'am" were far-sighted and noble, he argued. Southern opposition was rooted in fear of the educated Negro. Free, public southern education was the legacy of freedmen's education. If apologists for

³ Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* . . . (1919; reprint, New York, 1968); W. E. B. DuBois, ed., *The Negro Common School* (Atlanta, Ga., 1901); C. W. Birnie, "Education of the Negro in Charleston, South Carolina, Prior to the Civil War," *Journal of Negro History* 12 (Jan. 1927): 13–21; Luther P. Jackson, "Religious Instruction of Negroes, 1830–1860, with Special Reference to South Carolina," *Journal of Negro History* 15 (Jan. 1930): 72–114; Faith Vibert, "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts: Its Work for the Negroes in North America before 1783," *Journal of Negro History* 18 (Apr. 1933): 171–212; on postelementary education, see, e.g., W. A. Daniel, *The Education of Negro Ministers* (1925; reprint, New York, 1969); Rufus E. Clement, "The Church School as a Social Factor in Negro Life," *Journal of Negro History* 12 (Jan. 1927): 5–12; Reid E. Jackson, "Rise of Teacher-Training for Negroes," *Journal of Negro Education* 7 (Oct. 1938): 540–47; and W. E. B. DuBois and August Granville Dill, eds., *The College-Bred Negro American* (Atlanta, Ga., 1910); for informal agencies, see, e.g., Charles S. Johnson, "The Rise of the Negro Magazine," *Journal of Negro History* 13 (Jan. 1928): 7–21; Dorothy B. Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828–1846," *Journal of Negro Education* 5 (Oct. 1936): 555–76; Birnie, "Education of the Negro in Charleston"; Jesse Edward Moorland, "The Young Men's Christian Association among Negroes," *Journal of Negro History* 9 (Apr. 1924): 127–38; Campbell C. Johnson, "Negro Youth and the Educational Program of the Y.M.C.A.," *Journal of Negro Education* 9 (July 1940): 354–71; Marion Cuthbert, "Negro Youth and the Educational Program of the Y.W.C.A.," *Journal of Negro Education* 9 (July 1940): 363–71; few institutional biographies were written in this period, but see Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Education for Life: The Story of Hampton Institution* (Garden City, N.Y., 1918); and Luther P. Jackson, "The Origins of Hampton Institute," *Journal of Negro History* 10 (Apr. 1925): 131–49; on education in the North, see also J. C. Carroll, "The Beginnings of Public Education for Negroes in Indiana," *Journal of Negro Education* 8 (Oct. 1939): 649–58.

southern racism choked on those assertions, they simply fell silent in the face of his most fundamental premise: "The whole nation was responsible for slavery . . . it was . . . the undoubted duty of the whole nation to reimburse the slave in some slight degree for years of stolen toil. The smallest return thinkable was free elementary education to black children." His contemporaries also wrote on the schooling of the freedmen, but none matched his power or his poetry.⁴

Studies of postbellum elementary schooling frequently used the state as their unit of analysis. They concentrated on the legislation concerning schools and on the response of the black community to educational opportunity, often emphasizing black initiative. Only seaboard and border states received early scrutiny from black historians. Few writers were willing to attempt analyses of the region as a whole.⁵

That subject matter served to highlight a narrow range of historical themes. Instructively, the predominant themes of the following two historiographic periods—segregation and integration—were of little interest to this first generation of historians.⁶ Remarkably, too, industrial education figured only peripherally in their analyses. Industrial education as a practice in black schooling was over a half century old by the time this earliest historiographic tradition had played itself out. Some of the era's historians had been outspoken critics of industrial education and of Booker

⁴ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; reprint, New York, 1969), 64 (first quotation), 67, 71; idem, *Negro Common School*, 21–42, second quotation on 40; idem, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935; reprint, Cleveland, 1964), 637–69. See also Luther P. Jackson, "The Educational Efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau and Freedmen's Aid Societies in South Carolina, 1862–1872," *Journal of Negro History* 8 (Jan. 1923): 1–40; Charles Kassel, "Educating the Slave—A Forgotten Chapter of Civil War History," *Open Court* 41 (Apr. 1927): 239–56; G. K. Eggleston, "The Work of Relief Societies during the Civil War," *Journal of Negro History* 14 (July 1929): 272–99.

⁵ Henry Sullivan Williams, "The Development of the Negro Public School System in Missouri," *Journal of Negro History* 5 (Apr. 1920): 137–65; Carter G. Woodson, *Early Negro Education in West Virginia* (Institute, W.Va., 1921); Alruthus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in South Carolina during the Reconstruction* (1924; reprint, New York, 1969): 82–105; Aruthus Ambush Taylor, "The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia," *Journal of Negro History* 11 (Apr. 1926): 379–415; W. Sherman Savage, "Legal Provisions for Negro Schools in Missouri from 1865 to 1890," *Journal of Negro History* 16 (July 1931): 309–21; W. Sherman Savage, "Legal Provisions for Negro Schools in Missouri from 1891 to 1935," *Journal of Negro History* 22 (July 1937): 335–44; DuBois, *Negro Common School*; Lance G. E. Jones, *Negro Schools in the Southern States* (Oxford, Eng., 1928).

⁶ DuBois, Woodson, Taylor, and others documented segregation and exclusion, of course. But separation remained a minor issue in these studies, not a theme of significance. Savage, "Legal Provisions for Negro Schools in Missouri, 1865–1890," 309–21; idem, "Legal Provisions for Negro Schools in Missouri, 1891–1935," 335–44; and idem, "Early Negro Education in the Pacific Coast States," *Journal of Negro Education* 15 (Spring 1946): 134–39, focused more fully on legal and legislative issues than most contemporary African American education historians; hence, his studies are among the few that make racial segregation a theme.

T. Washington, its chief promoter. Others were surely supporters. Yet if, like DuBois, they wrote about industrial education, they wrote as critics and essayists, not as historians.⁷ Nor did they document frequently or insistently the erosion of black education that had been underway since at least the late 1880s, although Thomas Jesse Jones called their attention to the trend in 1917, and DuBois was speaking of the issue in 1901. That theme was deferred for the next generation of historians.⁸

The themes that did predominate were those concerned with the image of black America—the image projected to white America, and the image reflected back into the black community. On the one hand, there was the theme of black education as moral uplift, the “civilizing” of a people. Because of education, Richard R. Wright asserted in his *Historical Sketch of Negro Education in Georgia*, “No people in the world has made greater ADVANCEMENT IN MORAL AND CHRISTIAN character. The schools have given them eyes to see themselves as other people saw them, and year after year vice and ignorance have become more odious.” Anticipating the thrust of the Atlanta Compromise address by a full year, Wright used his history of black education in Georgia to assure the white South that racial peace was guaranteed by the schoolhouse. Through the good offices of black educators, Georgia’s Negroes were “becoming more sensitive with regard to discourtesies and insults. . . . It must be evident to all that the solution to the so-called Negro or Southern problem finds its key in what has already been done for all parties by the state and benevolent societies in the way of education in the past 20 years.” For historians in this stream, white prerogatives dictated the subject matter and the theme. Documenting moral progress defined the agenda. Their interpretation was thoroughly accommodationist.⁹

On the other hand, many more early black historians took as their theme black autonomy and self-help. Documenting civic and community progress defined their agenda. While that agenda had its roots in Western

⁷ Even the few studies whose theme appears to be industrial education frequently do not provide rigorous histories of the idea or its effects. Peabody’s *Education for Life*, for instance, is an extended panegyric.

⁸ Thomas Jesse Jones, ed., *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the U.S.* (Washington, D.C., 1917); DuBois, *Negro Common School*, 42; see also Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois, *The Negro in the South . . .* ([1907?]; reprint, New York, 1970): 102–3, 114. Jones, however, wrote largely in support of continued segregation.

⁹ Richard R. Wright, *A Brief Historical Sketch of Negro Education in Georgia* (Savannah, Ga., 1894), 50, 52; see also, Peabody, *Education for Life*; Loretta Funke, “The Negro in Education,” *Journal of Negro History* 5 (Jan. 1920): 1–21; Margaret A. Diggs, *Catholic Negro Education in the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1936).

white value structures, it did not necessarily imply white prerogatives. It could be, and often was, used to legitimate the black community to whites. Yet it could also, without paradox, be used as a source of race pride, as “indications of the activity of self-educative influences in Negro life,” in the words of Dorothy B. Porter. These historians wrote at length of the range of efforts by southern blacks to appropriate Western culture, to grasp intellectual and aesthetic opportunities. From the struggles of impoverished communities to build rustic schoolhouses to the triumphs of black college graduates; from the difficulties of obtaining a black teacher to the satisfactions of training scholarly black ministers; from clandestine schools for slaves to state systems of free public black education; from black literary societies to black magazines—“These agencies at work among the Negroes enabled them to show what they could do toward their own uplift. They did well.”¹⁰

Implied in both streams was the theme of education for the creation of a black leadership cadre. As with much else, DuBois put the issue most succinctly. “Progress in human affairs is more often a pull than a push,” he wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk*, “a surging forward of the exceptional man, and the lifting of his duller brethren slowly and painfully to his vantage-ground.” From that position he formulated his call for the training of a Talented Tenth; from that position, too, he blasted Washington’s efforts to replace higher education with industrial education. Other historians of this early period likewise saw the centrality of postsecondary education for providing the black community with leadership.¹¹

This group of education historians held a narrow range of interpretive positions. DuBois, already moving toward a rigorous materialist interpretation by the first decade of the century, had the most fully articulated interpretation. He took justice for black and working people as the central imperative, studied industrial and economic relations for their impact on institutions and on class formation and race relations, and spoke out forthrightly about his conclusions. Until long after this first period of black educational historiography, he held strongly to the faith that education was the key to race and class problems. “Racial

¹⁰ Porter, “Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies,” 576. See also Taylor, “Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia,” 414; Birnie, “Education of the Negro in Charleston”; Woodson, *Early Negro Education in West Virginia*; DuBois, *Negro Common School*, 21–42, 91; Charles S. Johnson, “Rise of the Negro Magazine”; Reid E. Jackson, “Rise of Teacher-Training for Negroes”; Clement, “Church School as a Social Factor”; Kurt F. Leidecker, “The Education of Negroes in St. Louis, Missouri, during William Torrey Harris’ Administration,” *Journal of Negro Education* 10 (Oct. 1941): 643–49.

¹¹ DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 127; Daniel, *The Education of Negro Ministers*, 28 and passim; Clement, “Church School as a Social Factor.”

antagonism can only be stopped by intelligence," he wrote, though the logic of his argument seemed to indicate that economic development, not ignorance, lay at the heart of the race and class problem.¹²

Other black writers of the period followed DuBois in writing corrective history but stopped well short of his interpretive stance. In Woodson one finds glimmers of a DuBoisian fury for justice, but for most of the other writers the issue of justice was muted. The majority of them sought through their writing to vindicate or exculpate the race, to portray a people who, despite oppression, poverty, and exclusion, were progressing heroically. Their work answered the canard of racists, documenting the community's educability and respectability. As human beings with aspirations not unlike those of whites, their logic implied, whites should welcome black efforts and grant the race educational opportunities equal to whites. One writer assured white readers that graduates of the college about which he wrote "are concerned about the same values with which other Americans are concerned."¹³

Their vindicationist stance left them without the clear analysis of the sources of oppression such as DuBois brought to his work. Racism, their work implied, was the result of mistaken impressions. Correct those impressions, show the dominant race the worthiness of the black race. Then would whites provide opportunities. Given that position, few were willing to be critical of white actions toward black education. They were even reticent to point out the contemporary deterioration in black education. They did not seek to confront white America with its criminality, but to appeal to its higher nature. Luther P. Jackson's observation that the religious training of slaves a century earlier was paradoxical, "at one and the same time an expression of Christian ideals and an instrument for social control," was about as critical an observation of white actions as that generation of historians was willing to hazard.¹⁴

During this same early period a second group of historians labored to document a different history of black education. They were white historians working from within a white supremacist interpretation. Black education was frequently secondary to their larger purposes, but they created an important, if objectionable, body of literature that their black contemporaries, and subsequent historians of both races, have felt compelled to address.

¹² DuBois, *Negro Common School*, 118.

¹³ E. Horace Fitchett, "The Influence of Claflin College on Negro Family Life," *Journal of Negro History* 29 (Oct. 1944): 459; see, among others, Emmett D. Preston, Jr., "Development of Negro Education in the District of Columbia," *Journal of Negro Education* 9 (Oct. 1940): 595–603; Preston, "The Development of Negro Education in the District of Columbia, 1800–1860," *Journal of Negro Education* 12 (Spring 1943): 189–98.

¹⁴ Luther P. Jackson, "Religious Instruction of Negroes," 72.

Within Afro-American education historiography, these writers had but one focus: postbellum southern black education, particularly the freedmen's education phase. Three themes arose from that one topic: northern venality in meddling in southern race issues; black ignorance; and southern paternalistic concern for the freedmen's moral training. Edgar W. Knight, one of the most prolific writers from this group, claimed, for instance, that northern-imposed and northern-directed freedmen's education was "to make for much insane intolerance in [the South], . . . actually retard public interest in public education and leave in [its] wake abortive educational efforts that passed under the name of schools." Central to this tradition was the argument that southerners would have educated the freedmen if left to themselves; it was the intolerable intervention of a people with "little or no sympathetic understanding of conditions and needs in the South," i.e., northern teachers, that created the violence toward freedmen's schools in the Reconstruction period, and that in the long run poisoned race relations.¹⁵ Henry L. Swint's *Northern Teacher in the South*, one of the last statements by this group of writers, summarized the white supremacist case against freedmen's education. He was less virulent in his racial bias, but no less firm in his condemnation of northern educators. His interpretation was not answered for fully four decades.¹⁶

When white supremacist writers did go beyond freedmen's education to investigate subsequent postbellum black education, they did not flinch from the evidence of the deteriorating condition of southern black schooling as did contemporary black historians. But they found convenient means to shift blame for that deterioration to blacks. Stuart G. Noble, for example, noted the wildly unequal conditions between white and black schools in Mississippi by 1910, including black classrooms averaging sixty-seven pupils per teacher, twice the white average, and salaries for black teachers less than half that paid white teachers. The classroom size discrepancy he dismissed as regrettable. As for salaries, "Negro teachers, with a lower standard of living, with fewer social wants, and with lower qualifications, do not deserve as high salaries as were paid white teachers." He did not investigate teacher qualifications, though he had

¹⁵ Edgar W. Knight, "The 'Messianic' Invasion of the South after 1865," *School and Society*, 5 June 1943, 647, 645. See also idem, "Reconstruction and Education in South Carolina," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 18 (Oct. 1919): 350–64 and 19 (Jan. 1920): 55–66; idem, *Public School Education in North Carolina* (1916; reprint, New York, 1969): esp. 265; J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton, "The Freedmen's Bureau in North Carolina," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 8 (Jan. 1909): 53–67 and (Apr. 1909): 154–63.

¹⁶ Henry Lee Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862–1870* (1941; reprint, New York, 1967).

noted wide discretion given administrators in assigning grades of certificates. Thus, the issue of qualifications was never established. The other issues were racist slurs and tautologies.¹⁷

The white supremacist historians were apologists for the emerging social order in the South. They sought historical evidence to justify racial oppression and exclusion. They found it, to their satisfaction, in a racist view of the African American and in the errors of Reconstruction. Blacks and northern whites were to blame for any evidence of southern backwardness.

To a large extent, it was that interpretation to which the vindicationists and accommodationists were responding. But in doing so, they granted too much of their opponents' argument. What was needed were demands for justice based on rigorous historical evidence of American injustice and an interpretive stance that did not concede the white supremacists' primary assertions, but that posed clear alternative analyses. DuBois offered that, but his was a voice crying in the wilderness.

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Vindicationist, corrective histories were written into the 1940s, but, with a handful of exceptions, the first wave of writing on black education had spent itself by the end of the depression. Before its spokesmen had fallen silent, however, a new generation was at work. It shared some of the topical interests of the first generation, but shifted the thematic content and constructed new interpretive foundations for its work. Liberal progressivism and integrationism replaced exculpation and accommodation in a historiographic period that ran from the 1930s to near the close of the 1960s.

DuBois had been among the earliest writers in the first period. His agenda, methodology, and analysis were rigorous and penetrating. They were also ignored by his contemporaries. Yet his works have survived while the others', excepting Woodson's, are little known. The second period was also ushered in by a writer whose interpretation and insights apparently had little effect on other writers of the era. Yet today, Horace Mann Bond's *Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* and *Negro Education in Alabama* stand head and shoulders above most of the other histories of black education written in this era.

Like no other writer until Louis Harlan in 1958, Bond grounded his studies in a firm sense of education's social embeddedness. Education

¹⁷ Stuart Grayson Noble, *Forty Years of the Public Schools in Mississippi, with Special Reference to the Education of the Negro* (New York, 1918): 75–89, quotation on 82. See also Charles Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1936).

was a dependent force, he held, capable neither of developing autonomously nor of reforming its economic or political contexts. The vindicationists hoped to win white concessions for black schools in the faith that improved schools would bring improved social conditions; Bond countered, "Strictly speaking, the school has never built a new social order; it has been the product and interpreter of the existing system, sustaining and being sustained by the social complex."¹⁸

He thus brought an analysis that could look steadfastly at the eroding condition of southern black schooling from the 1880s onward and provide an explanation. That explanation was not designed to please southern whites. It also did not offer easy panaceas nor support for faith in a liberal progressive solution to the African American struggle for freedom. In *Negro Education in Alabama*, Bond wrote of freedmen's education that, so long as both conservatives and radicals assumed "that the Negro was to be inducted into the new social order with the same standing as Whites and with the same social and economic stratification," full educational entitlement logically followed. But as sharecropping emerged as the primary determinant of social relations, it was "obvious that an educated labor force, intelligent regarding rates of interest, cognizant of even the simplest methods of accounting, would be a distinct liability to the system rather than an asset."¹⁹ Thus did Horace Mann Bond announce the beginning of a new period in black education historiography. His bold position was not destined to guide the new era, however.

Like the earlier historians, this second generation generally failed to study systematically the differences between rural and urban schooling. And like their forebears, their focus was almost exclusively southern. They began to view southern education more broadly, however, attempting toward the end of this second period to interpret African American education regionally—Louis Harlan on the seaboard South after the turn of the twentieth century, William P. Vaughn on the roots of integration in the Reconstruction South, and Allen Bullock with the first attempt to provide an interpretation of the entire history of southern black education. Generally, however, the primary geographical focus remained the individual southern state.²⁰

¹⁸ Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (1934; reprint with new preface and additional chapter, New York, 1966), 13.

¹⁹ Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (1939; reprint, New York, 1969), 141.

²⁰ Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901–1915* (1958; reprint, New York, 1968); William Preston Vaughn, *Schools for All: The Blacks and Public Education in the South, 1865–1877* (Lexington, Ky., 1974); Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present* (1967; reprint, New York, 1970). On the history of

Freedmen's education during Reconstruction was of little interest to historians of the second period. Swint's 1941 interpretation held sway throughout these years. Beginning in the mid-1950s, however, historians began cautiously and tentatively to test minor points in the Swint tradition. Their work was part of the broader challenge to the Dunning interpretation of Reconstruction. They succeeded in rescuing the Freedmen's Bureau from the worst of its detractors' opprobrium and in raising the possibility that black education was the bureau's most enduring legacy.²¹

In contrast to earlier historians, writers in midcentury were freer to document discrimination in southern education. They exposed as myth the rationalizations put forward by southern apologists. Using language that even the more forceful vindicationists would have winced at, William R. Davis argued in *Negro Education in East Texas* that black schooling had been "a dual system in name only; the Texas system is essentially a White system with Negro education incidental to it." In *Separate and Unequal*, Harlan went further: "It is misleading to think of the dual system as a financial burden when the two systems are grossly unequal. Discrimination against Negro schools represented a fiscal saving and was a basis for compromise between tax payer and tax layer." State and regional studies from the period were frequently heavy with quantitative material detailing the myriad forms of discrimination.²²

Writing on black higher education lacked the richness of earlier studies. Largely gone, remarkably, was the expectation of DuBois and

northern black education written during this period, see, e.g., L. D. Reddick, "The Education of Negroes in States Where Separate Schools Are Not Legal," *Journal of Negro Education* 16 (Summer 1947): 290–300; Frederick A. McGinnis, *The Education of Negroes in Ohio* (Wilberforce, Ohio, 1962); Marion Manola Wright, *The Education of Negroes in New Jersey* (New York, 1941). Southern state studies include William R. Davis, *The Development and Present Status of Negro Education in East Texas* (New York, 1934); Daniel J. Whitener, "The Republican Party and Public Education in North Carolina, 1867–1900," *North Carolina Historical Review* 37 (July 1960): 382–96; Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*; Hugh Victor Brown, *History of the Education of Negroes in North Carolina* (Raleigh, N.C., 1961). Cf. Hollis Moody Long, *Public Secondary Education for Negroes in North Carolina* (New York, 1932), a sociological approach.

²¹ See, among others, William T. Alderson, Jr., "The Freedmen's Bureau and Negro Education in Virginia," *North Carolina Historical Review* 29 (Jan. 1952): 64–90; W. A. Lowe, "The Freedmen's Bureau and Education in Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 47 (Mar. 1952): 29–39; Martin Abbott, "The Freedmen's Bureau and Negro Schooling in South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 57 (Apr. 1956): 65–81; Joe M. Richardson, "The Freedmen's Bureau and Negro Education in Florida," *Journal of Negro Education* 31 (Fall 1962): 460–67.

²² William Davis, *Negro Education in East Texas*, 137; Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*, 269; see also Ellis O. Knox, "The Origins and Development of the Negro Separate School," *Journal of Negro Education* 16 (Summer 1947): 269–79; Marion Wright, *Education of Negroes in New Jersey*.

others of his generation that higher education would produce the race's leadership cadre. The implication, at least, from writers on black higher education right up to the 1960s was that the Talented Tenth had taken their talents elsewhere. One writer suggested approvingly that higher education served to provide "acceptance and integration in the general culture of the United States," and the handful of other, largely sociological, studies of black higher education concurred. Charles S. Johnson's outstanding 1938 study, *The Negro College Graduate*, argued somewhat contradictorily that black graduates "provide a fairly large proportion of the Negroes who are contributing notably to the development of the Negro group itself and to American life generally," yet noted that college education broke the connection with black folk traditions and documented a move away from the community. The institutional biographies from the period were generally unexceptional.²³

Black industrial education began to come under the scrutiny of this second generation of black education historians. Bond had given it brief attention in the context of his appraisal of the influence of personalities in Negro education. He essentially dismissed Booker T. Washington as the father of black industrial education, claiming that he "borrowed" the term. Later writers went further. Willard Range questioned the importance of the industrial education movement as a whole in *Negro Colleges in Georgia*, remarking that "it is safe to say that after 1900 most schools [in Georgia] had abandoned their dreams" of industrial education. August Meier more fully debunked Washington, tracing the antecedents of racial industrial education to white educational innovations in the nineteenth century. In place of Washington, Meier argued

²³ Jeanne L. Noble, *The Negro Woman's College Education* (New York, 1956), 18; Charles S. Johnson, *The Negro College Graduate* (1938; reprint, College Park, Md., 1969), 339; see also Willard Range, *The Rise and Progress of Negro Colleges in Georgia, 1865–1949* (Athens, Ga., 1951); Buell G. Gallagher, *American Caste and the Negro College* (1938; reprint, New York, 1966); Marion Vera Cuthbert, *Education and Marginality: A Study of the Negro Woman College Graduate* (New York, 1942); Dwight Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Evolution of the Negro College* (1934; reprint, New York, 1970); Horace Mann Bond, "The Evolution and Present Status of Negro Higher and Professional Education in the United States," *Journal of Negro Education* 17 (Summer 1948): 224–35; Horace Mann Bond, "The Origin and Development of Negro Church Colleges," *Journal of Negro Education* 29 (Summer 1960): 217–26. Among institutional biographies from the period, see Frederick A. McGinnis, *A History and Interpretation of Wilberforce University* (Wilberforce, Ohio, 1941); and Leedell W. Neyland and John W. Riley, *The History of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University* (Gainesville, Fla., 1963). Elisabeth S. Peck, *Berea's First Century, 1855–1955* (Lexington, Ky., 1955), deals briefly with Berea while it was an integrated college.

the prior claim of Samuel Chapman Armstrong as architect and the Slater Fund as promoter.²⁴

Histories of the middle period focused on two other topics that were essentially new to the historiography: philanthropy and segregation. Through most of the writing of this period, the philanthropists received a good press. Ullin Whitney Leavell's *Philanthropy in Negro Education*, the first systematic study of black education's benefactors, distinguished between the early philanthropy of the churches and the later philanthropy of the major capitalists, concluding that "this newer educational philanthropy is not alone nor even primarily interested in the teaching of any doctrine or creed." His assertion of the disinterest of the major educational funds held sway among most historians throughout the period. Bond, whose early class analysis might be expected to have raised doubts, saw no class advantage to be gained through giving to southern education. Others had high praise for the vital assistance that flowed to black education at a crucial time.²⁵

These writers asked if the philanthropists might gain from their activities economically or ideologically. Cast deterministically, the question seemed to yield a negative response. Only Bullock found a positive answer. He argued that philanthropic acts salved the consciences of men whose wealth was gained in ways not fully sanctioned by American culture, and legitimated that wealth to American society. But Harlan and others, anticipating the revisionists, posed different questions. For them, the issue was not primarily one of motives, but of social and racial philosophy and purpose. The philanthropists' accommodation and racism, not their putative class advantages, were central. Measured thus, the Southern Education Board, for instance, "failed in its program of Negro education and also failed to challenge or deflect the anti-Negro movement which it paralleled." Others began to suspect that the funds

²⁴ Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, 215. Range, *Negro Colleges in Georgia*, 78; August Meier, "The Beginning of Industrial Education in Negro Schools," *Midwest Journal* 7 (Spring 1955): 21–44; August Meier, "The Vogue of Industrial Education," *Midwest Journal* 7 (Fall 1955): 241–66. Bullock, *Negro Education in the South*, addresses industrial education desultorily, but is less willing to dismiss industrial education altogether; see esp. 100–102, 159–60.

²⁵ Ullin Whitney Leavell, *Philanthropy in Negro Education* (1930; reprint, Westport, Conn., 1970), 57–58; Bond, *Education of the Negro*, 148–50; see also, Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, 262–86; Lance G. E. Jones, *The Jeanes Teacher in the United States, 1908–1933: An Account of Twenty-five Years' Experience in the Supervision of Negro Rural Schools* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1937); Holmes, *Evolution of the Negro College*, esp. 14, 69–71; Raymond B. Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board, a Foundation Established by John D. Rockefeller* (New York, 1962).

not only failed to stem racism but indeed contributed to drawing the color line.²⁶

Segregation, an issue seldom mentioned by early writers on the history of African American education, loomed large in this second period. The key to this new interest does not lie solely with the 1954 Supreme Court decision. Several writers had begun researching the origins of segregation, and advocating integration, more than a decade before the *Brown* decision. But the decision, and the momentous events unleashed by it, opened the gates for a veritable flood of studies, not only of the desegregation battle but of the roots of southern educational discrimination generally.²⁷

²⁶ Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*, 254; see also Bullock, *Negro Education in the South*, 117–20; Meier, “Vogue of Industrial Education,” 241–66; William Preston Vaughn, “Partners in Segregation: Barnas Sears and the Peabody Fund,” *Civil War History* 10 (Sept. 1964): 260–74; cf. Earle H. West, “The Peabody Education Fund and Negro Education, 1867–1880,” *History of Education Quarterly* 6 (Summer 1966): 3–21.

²⁷ Knox, “Origins and Development of the Negro Separate School”; Lillian G. Dabney, *The History of Schools for Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1807–1947* (Washington, D.C., 1949), esp. 252–53; Leonard W. Levy and Harlan B. Phillips, “The *Roberts* Case: Source of the ‘Separate but Equal’ Doctrine,” *American Historical Review* 56 (Apr. 1951): 510–18; Harry E. Groves, “A Re-examination of the ‘Separate but Equal’ Doctrine in Public Education,” *Journal of Negro Education* 20 (Fall 1951): 520–34; “How Imminent is the Outlawing of Segregation?” *Journal of Negro Education* 20 (Fall 1951): 495–98; Howard J. Graham, “The Fourteenth Amendment and School Segregation,” *Buffalo Law Review* 3 (1953): 1–24. Post-*Brown* studies of the origins of segregation and the antecedents to desegregation include John Hope Franklin, “Jim Crow Goes to School: The Genesis of Legal Segregation in Southern Schools,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 58 (Spring 1959): 225–35; Alfred H. Kelly, “The Congressional Controversy over School Desegregation, 1867–1875,” *American Historical Review* 64 (Apr. 1959): 537–63; Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*; Louis R. Harlan, “Desegregation in New Orleans Public Schools during Reconstruction,” *American Historical Review* 67 (Apr. 1962): 663–75; William Preston Vaughn, “Separate and Unequal: The Civil Rights Act of 1875 and Defeat of the School Integration Clause,” *Southwest Social Science Quarterly* 48 (Sept. 1967): 146–54; Vaughn, *Schools for All*; Carleton Mabee, “A Negro Boycott to Integrate Boston Schools,” *New England Quarterly* 41 (Sept. 1968): 341–61; August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, “Early Boycotts of Segregated Schools: The East Orange, New Jersey, Experience, 1899–1906,” *History of Education Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1967): 22–35; Meier and Rudwick, “Early Boycotts of Segregated Schools: The Alton, Illinois Case, 1897–1908,” *Journal of Negro Education* 36 (Fall 1967): 394–402; August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, “Early Boycotts of Segregated Schools: The Case of Springfield, Ohio, 1922–1923,” *American Quarterly* 20 (Winter 1968): 744–58; Donald M. Jacobs, “The Nineteenth-Century Struggle over Segregated Education in the Boston Schools,” *Journal of Negro Education* 39 (Winter 1970): 76–85. For histories of desegregation written in this period, see, e.g., Benjamin Muse, *Ten Years of Prelude: The Story of Integration since the Supreme Court’s 1954 Decision* (New York, 1964); Albert P. Blaustein and Clarence C. Ferguson, Jr., *Desegregation and the Law: The Meaning and Effect of the School Segregation Cases* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1957); Daniel M. Berman, *It Is So Ordered: The Supreme Court Rules on School Segregation* (New York, 1966); Gary Orfield, *Reconstruction of Southern Education: The Schools and the 1964 Civil Rights Act* (New York, 1969); Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s* (Baton Rouge, La., 1969).

The second historiographic generation distanced itself further thematically than topically from the first generation. Self-help, autonomy in educational endeavors, and uplift, had primacy of place in earlier studies. The self-help theme all but dropped from sight after the depression. Interracialism—efforts by liberal whites on behalf of or in concert with blacks—took its place as one of the major themes explored in the histories of the era. Much of the literature of the period documented the efforts “through which the better elements of both races have been able to find expression in co-operative effort for the common good.” The era’s keen interest in the philanthropists grew out of this dedication to interracialism.²⁸

Interracialism rested, to a degree, on a second theme, an appeal to American ideals. This call to righteousness depended on moral suasion and the faith that when people saw the contradiction between racist behavior and democratic virtues, they would be emboldened to take the ethical high ground; they would seek “to make educational practices consistent with democratic ideals.” Writers limning that theme preceded Gunnar Myrdal and contributed to the stream of liberalism from which *An American Dilemma* drew its ideological sustenance.²⁹

The appeal to moral prophesy and to interracial cooperation woven into the histories of the period were logical responses to the era. This was, after all, the heyday of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the interracial commissions in dozens of cities and states, and other efforts to mute the racist legacy in America. European fascism had held a mirror close to the American face. Socialism was making headway in the former European colonies, in part by noting to the world’s people of color how blacks were treated in the leading capitalist democracy. White liberals began moving toward moderate re-

²⁸ Lance Jones, *Jeanes Teacher*, xv–xvi. Among many reflecting the interracial theme, see Brown, *History of Education of Negroes in North Carolina*; Edward Jones, *A Candle in the Dark: A History of Morehouse College* (Valley Forge, Pa., 1967); James P. Brawley, *Two Centuries of Methodist Concern: Bondage, Freedom, and Education of Black People* (New York, 1974); and the sources cited in note 25 on philanthropy in black education. Not all who developed interracialism as a theme were integrationists. Early in this period, some writers lauded interracial cooperation as a means to ease the harsher aspects of educational discrimination and make separate truly equal. See, e.g., William Davis, *Negro Education in East Texas*; Lance Jones, *Jeanes Teacher*; Charles H. Wilson, *Education for Negroes in Mississippi since 1910* (Boston, 1947).

²⁹ Marion Wright, *Education of Negroes in New Jersey*, 194; Reddick, “Education of Negroes Where Separate Schools Are Not Equal,” esp. 300; John W. Davis, “The Negro Land-Grant College,” *Journal of Negro Education* 2 (July 1933): 315; McGinnis, *Education of Negroes in Ohio*, xii; Robert G. Newby and David B. Tyack, “Victims without ‘Crimes’: Some Historical Perspectives on Black Education,” *Journal of Negro Education* 40 (Summer 1971): 192–206; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944).

formism. That movement seemed to historians to offer greater promise of delivering a measure of justice than black self-help. It was, at the same time, more congenial than issues of class, capital, and conflict, the themes Bond and DuBois had called upon their contemporaries to consider.

As noted, segregation was a central topic for investigation by the second generation of historians. It also served as a major theme in the period. Indeed, it was Jim Crow discrimination that brought interracialism to the fore. Black progress in education, black assimilation into the society, interracial cooperation in racial uplift, and the “advancement of colored people” through education, it was hoped, would undermine separation. As one historian intoned the faith in 1950, “educational advance among Negroes creates a public opinion . . . before which all artificial barriers must eventually fall.”³⁰

Those three themes—interracial cooperation, democratic ideals, and segregation—arose in turn out of the interpretive stance of the majority of writers in the period. Their work was founded upon two mutually supportive traditions, integrationism and liberal progressivism.

Integrationists presumed that segregation would, or should, wither away. They were frequently assimilationists as well. They sought evidence of greater white tolerance and of greater black immersion in white culture. Indeed, the Washingtonian roots of their faith meant that the former was largely dependent upon the latter. The integrationists argued that discrimination resulted from caste, caste resulted from attitudes, and attitudes resulted from experiences. Thus, to alter discrimination, one must alter experiences. The experiences that culminated in racial discrimination were white experiences with blacks. The social condition of the generality of African Americans resulted in negative white attitudes, which led to racial discrimination. Given those premises, education was an obvious key, for it could change the social condition of blacks and also give whites positive experiences with blacks. Buell Gallagher concluded *American Caste and the Negro College* with words that defined the integrationist position from his day forward: “Education is the best answer to the challenge of caste.”³¹ That faith also guided American social policy for the next forty years.

The liberal position assumed that if the marketplaces of status and reward could be freed of artificial encumbrances—legal proscriptions, unequal access to public services, atavistic traditions of exclusion, sep-

³⁰ Ambrose Caliver, “Certain Significant Developments in the Education of Negroes during the Past Generation,” *Journal of Negro History* 35 (Apr. 1950): 111–34; quotation on 120.

³¹ Gallagher, *American Caste and the Negro College*, xiii–xiv.

aration, and discrimination—racism would fade and discrimination would end. Racism was a result, not a cause, of racial oppression. Guarantee truly free social, political, and economic marketplaces, and the self-balancing mechanisms of liberal society would take over. Social position would accrue to merit, not race, class, or privilege. The fundamental, though unstated, premise upon which the liberal position was founded was that consensus, not conflict, lay at the heart of the historical process. Undermine that premise and the whole structure would crumble.

The labors of the second generation of historians of black education, then, were guided by a concern to document progress toward assimilation, or progress toward integration, or progress toward fuller realization of the promise of democracy. It sought to document, too, black assent to the liberal consensus. And if one looked in the right places by mid-century, there appeared to be progress and consensus. Black education was not as abysmal by 1950 as it had been in 1920; it was certainly better in 1870 than it had been in 1850, at least in the South; the notable black struggle for knowledge suggested consensus on American values.

But sustaining a progressive analysis required that historians choose their topics with care. It was best not to look too closely at the North, for, as the revisionists of the next period were to document, black educational opportunities and conditions slumped badly rather than improving in the northern black communities, at least from the Great Migration onward. The post-Reconstruction era in the South was also problematic for a liberal or integrationist interpretation, except as it created a gloomy background against which to contrast a brightening present. Antebellum education was of little service; as Woodson had long before documented, black education in the North improved little from colonial times to the Civil War, while an increasingly market-oriented yet paranoid slave society reversed whatever minuscule gains in literacy the slaves of the post-revolutionary period might have earned. Nor was it well to enquire too closely about the sorts of cultural institutions that provided informal education to the black community. For, while there were many of them, as the earlier historians had begun to document, they were too frequently short-lived. Whether crushed by the systematic opposition of white society, or by the inertial weight of a community without the leisure or the social resources to support them, they failed to indicate sustained progress. Meanwhile, conflict between the races, between classes, and among competing purposes for education threatened to overwhelm consensus.

More fundamentally, liberal and integrationist interpretations lacked explanatory power. Although they often described with a measure of grace, they were less successful as modes of analysis. Why was America racist? Why did its schools, presumably the mainstays of democracy,

deny equality to millions of its children? The liberal tradition could imagine little beyond the possibility that racism was a mistake, a misunderstanding, simply a case of bad faith that could be rectified through institutional adjustments. For the assimilationists, the answer lay in the character of the black community itself: its tangle of pathologies, its failure to adopt the speech, dress, interests, ideologies, and neuroses of the majority culture.

Neither liberal nor assimilationist took power and conflict seriously as categories of analysis. In liberal ideology, power is a formal aspect of the liberal state which is spread relatively evenly among all parties in the state. Birth, wealth, caste, and other ascriptive traits that may once have determined political and social power have been, by this analysis, removed from their traditional seats and distributed among all the sovereign people. Conflict, then, is reduced to resolvable issues between relative equals. Thus, one need not even ask seriously about the uses, allocation, or consequences of power or conflict.

There were dissenting voices during this period. A handful of writers spoke from outside the progressive and integrationist consensus. After the work of Horace Mann Bond in the 1930s, however, it was 1958 before a major study appeared that suggested new questions and interpretations. Like DuBois and Bond before him, Louis R. Harlan, in *Separate and Unequal*, spoke from a sense of outraged justice. His basic premises departed from those of his consensus contemporaries. His premises included principled antiracism, an insistence that economic and institutional factors were of primary importance in the development of southern educational practices, and a historically grounded conviction that education alone “would never solve the major race problems.” The residual integrationist strain detectable in the book resulted from Harlan’s demand for justice rather than from a belief that integration or assimilation were solutions to racial conflict. Dissenters such as Harlan did not change the thrust of historical writing in their period, but they did suggest strategies and agendas for the next period.³²

³² Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*, xvii; others in this dissenting tradition include Knox, “Origins and Development of the Negro Separate School”; and Herbert Aptheker, “Literacy, the Negro, and World War II,” *Journal of Negro Education* 15 (Fall 1946): 595–602; Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*; Bond, *Education of the Negro*. Bond moved closer to liberal integrationism by the 1960s, however. In 1934 he wrote that it was “highly possible that [the] day will never come” when blacks would become “full participants in the American social order” (*Education of the Negro*, 4). However, in the new preface and conclusion to this book, written in 1966, he expressed a cautious optimism toward assimilation, and embraced the “tangle of pathologies” explanation of black culture. Thus, he appears to have abandoned his focus on systemic bases for oppression and rooted his analysis in the family and culture of black America instead.

In 1967 Henry Allen Bullock published *A History of Negro Education in the South*, about the most ambitious survey of the field yet attempted. It marked the high tide of liberal progressivism and integrationism. It also marked roughly the end of the second historiographic period. The book encapsulated well the thrust of the entire period. Its dominant subjects were the dominant subjects of the period—a southern, largely rural focus, superficial treatment of antebellum education, extended analysis of freedmen's education and of the philanthropists, and moderate attention to higher education. Interracial cooperation, segregation, and the contradictions between black education practices and the ideals of democracy were consistent themes, though the volume also reflected earlier historians' interest in self-help. It also illustrated clearly the poverty of liberal progressivism by the 1960s.

Bullock's central problem in this prize-winning volume was to find some unifying theme, some mode of explanation that would tie the study together. Disinclined ideologically to search for explanations in social and economic systems, convinced of the righteousness of participants in the liberal consensus, blind to conflict, Bullock was reduced to inventing an elaborate system of explanation that invested history with progressive purposes of its own. He secularized nineteenth-century Protestant historians' faith that the divine hand could be discerned in history. He argued from an uncritical Hegelian idealism that the dialectical reaction of intended and unintended effects created historical change. Thus, the task of the historian was simply to identify the intended and the unintended.³³

The methodology was marvelously tautological. Every putatively progressive element in historical evolution could be linked, without logical possibility of rebuttal, as the unintended consequence of some earlier intended act. Thus, for instance, Bullock argued that the very existence of blacks in the slave South—the very fact of racial slavery, we might say—“enhanced an unintentional development of their educational opportunities and an increase in their social position among Southern White people,” an argument virtually indistinguishable from the argument of slavery's apologists that the presence of blacks in America was a positive good, for it put them in contact with a superior, Christian culture. The crushing near-reenslavement of African Americans after Reconstruction was, for Bullock, merely a “Great Detour.” White racists may have intended to create a dual society, but the unintended consequence was eventual desegregation and movement toward a multicultural society.³⁴

The interpretation, like the liberal progressivism on which it rested, allowed major historical issues to go unexamined. Within his conceptual

³³ Bullock, *Negro Education in the South*, xiv–xi and passim.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 34, 60–88.

scheme, for instance, ideology was exempted from scrutiny. Things happened by “accident” and “mutation.” They “evolved.” The conflicts and contradictions between people were overlooked, and the impact of events and ideas was minimized.

Thus, one of the central events affecting southern black education, the industrializing of the South, Bullock dismissed in a single paragraph. What we learn there is that industrial education failed to prepare blacks for industry, a fact Bullock could describe but was incapable of analyzing on the level of ideology. Meanwhile, he ignored at his own peril Bond’s haunting prophesy, made thirty years earlier, that whereas the black was indispensable under the domination of southern agriculture, under the domination of industrialism “the Negro producer as a Negro is by no means indispensable.”³⁵ Similarly, nowhere in the study did he mention racism, much less treat it as an analytical category. Astonishing as that seems in a book about African American history, it is a characteristic the book shares with most others written from within the same interpretive framework.

* * * * *

The remarkable topical, thematic, and interpretive unity of the first two historiographic periods was shattered in the third period. Beginning in the 1960s, this period featured great diversity in approaches, methodologies, foci, and premises. The result was an unparalleled richness in the field of African American education history. In analytical rigor, many of the recent offerings rivaled the best of DuBois, Bond, and Harlan. The period was marked by a thoroughgoing revisionism.

The revisionists introduced several new topics to the history of African American education. We know much more, for instance, about slavery as an educative institution, both from general studies of slavery and from studies that focus specifically on purposeful training within slavery. The debate that rages around these studies concerns the difficult issue of the degree of autonomy of slave culture.³⁶

The education of northern blacks was virtually ignored in the first two periods. After the mid-1960s, however, northern black schooling

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 188; Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, 289.

³⁶ Thomas L. Webber, *Deep like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831–1865* (New York, 1978); Janet Cornelius, “‘We Slipped and Learned to Read’: Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830–1865,” *Phylon* 44 (Sept. 1983): 171–86; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972); Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860–1880* (Chicago, 1973); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974). Cf. Peter Kolchin, “Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of American History* 70 (Dec. 1983): 579–601.

received more attention than southern, most of it focused on urban schooling.³⁷ Further, historians began to investigate the people who made up schools, the students and teachers without whom there would be little to write in the first place. Much remains to be done in this area, but we now have strong studies of students in the 1920s and in the civil rights era, and of teachers, particularly in the 1860s and 1870s.³⁸

There was also more empirical study of the response of the black community to educational opportunity and of black educational achieve-

³⁷ Doxie Wilkerson, "Ghetto School Struggles in Historical Perspective," *Science and Society* 33 (Spring 1969): 130–49; Marsha Hurst, "Integration, Freedom of Choice, and Community Control in Nineteenth-Century Brooklyn," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 33–55; Carleton Mabee, *Black Education in New York State: From Colonial to Modern Times* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1979); Linda Marie Perkins, "Quaker Beneficence and Black Control: The Institute for Colored Youth, 1852–1903," in *New Perspectives*, ed. Franklin and Anderson, 19–43; Judy Jolley Mohraz, *The Separate Problem: Case Studies of Black Education in the North, 1900–1930* (Westport, Conn., 1979); Vincent P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900–1950* (Philadelphia, 1979); Phillip T. K. Daniel, "A History of Discrimination against Black Students in Chicago Secondary Schools," *History of Education Quarterly* 20 (Summer 1980): 147–62; Michael W. Homel, *Down from Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920–1941* (Urbana, Ill., 1984); Doris Pieroth, "With All Deliberate Caution: School Integration in Seattle, 1954–1968," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 73 (Apr. 1982): 50–61; John L. Rury, "The New York African Free School, 1827–1836: Conflict over Community Control of Black Education," *Phylon* 44 (Sept. 1983): 187–97; among others cited below.

³⁸ Studies of black students include Herbert Aptheker, "Negro College Students in the 1920s: Years of Preparation and Protest: An Introduction," *Science and Society* 33 (Spring 1969): 150–67; W. E. Bigglestone, "Oberlin College and the Negro Student, 1865–1940," *Journal of Negro History* 56 (July 1971): 198–219; Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton, N.J., 1975); Cynthia Griggs Fleming, "The Effect of Higher Education on Black Tennesseans after the Civil War," *Phylon* 44 (Sept. 1983): 209–16; Donald Spivey, "The Black Athlete in Big-Time Intercollegiate Sports, 1941–1968," *Phylon* 44 (June 1983): 116–25; Linda M. Perkins, "The Impact of the 'Cult of True Womanhood' on the Education of Black Women," *Journal of Social Issues* 39 (1983): 17–28; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Black Schooling during Reconstruction," in Walter J. Fraser, Jr., et al., *The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education* (Athens, Ga., 1985): 146–65. On white teachers in black education, see Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865–1873* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980); Sandra E. Small, "The Yankee Schoolmarm in Freedmen's Schools: An Analysis of Attitudes," *Journal of Southern History* 45 (Aug. 1979): 381–402; Philip S. Foner and Josephine F. Pacheco, *Three Who Dared: Prudence Crandall, Margaret Douglass, Myrtilla Miner: Champions of Antebellum Black Education* (Westport, Conn., 1984). On black teachers, see Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf: The Shift from White to Black Teachers in the Negro Schools of the Urban South, 1865–1890," *Journal of Southern History* 40 (Nov. 1974): 565–94; Cynthia Griggs Fleming, "The Plight of Black Educators in Postwar Tennessee, 1865–1920," *Journal of Negro History* 64 (Fall 1979): 355–64; Art Evans and Annette M. Evans, "Black Educators before and after 1960," *Phylon* 43 (Sept. 1982): 254–61; Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861–1870* (Chicago, 1981): 85–130; Ronald E. Butchart, "'We Best Can Instruct Our Own People': New York African Americans in the Freedmen's Schools, 1861–1875," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 12 (1988): 27–49; and biographies of black educators, such as Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T.*

ment. Earlier studies often noted black enthusiasm for education and faith in its ameliorative power, but their evidence was impressionistic for the most part. The recent empirical studies provided striking corroborating evidence, finding that historically blacks have attended school at higher proportional rates, and for longer periods, than contemporary immigrant groups.³⁹

In a related arena, scholars began to probe the history of scientific racism and its insinuation into the school in the form of intelligence tests and other standardized tests. Their documentation of the ways in which racist ideology consistently overwhelmed empirical science is chilling; the implications for the ways in which that ideological science has killed children's spirits in America's schools are devastating.⁴⁰

Revisionist historians built on the topics developed in earlier periods as well, offering greater depth of insight or challenging earlier interpretations. The prevailing view of freedmen's education, and hence to a degree the view of postbellum southern black schooling more generally, remained tied to Henry Lee Swint's white supremacist interpretation well into the 1970s. Though a less malevolent view of the Freedmen's Bureau was emerging in that decade, it was not until 1980 that the Swintian tradition was frontally assaulted.⁴¹

Washington, 2 vols. (New York, 1972, 1983); Kenneth R. Manning, *Black Apollo of Science: The Life of Ernest Everett Just* (New York, 1983); Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (New York, 1981); Joe M. Richardson, "Francis L. Cardozo: Black Educator during Reconstruction," *Journal of Negro Education* 48 (Winter 1979): 73–83; and Linda M. Perkins, "Heed Life's Demands: The Educational Philosophy of Fanny Jackson Coppin," *Journal of Negro Education* 51 (Summer 1982): 181–90.

³⁹ Timothy L. Smith, "Native Blacks and Foreign Whites: Varying Responses to Educational Opportunity in America, 1880–1950," *Perspectives in American History* 6 (1972): 309–35; Selwyn K. Troen, *The Public and the Schools: Shaping the St. Louis System, 1838–1920* (Columbia, Mo., 1975): 91–98; Alejandro Portes and Kenneth Wilson, "Black-White Differences in Educational Attainment," *American Sociological Review* 41 (June 1976): 414–31.

⁴⁰ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, 1981); Allan Chase, *Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism*, 2d ed. (Urbana, Ill., 1980).

⁴¹ Ronald E. Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862–1875* (Westport, Conn., 1980); Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861–1890* (Athens, Ga., 1986); Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*; Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*; Roberta Sue Alexander, "Hostility and Hope: Black Education in North Carolina during Presidential Reconstruction, 1865–1867," *North Carolina Historical Review* 53 (Apr. 1976): 113–32; Keith Wilson, "Education as a Vehicle of Racial Control: Major General N. P. Banks in Louisiana, 1863–1864," *Journal of Negro Education* 50 (Spring 1981): 156–70. Curiously, James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, N.J., 1964), esp. 154–77, which anticipated many of the later revisionist arguments, was generally ignored by historians of black education.

Likewise, industrial education continued to generate interest, but in this period investigators were less concerned with dating its years of influence or assessing its success as a strategy of modernization. The more interesting work sought instead to probe its ideological functions. In one of the more provocative essays, James D. Anderson argued that the fact that graduates of industrial schools did not go into trades or craft positions—which overwhelmingly they did not—does not indicate industrial education's failure. To the contrary, Anderson held that the intention was not to train black craftsmen but rather to create a cadre of black schoolteachers steeped in a conservative social and economic ideology. Industrial education, training thousands of teachers for the South's black schools, provided a means to diffuse an ameliorist, gradualist ideology throughout the black South.⁴²

Philanthropy in black education also attracted critical scrutiny. The resulting revisionism was as thoroughgoing concerning philanthropy as it was concerning freedmen's education. The philanthropists were humanitarians, wrote the historians of the middle period, men of vision and courage perhaps, or at least beneficent individuals whose failings trace simply to a pragmatic accommodationism. Their efforts could not reasonably be interpreted as motivated by economic or ideological considerations, according to those writers. Nonsense, retorted the revisionists. Philanthropists were men of vision, indeed, but it was a vision arising precisely out of economic and ideological considerations. In clumsy hands, this threatened to degenerate into reductionist determinism. However, the best studies remained sensitive to contradiction and conflict among competing visions and also retained a firm grip on the analysis of ideology and economic development.⁴³

⁴² James D. Anderson, "The Hampton Model of Normal School Industrial Education, 1868–1900," in *New Perspectives*, ed. Franklin and Anderson, 61–96; see also Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*. Robert G. Sherer, *Subordination or Liberation? The Development and Conflicting Theories of Black Education in Nineteenth-Century Alabama* (University, Ala., 1977), and James M. McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (Princeton, N.J., 1975): 203–33, contribute to Willard Range's assertion that the liberal arts remained as the core of most secondary and higher education curricula. Also on industrial education, see Allen W. Jones, "The Role of Tuskegee in the Education of Black Farmers," *Journal of Negro History* 60 (Apr. 1975): 252–67.

⁴³ James D. Anderson, "Northern Foundations and the Shaping of Southern Black Rural Education, 1902–1935," *History of Education Quarterly* 18 (Winter 1978): 371–96; idem, "The Southern Improvement Company: Northern Reformers' Investment in Negro Cotton Tenancy, 1900–1920," *Agricultural History* 52 (Jan. 1978): 111–31; idem, "Northern Philanthropy and the Training of the Black Leadership: Fisk University, A Case Study, 1915–1930," in *New Perspectives*, ed. Franklin and Anderson, 97–112; idem, "Education as a Vehicle for the Manipulation of Black Workers," in *Work, Technology, and Education: Dissenting Essays in the Intellectual Foundations of American Education*, ed. Walter Feinberg and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Urbana, 1975): 15–40; Don Quinn Kelley, "Ideology and Education: Uplifting the Masses in Nineteenth-Century Alabama," *Phylon*

Historians revitalized the history of black higher education since its doldrums in the fifties. Most notable was a spate of outstanding institutional biographies, including Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University*, and Clarence A. Bacote, *The Story of Atlanta University*, one of whose themes concerned the role of higher education in the creation of black leaders. These studies dealt not only with their respective colleges' intentions in regard to training for leadership but also with the accomplishments of their graduates, particularly in the field of civil rights and service to the community. Additionally, the related histories of black professional training and of black professional and scholarly organizations flowered, providing insight into professional education and affiliation, and important glimpses into the upper strata of the black community.⁴⁴

Segregation remained the major topic, however. Many recent historians appeared to assume that school desegregation was the end, rather than a means, in black education. Hence, several studies focused exclusively on the degree to which segregation did, or did not, decline. Others

40 (June 1979): 147–58; J. M. Stephen Peeps, “Northern Philanthropy and the Emergence of Black Higher Education—Do-Gooders, Compromisers, or Co-conspirators?” *Journal of Negro Education* 50 (Summer 1981): 251–69; Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868–1915* (Westport, Conn., 1978).

⁴⁴ Institutional biographies include Edward A. Jones, *Candle in the Dark*; Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867–1967* (New York, 1969); Clarence A. Bacote, *The Story of Atlanta University: A Century of Service, 1865–1965* (Atlanta, Ga., 1969); Horace Mann Bond, *Education for Freedom: A History of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania* (Lincoln University, Pa., 1976); Leland Stanford Cozart, *A Venture of Faith: Barber-Scotia College, 1867–1967* (Charlotte, N.C., 1976); Clarence T. Campbell and Oscar Allan Rogers, Jr., *Mississippi: The View from Tougaloo* (Jackson, Miss., 1979); Zella J. Black Patterson, *Langston University: A History* (Norman, Okla., 1979); and Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865–1946* (University, Ala., 1980). On other issues in higher education, see, e.g., John E. Fleming, *The Lengthening Shadow of Slavery: A Historical Justification for Affirmative Action for Blacks in Higher Education* (Washington, D.C., 1976); Samuel H. Shannon, “Land-Grant College Legislation and Black Tennesseans: A Case Study in the Politics of Education,” *History of Education Quarterly* 22 (Summer 1982): 139–57; Ralph L. Pearson, “Reflections on Black Colleges: The Historical Perspective of Charles S. Johnson,” *History of Education Quarterly* 23 (Spring 1983): 55–68. On black professional training and organizations, see Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge, La., 1981): 304; see also James Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors: A History of Meharry Medical College* (University, Ala., 1983); Darlene Clark Hine, “The Pursuit of Professional Equality: Meharry Medical College, 1921–1938, A Case Study,” in *New Perspectives*, ed. Franklin and Anderson, 173–92; Kellis E. Parker and Betty J. Stebman, “Legal Education for Blacks,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 407 (May 1973): 144–55; Genna Rae McNeil, “To Meet the Group Needs: The Transformation of Howard University School of Law, 1920–1935,” in *New Perspectives*, ed. Franklin and Anderson, 149–71; Thelma D. Perry, *The History of the American Teachers Association* (Washington, D.C., 1975); Ernest J. Middleton, “The Louisiana Education Association, 1901–1970,” *Journal of Negro Education* 47 (Fall 1978): 363–78.

continued to probe the origins of educational discrimination.⁴⁵ In two areas, however, the current generation of historians moved segregation studies in new directions. First, some studies began to document the civil rights struggles as they impinged on schooling. Second, a few voices began to be heard asking critical questions about the historical context of desegregation, about the racism within desegregation's fundamental premises, and about the relationship between desegregation strategy and power.⁴⁶

In only one topical area did the third wave of historians show decreased interest. The last two decades produced only a handful of state-wide studies, though at one time the state study was a staple in the historical literature. Histories of urban education have taken the place of state histories. While an important corrective—too little was done on urban education previously, despite the urbanization of African Americans—state studies such as Carleton Mabee's splendid *Black Education in New York State* remind us that even in the North, many blacks have always lived in villages and towns, and were educated there in one way or another.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Homel, *Down from Equality*; Bernard Schwartz, *Swann's Way: The Second Busing Case and the Supreme Court* (New York, 1986); Richard A. Pride and J. David Woodard, *The Burden of Busing: The Politics of Desegregation in Nashville* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1985); George R. Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston: The History of School Desegregation* (Westport, Conn., 1983); Meyer Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn: The History of Race and Education in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York, 1976); David A. Gerber, "Education, Expediency, and Ideology: Race and Politics in the Desegregation of Ohio Public Schools in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 1 (Fall 1973): 1–31; Pieroth, "With All Deliberate Caution," 50–61; J. Morgan Kousser, "Making Separate Equal: Integration of Black and White School Funds in Kentucky," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10 (Winter 1980): 399–428; John Caughey, *To Kill a Child's Spirit: The Tragedy of School Segregation in Los Angeles* (Itasca, Ill., 1973); Alton Hornsby, Jr., "The Freedmen's Bureau Schools in Texas, 1864–1870," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 76 (Apr. 1973): 397–417. Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1984), deals with segregation, but fits better within one of the possible postrevisionist camps described later than in a discussion of revisionism.

⁴⁶ Mary Aickin Rothschild, "The Volunteers and the Freedom Schools: Education for Social Change in Mississippi," *History of Education Quarterly* 22 (Winter 1982): 401–20; Everett E. Abney, "A Comparison of the Status of Florida's Black Public School Principals, 1965–66/1975–76," *Journal of Negro Education* 49 (Fall 1980): 398–406; Donald L. W. Howie, "The Image of Black People in Brown v. Board of Education," *Journal of Black Studies* 3 (Mar. 1973): 371–84; Vincent P. Franklin, "Persistence of School Segregation in the Urban North," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 1 (Winter 1974): 51–68.

⁴⁷ State studies include Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*; Lester F. Russell, *Black Baptist Secondary Schools in Virginia, 1887–1957: A Study in Black History* (Metuchen, N.J., 1981); John I. E. Scott, *The Education of Black People in Florida* (Philadelphia,

The flowering of black educational history since the 1960s has nurtured a diversified thematic content. Two of the three dominant themes from the post-depression era reemerged. The perspective on each changed, however. Thus, while interracialism continued to be woven into the fabric of many recent histories, several of them were critical of the ways in which whites have manipulated interracial efforts for conservative ends. Similarly, segregation and integration continued to fascinate historians three decades after *Brown*. Yet writers played out that theme less frequently than in the middle period of historical writing. Further, in the last decade the failure of desegregation, both as an institutional goal and as a social ameliorist strategy, added a critical and skeptical edge to this theme. Meanwhile, the appeal to democratic conscience was increasingly banished to the margins.⁴⁸

On the other hand, themes previously unexploited by historians of black education emerged as central concerns in the revisionist era. For instance, historians gazed unswervingly at racism as a category of analysis and a primary problematic in the history of African American education.⁴⁹ Likewise, several recent writers used the material base of the society as a theme. Concluding with Doxie Wilkerson that “the effectiveness of the Negro’s struggle for education is conditioned by his relations to the dominant economic and political forces in any given period,” they sought to clarify those forces as the terrain on which the struggle for knowledge and power goes on.⁵⁰

Others began to use the history of black education as a means to explore the effects of black cultural values on education. The degree of

1974); James C. Carper, “The Popular Ideology of Segregated Schooling: Attitudes toward the Education of Blacks in Kansas, 1854–1900,” *Kansas History* 1 (Winter 1978): 254–65. Among urban studies, see Homel, *Down from Equality*; Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*; Mohraz, *Separate Problem*; June O. Patton, “The Black Community of Augusta and the Struggle for Ware High School, 1880–1899,” in *New Perspectives*, ed. Franklin and Anderson, 45–59.

⁴⁸ Interracialism is central to Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*; Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*; McPherson, *Abolitionist Legacy*; Rothschild, “The Volunteers and the Freedom Schools”; Florence Howe, “Mississippi’s Freedom Schools,” *Harvard Educational Review* 35 (Spring 1965): 141–60. More critical studies include Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction*; Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*; Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*; Perkins, “Quaker Beneficence and Black Control.” See note 45 for studies of segregation and desegregation.

⁴⁹ Homel, *Down from Equality*; Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn*; Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*; Troen, *The Public and the Schools*, 91–98; Edmund Fuller, *Prudence Crandall: An Incident of Racism in Nineteenth-Century Connecticut* (Middletown, Conn., 1971), among others.

⁵⁰ Wilkerson, “Ghetto School Struggles,” 145; see also Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction*; Wilson, “Education as a Vehicle of Racial Control”; John E. Fleming, *The Lengthening Shadow of Slavery*; and citations to Anderson in notes 42 and 43.

autonomy of slave culture is the focus of a current debate on the “schooling” of slaves. In a very different vein, Judy Jolley Mohraz, in *The Separate Problem*, argued that the diverging cultural allegiances in the black communities of three northern urban centers yielded significantly different educational strategies, although the more egregious patterns of northern educational discrimination wracked all three communities about equally.⁵¹ Cultural nationalism revived a major theme of the vindicationists, the self-help motif. Once again, writers noted the autonomous educational activities of the black community. Importantly, this revived concern with self-help has shed the early attachment to theories of racial “uplift” and is little interested in vindicating the race to the white community.⁵²

Interpretation shifted dramatically in this period. The liberal progressivism of the middle years did not fade away, as had vindicationism before it, but it was no longer the primary lens through which historians viewed the educational world. Liberalism was eclipsed by revisionist tendencies due to its collapse and retreat as an interpretive mode.

In the early post-*Brown* years the liberal history of black education waxed celebrational. God was clearly in his heaven, and all would be right with the world. But somewhere on that tortured road from Little Rock to Boston and beyond, liberalism lost its confidence. It could no longer easily document progress nor the ameliorative effects of the marketplace. Despite institutional tinkering and good intentions, despite laws and court decisions, America was not moving toward a desegregated society. And liberal theory lacked the ability any longer to explain that.

Liberal history retreated. It took with it its individualist bias and its disinclination to investigate ideology, power, or conflict. The result so far has not been the collapse of liberal faith, but an abandonment of its progressivist and integrationist strains. But robbed thus of its ethical and prophetic core, reduced to little more than methodology and focus informed by ideology, its historiographic products in the last twenty years have tended toward antiquarianism. Liberal historians have provided richly detailed pictures. But they have abandoned the historical task of deepening political and social consciousness; they have not explained historical processes.

An aggressive revisionism upstaged the liberal posture, and was largely responsible for the vibrancy and diversity of the scholarship of this most

⁵¹ Mohraz, *Separate Problem*; and studies cited in note 36.

⁵² Moss, *The American Negro Academy*; Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*; Webber, *Deep like the Rivers*; Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*; Sherer, *Subordination or Liberation?*; Cozart, *A Venture of Faith*.

recent period. The revisionists were held together by a skepticism toward the liberal notion of race and American institutions, a mistrust of consensus history, and a conviction that justice will not be achieved through gradualism or reliance on the marketplace. But it is a loose coalition, not all of whose contradictions are yet clear.

The disparate tendencies of revisionists betray a lack of ideological unity among them. Beyond a shared antiracism, to which many liberal historians subscribe as well, the group splinters along a number of lines. Marxists, anti-Marxists, black nationalists, anarchists, democratic socialists, and those disabused liberals who have not moved to neoconservatism fill the ranks. Consequently, revisionism cannot be said to have a clear voice. We may find eventually that its main tendencies are in fact unique lines of interpretation, each leading to exclusive conclusions.

* * * * *

Where is the field, then, after ninety years of scholarship? Our knowledge of schooling in the history of Afro-American life has grown enormously. Our understanding of the means by which “the owners of the world” have sought to use black schooling to serve their own purposes has increased perhaps even more. That growth has been important if the point is to contribute to “outthinking and outflanking” those owners. Yet in the service of that end, much more remains to be done.

Despite the richness and diversity of the history of black education in the past, a wide range of subjects have yet to be adequately explored. As noted previously, statewide studies of black education can be extremely valuable for the detail and the comparative perspective they can provide. Yet most of the southern studies are dated. Only New York among northern and western states can boast a recent book-length study, and it is unsatisfactory in its treatment of the twentieth century, arguably the state’s most important period in terms of African American education.⁵³ Not surprisingly, then, regional foci have also been neglected. Good state and regional studies would provide heuristic insights into the educational strategies required by northern forms of racial oppression and into the cultural forms created by adaptation to nonsouthern economic, political, and social structures.

Since African American life in the twentieth century has become an urban life, a complete history of Afro-American education must afford more insight into urban education. Vincent Franklin’s *Education of Black Philadelphia* provides a brilliant model, though studies of long-estab-

⁵³ Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*.

lished black communities would do well to provide a longer historical perspective than Franklin offers. Other northern urban studies have been fetishist in their focus on segregation, reinforcing the racist notion that attending school with white children is the sum total of black educational aspiration and purpose. Meanwhile, the urbanization of the black South has netted little significant research on its educational consequences.

It is not yet clear what educational effects flowed out of various black social movements. Black abolitionism, post-Reconstruction westward migrations, the Harlem Renaissance, Garveyism, Pan-Africanism, and various forms of separatism, among others, would appear to have implications for the ways in which the community educated itself, and perhaps for the ways white society sought to structure that education. To date, historians have not gone far toward probing those implications.

Students have received increasing attention from historians, though the coverage is spotty. Teachers in black schools have been virtually ignored, except for the freedmen's teachers. Who taught in black schools, and why? Are there differences in the social profile of black educators as compared to white educators? Has the black community accorded its teachers a different status than the white community has accorded to white teachers? The social histories of students and of teachers will add an important dimension to the history of African American culture generally.

The history of black female education is even more neglected. Beyond occasional mention of domestic training in industrial education, the current literature says little about specific schooling for black women or about the content of the curriculum in black schools as it attempted to mold perceptions of race and sex. Black fiction is filled with images of strong, independent black women, yet nowhere in the historical literature do we learn where that characterology might have been learned outside the home; what agencies contributed to the education of black womanhood? And what have been the sources and content of the schooling of the female children of the black elite?

It is now possible to begin investigating the meaning of postprogressive education for black schooling. Launched in the 1950s, postprogressivism (for lack of a better term) broke the monopoly of progressive education. It was initially impelled by technical transformations in industry, as well as ideological problems facing the United States. But it was propelled far beyond its logical limits in the 1960s by blacks, women, students, and others. Subsequent reform efforts in education arose in part to push education back to boundaries more in harmony with the actual technical needs of current productive forms. The implications for black workers, and hence for black education, are not heartening, for the dynamic of the market is now toward a shrinking sector of middle-level,

white-collar work, and a ballooning sector of marginal and service employment. Until much more work is done on this era, however, we will not be in a position to counter intelligently the current efforts to rationally rationalize the marketplace of status and reward.⁵⁴

Thus far historians have focused overwhelmingly on the purposes for schooling—the intentions of educators, civic leaders, reformers, philanthropists, and perhaps even parents and students. They have paid much less attention to the effects of black education. And to the extent that scholars have addressed effects, they have interpreted effects in narrow, marketplace terms: what was the degree of mobility or assimilation resulting from schooling?

But surely the effects of education embrace more than “getting ahead.” Among other things, historians need to ask the question that is assiduously avoided when speaking of “getting ahead”: getting ahead of *whom*? What was the effect on family, community, and relationships as a result of the advanced education of individuals? Who got ahead of whom, and why, and with what consequences for the community? Those questions must eventually lead us to confront the sticky issues of the relationship of education to the creation of the black leadership elite, the relationship of that class to the black masses and to the white elite, and the role of its education in inculcating an ideology amenable to the continued social domination of white economic interests.

Ultimately, investigations of the effects of African American education must grapple with a more basic conceptual problem. Is there an irresolvable contradiction between the central value of African American culture and that of education as defined by bourgeois society? The point of education in liberal culture is individualistic and privatized. The aim is to allow the atomized individual the opportunity for self-fulfillment in a social setting conceived as a marketplace; this goal can be realized only (or most effectively) through a systematic process of severing communal obligations, and by privatizing as commodities the knowledge gained in the educational setting. African American culture, on the other hand, values a communal ethos. Community and mutuality, not atomization and privatization, define the good. To the extent that that is true, scholars need to explore the implications of the contradiction and the ways in which blacks have sought to resolve it.

Related to that problem are two others having to do with the black community and an educational ideology. First, we have been assured

⁵⁴ Ronald E. Butchart, “Understanding the Retreat from Integration and Affirmative Action: Implications of Some Historical Parallels,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 57 (Oct. 1979), 1–9, sketches, tentatively, an interpretation of this period.

repeatedly of black America's universal faith in education as a key to the future of the race. Yet we have no systematic attempts to test that assurance, and impressionistic evidence raises important questions. For instance, the founders of the all-black communities in the South and West built a number of other social institutions before turning their attention to education. The freedmen supported education heartily but showed by their actions that their hope for liberty lay in land, protection, and political power. We need a better understanding of where education stood in relationship to other social institutions for various groups and at various times, and a better sense of the content of the educational ideologies.

Second, historians have themselves accepted uncritically the adequacy of education as the panacea for the liberation of black America and the resolution of America's racism. They have asserted as true what must be proven: that education *is* the key to black progress in isolation from other social changes. The issue can be posed as an empirical question, and the answer available from African American history is not comforting to the believers. After a century and more of expression of the faith, it is time to pose Doxie Wilkerson's counterclaim: "It is not the education of black men that will achieve their liberation; it is the liberation of black men that will assure their effective education." Let the two positions contend in rigorous historical debate rather than either holding place by virtue of frequent repetition.⁵⁵

Two observations concerning future interpretation in the history of African American education will close this study. The first observation has to do with interpretive scope. While African American education history is and will remain an independent, autonomous field of research, the field must begin to enrich other fields with its insights and findings if it is to have any impact on the historical profession, on educational practice, and on the society. Historians of black education are in a position now to begin putting black education within larger intellectual, educational, and social contexts. Its practitioners have not always spoken clearly heretofore of the broader intellectual currents in American society and of how, filtered through the lens of race, they came to influence black education.

Likewise, historians of black education have been uneven in their attempt to place black schooling within its larger educational context. In the large majority of studies, readers gain no sense of contemporaneous practices in mainstream education, and hence little sense of the degree to which black education was unique. Yet in general, it can be argued

⁵⁵ Wilkerson, "Ghetto School Struggles," 146.

that since at least the last third of the nineteenth century, black education differed primarily in degree rather than in type from the education offered white children.

However, what is most needed in the history of Afro-American education is an end to the segregation of its interpretive insights by placing it in the broader social context in which black education was practiced. For black education is part of the struggle of and against working people in America as a whole. The modes of worker control developed in black education, whether aimed at ideological hegemony or skill training, were being developed simultaneously, if under different names, for use against immigrant and working-class white people. Those modes demeaned black working men and women more than white working men and women, doubtlessly, and wrought greater economic devastation on black workers than on white; the inequality and social conflict endemic to capitalism, linked to racist presumptions, assured that. The broader purposes were the same, however. Both groups were denied the sort of rigorous, critical education they needed.

The second observation involves the interpretive stance of black education's historians in the coming era. Revisionism has clearly taken the high ground. But the very disparateness of revisionism calls for a reconceptualization, a rethinking of fundamental premises, to move toward a postrevisionist stance.

The outlines of postrevisionism are not yet clear, but there are at least two contradictory possibilities. The shape of postrevisionism will directly affect the ways the black community and others think about the community, and conceptualize appropriate social, political, and economic action. One possibility may move toward "outthinking and outflanking the owners of the world"; the second possibility would move in much less liberatory directions.

The first possibility for postrevisionism would be the revisionist agenda and vision, but from within a more consolidated position than that held by the current revisionists. Revisionists are not ideologically unified as were the vindicationists, white supremacists, or liberal progressivists, and hence are not in a position to fill the political void created by the retreat of liberal progressivism. There appear to be three tendencies within revisionist historiography: one that considers white culture and institutions and their intersection with African American life;⁵⁶ another that considers

⁵⁶ Examples of the genre include Elizabeth Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries in the South: The Penn School Experiment* (Baton Rouge, La., 1980); Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*; McPherson, *Abolitionist Legacy*; Foner and Pacheco, *Three Who Dared*; Homel, *Down from Equality*; and Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*.

African American culture in and for itself;⁵⁷ and a third that takes both seriously but brings a materialist analysis to bear in its interpretation of either.⁵⁸

The first illuminates the levers of power, but frequently omits any sense of black perspectives and often lacks an analysis of the sources and nature of power. The second tendency takes seriously the lives, thoughts, and actions of black folk living, thinking, and acting for themselves. However, that culturalist approach often fails to address the material base that forms the context in which black people lived, thought, and acted, even for themselves. It tends, then, to be as politically vacuous as history written by liberal progressives, for it does not offer an understanding of the sources of the oppression within which blacks experienced life. Thus, the third tendency, drawing on the heritage of DuBois and Bond, provides the best hope for a sensitive, informed postrevisionism. It would be a postrevisionism built upon the priority of black liberty, but bringing with it an ability to explain rather than simply lament the denial of liberty. It would have a vision of what black education should have been and should be, but would be able to explain why it did not and does not achieve this ideal. And its explanation, like DuBois's and Bond's, would be capable of leading to political and economic strategies to guide the black community in its struggles toward "outthinking and outflanking."

The second possibility is that postrevisionism will turn its back decisively on the heritage of DuBois and Bond. Revisionism flowered in what has come to be known as the Second Reconstruction—that era in which Afro-Americans and their supporters forced America back to the unfinished business of Reconstruction. But a Second Redemption, though not yet decisively in the saddle, looms larger in American social and political life, and has been seeking intellectual legitimacy. To judge from the early efforts of scholars moving in that direction, a postrevisionism nurtured by redemptionist sensibilities promises to return the history of African American education to the historiographic fashions of ninety

⁵⁷ Authors loosely associated with this tendency include Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*; Webber, *Deep like the Rivers*; Blassingame, *The Slave Community*; Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860–1880*; Mohraz, *Separate Problem*; and Wolters, *New Man on Campus*.

⁵⁸ Among others, see Aptheker, "Negro College Students in the 1920s," *Science and Society* 33 (Spring 1969): 150–67; Aptheker, "Literacy, the Negro, and World War II," *Journal of Negro Education* 15 (Fall 1946): 595–602; Anderson, all sources cited in notes 42 and 43; Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction*; Wilkerson, "Ghetto School Struggles in Historical Perspective," *Science and Society*, 33 (1969), 130–49; and, less successfully, Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*.

years ago.⁵⁹ It would find little reason to exploit the scholarly opportunities in the field as outlined earlier. Such a postrevisionism would be replete with triumphalist treatises that indict the black community and its white allies for the community's problems and many of the country's woes, and with revisionist historians fighting rearguard battles to vindicate the race. And such a postrevisionism could only fortify "the owners of the world," for it will suggest few actions beyond resignation.

⁵⁹ This tendency is still embryonic, but can be detected in such general work as Nicholas Lemann, "The Origins of the Underclass," *Atlantic Monthly* 257 (June 1986): 31–55, and 258 (July 1986): 54–68; and more specific studies such as Wolters, *Burden of Brown*; and Thomas Sowell, *Education: Assumptions versus History: Collected Papers* (Stanford, Calif., 1986).