

**“BEYOND EXCLUSIVITY: WRITING RACE,
CLASS, GENDER INTO U.S. HISTORY”**

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In the final year of the nineteenth century, the American Historical Association (AHA) convened in Boston and Cambridge during the last week of December. The Association then numbered fifteen hundred members and was presided over by James Ford Rhodes, successful Ohio businessman and even more successful author of the arbitral, multi-volume *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*. At this 1899 meeting, there were no Jews, no Negroes, no women to speak of, and all the gays were in the closet. Ten years later, W.E.B. Du Bois would address the AHA; his would be the first and last appearance of an African American on the program until 1940.

Exclusive by class composition, these gentlemen historians conceived the proper ambit of their intellectual preoccupations in terms equally exclusive and Eurocentric.

Professor John Bach McMaster's paper delivered on the closing day in Cambridge and entitled, "The Government of Foreigners", deserves to be considered as the signature of the conference. Reviewing the constitutional complexities of dominion over the peoples of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines acquired in the *annus mirabilis* of United States imperialism, McMaster posed the question that Judge Roger B. Taney had confronted a half century earlier in the case of the Negro. "The question raised was whether these people were under the Constitution or without it." With no recorded demurral, the members departed the 1899 AHA meeting advised by this leading constitutional scholar that the "new possessions," like Dred Scott in 1854, were outside the protections of the Constitution and were, therefore, subject to whatever Congress might do---provided, McMaster qualified, that it was "just and right."

The mentality informing McMaster's paper would persist well into the 20th century, regnant in the works of several generations of professional historians committed to the exclusion of those who, in McMaster's words were "in every sense of the word . . . foreign to us." Fifty years later, it was still the case, as spun out in those fine old national narratives running from Ellis Oberholtzer to Samuel Elliott Morrison and Henry Steele Commager and Dumas Malone, that being an American meant declared membership in the white middle-class and freedom from all ideologies except the ideology of our own exceptionalism. One recalls the telling of the national narrative by the Beards, Charles and Mary, in which there is hardly an index citation for people of color in their two-volume panorama, *Rise of American Civilization*. To be sure, the Beards duly noted the condition and achievement of women, although such emphasis was to have little resonance in the ensuing historiography.

Elision and evasion of the consequences of racism marched *pari passus* with the elision and evasion of class in much of US history writing, Beard and Vernon Parrington notwithstanding. The progressive critique from William Demarest Lloyd to Matthew Josephson was an assault not so much on corporate capitalism but an expose and reproach of capital's antisocial, monopolistic behavior---a demonizing of the dynasts of industry in prose that was Jeffersonian or neo-utopian but rarely if ever Marxist. Whatever heightened awareness of divergent class interests they may have acquired during the Great Depression, most students of US history enthusiastically embraced the triumphalist paradigm of consensus emerging out of World War Two. Allan Nevins rehabilitated Ida Tarbell's Rockefeller as a misunderstood innovator while Alfred Chandler disclosed a visible hand of economic rationalization and consolidation that was not so much good or bad as inevitable. Arthur Schlesinger's *The Vital Center* (1948), the great trope of Cold War Liberalism, framed the optic of much of the profession after 1948 for more than another decade. As late as 1965 (a year of epic social and legislative reorientation in the country) would appear one of the staple monographs of the profession, John Higham's bullish *History*:

Professional Scholarship in America, serene in its mythos of objectivity that a now mature guild of scholars had transcended relativism and misguided activism.

Reflective of the skewed professional preparation of this history-cum-consensus prevailing only the day before yesterday, is the recent recollection of Lawrence Levine, then president of the Organization of American Historians: "I learned almost nothing about workers, slaves, immigrants, children, or women. I learned almost nothing about how people acted in their families, their churches, their homes, their place of work.," At mid-20th century, then, more than half the constituents were still missing from US historiography: no blacks; no women, and organized labor and big business were largely depicted as united ideologically by what divided them materially---more money for both. As told in Peter Novick's "*Objectivity Question*", the serene epistemology and the raced and gendered exclusivity of the historical profession seemed destined for many years of self-perpetuation---as if the real world were truly a reflection of Thomas Bailey's best-selling textbook, *American Pageant*. Leading diplomatic historians Samuel Flagg Bemis and Julius Pratt explained America's nice-sized, informal empire as the result of either accident or disinterested necessity.

Then, just as consensus history appeared to be enthroned in all its monochromatic and masculinist self-assurance, came the Great Irruption from below and outside bringing, at long last, people of color and then women into American history. If the wall of orthodoxy had already begun to be breached at the top of the 1960s by contender on the New Left, much of it simply crumbled under the combined onslaught of the new histories and their cohorts. Triumphant democracy looked decidedly lame after the appearance of Gabriel Kolko's *Triumph of Conservatism* (1963). Diplomatic history as recorded by Bemis, Pratt, and Thomas Bailey suddenly seemed naive or complicitous after William Appleman Williams, Walter LaFeber, Richard Van Alstyne, Gar Alperovitz, and Lloyd Gardner exposed the tragedy of empire and the rise of the National Security State as the engines of the American Century. Nor would much of the traditional national narrative

subsist in articles by Staughton Lynd or Jesse Lemisch in *Studies on the Left* or be recognizable in Howard Zinn's sweeping alternative chronicle, *A People's History* (1977). Imbued with interracial solidarity and radical political culture, Herbert Gutman's late 19th-century workers were on the march to build an equitable social order in industrializing America.(1977).

Developments were noisier and more fractious as the professional presence of minorities grew, mirroring the civil rights contestation in the larger society. The changes being wrought by debates over curriculum, recruitment of minority faculty, the arrival as though by conveyor belt of monographs on slavery, the family, the inner city, the civil rights struggle, transformed Negro history (quickly and often painfully) into black history after 1968, then saw its steady evolution out of the stage of contributionism into the exciting, fecund sub-field of African American history. By the end of the 1970s, John Blassingame, and Leon Higginbotham on slavery, Thomas Holt on Reconstruction, Nell Painter on bottom-up agency, Harold Cruse and Nathan Huggins on cultural politics, Mary Berry and Clayborn Carson on civil rights, and Hollis Lynch and Wilson Moses's vanguard work on diasporic ideologies, brought race and class as analytical tools into US history with an unprecedented sharpness. It seems clear that there is an interpretive line, unbroken if not quite straight, leading from Moses's 1978 classic, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, to some of the major works of the 90s: Kevin Gaines's *Uplifting the Race* (1996), Glenda Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow* (1996), Fredrickson's *Black Liberation* (1995), and even to the pioneering work on black clubwomen, Debra Gray Whites' *Too Heavy a Load* (1999).

New Left history also shaded off, as it were, into early black history where, in the work of Gutman (1974), Levine (1977), and (while still on the Left) Eugene Genovese, it produced some of the blockbuster monographs of the last quarter century. In Robin Kelley's discussions of the infrapolitics of subaltern resistance the New Left tradition finds its most faithful African American exponent brilliantly at work. Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe*

is that rare monograph, a model work in which subaltern agency is authentically recuperated. His recontextualizing of class in the intellectually tangy *Yo Mama's dysfunctional* (2000) is one of the most usefully provocative works in African American intellectual history in many years. The contributions to this new subfield of Jewish academics such as August Meier, Nancy Weiss, Lawrence Levine, Leon Litwack, Gilbert Osofsky, David Katzman, Ira Berlin, Steve Lawson, and Howard Rabinowitz, to name an arbitrary few, were incommensurable. Indeed, the notable exception to the history profession's focus on what whites understood about the thinking about people of color had actually been published at the top of the 1960s by Meier, whose bedrock monograph, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* (1963), presented the reactions of the African American leadership class to the hardening of institutional racism, a classic very shortly to be complemented by Rutgers historian Mia Bay's mold-breaking monograph, *The White Image in the Black Mind*, a fine complement to Kevin Gaines's *Uplifting the Race*.

With the award of the first Bancroft Prize to a minority scholar in 1967 and the serial election of John Hope Franklin to the presidency of the Southern Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and, the AHA in 1979, African American history entered Clio's agora as a fully franchised citizen. The salubrious, exciting, and profound impact upon mainstream history was unmistakable. Winthrop Jordan's synoptic *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro: 1550-1812* was not the first, but by far the most ambitious, in a line of monographs running from George Fredrickson, Carl Degler and Edmund Morgan to Joel Williamson, in which the ideational and cultural underpinnings of the White Republic were surgically probed and exposed to establish the symbiosis of American democracy and racial subordination. Franklin's memorable AHA presidential address, "A Century of Reconstruction History", in its reiteration of Howard Beale's forty-year-old challenge to expunge the travesty of the Dunningites, was in a real sense a categorical imperative that Eric Foner (with Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America* serving as model) would consummate within the decade.

The Great Irruption of the 60s was also a boon to biography, a craft that had been rather eschewed by objectivity-prone Americanists as lacking in universalist and institutional heft---presidential biographies excepted, of course. The meaning and kinesic of the times---of civil rights, superpower confrontations, national politics, televised wars and assassinations---were peculiarly susceptible to the mediation of excellent biographical writing, however. And besides, some historians asked themselves, why should publishers' advances and a burgeoning mass readership be left to amateurs and journalists. From the late 60s onward, then, the best biographies functioned as synecdoches, windows onto macrohistory, platforms for eras.

Volume one of Louis Harlan's prize-winning *Booker T. Washington* came along soon within the same early seventies time-frame as the first biographies of Du Bois (Marable), Martin Luther King, Jr. (Lewis, 1970), Marcus Garvey, and Jessie Daniel Ames (1977). In a lengthy review-essay twenty years ago in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* (autumn 1983), I predicted the filling in of the missing lives of people of color. Although a definitive Marcus Garvey life-and-times remains to be produced, there now exist major treatments of Du Bois by Manning Marable, Arnold Rampersad, and by myself in 1993 and 2001; Rayford W. Logan and Walter Francis White (2003), both by Kenneth Janken; Ernest Just by Kenneth Manning; Ida B. Wells-Barnett by Patricia Schechter (2001); Paul Robeson by Martin Duberman and by Andrew Bunie and Sheila Boyle's *Paul Robeson* (2001); Charles S. Johnson by Patrick Gilpin (2004); and John D'Emilio's Bayard Rustin life, *Lost Prophet* (2003). Rather surprisingly, full bore studies of Alain Locke, Marcus Garvey, and James Weldon Johnson have not yet materialized, but a number of recent monographs contain strong collective biographies of pivotal men and women activists, as in Jonathan Holloway's *Confronting the Veil* (3002), an appreciation of international civil servant Ralph Bunche, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, and economist Abram Harris; a similar multiple lives treatment within an institutional context by Evelyn Higginbotham; by Deborah Gray White's *Too Heavy a Load* (2001), Barbara Savage's *Broadcasting Freedom*;

and Matthew Guterl's outstanding meditation on the construction of racial identities via Madison Grant, Jean Toomer, Daniel Cohalan, and Du Bois in *The Color of Whiteness* (2002)

Meanwhile, women's history tracked behind black history only by a few years, recapturing during the mid-1970s the lost ground on which Mary Beard and Elinor Flexner had stood in 1946 and 1959, respectively. To be precise, by building on the interpretive agendas of race and class in African American history (that of women's studies pioneers, Paula Giddings, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, and Darlene Clark Hine, in particular), women's history has inestimably complicated the way we must now write history. Its epistemic gift to the profession is now fundamental to all analysis---the indivisible, four-fold construct of race-class-gender-sexuality. In spite of their conceptual affinities and a common, marginalized past, however, the histories of women and of people of color have only very recently begun to transcend the structural problem divined ages ago by de Tocqueville and prophesied by Du Bois as the everlasting problem of the 20th century---the racist mindset that repeatedly disaggregates and splits American history into noncongruent pieces instead of holistically fusing them.

With some notable exceptions (Nell Painter's *Armageddon* and Joyce Ross's Joel Spingarn biography), women of color wrote mainly about people of color. Painter's excellent, recent collection of essays, with its stunning meditation on W. J. Cash's *Mind of the South* is another exception that has raised the bar high for women of color. Among white women historians, there has been an analogous focus on kind. Until recently (and notwithstanding Lerner's groundbreaking anthology, *Black Women in White America* [1973], and Jacqueline Jones's *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* [1985]), few are the books in women's history authored by whites that achieved or even attempted crossover saliency. Still, the news in the 90s has gotten better. One thinks of Jacqueline Jones's *Dispossessed* (1992), her splendid study of the America's underclasses; of Glenda Gilmore's sensitive *Gender and Jim Crow* (1997); of Martha Hodes's exceptional exploration of the relations

between black men and white women, and Kathy Peiss's engrossing examination of the cosmetics industry, *Hope in a Jar*.

To these titles, one happily adds Penny von Eschen's indispensable survey of civil rights in the international arena, as well as Mary Dudziak's institutional study of the NAACP in a time of cold war civil rights. Among women of color, one finds parallel evolution in the work of Barbara Savage's *Broadcasting Freedom* on radio and film, and a brilliant analysis of race, human rights, and American diplomacy by Carol Anderson's *Eyes Off the Prize* (2003).

To be sure, the Great Irruption beginning in the 1960s has not been to everyone's liking. The New Left wedge became an African American breach through which women entered, to be followed by Hispanics, Native Americans, by Ronald Takaki and David Reimers' Asian peoples from a different shore. The rich parade continues with gays and lesbians. It is fair to say, that the relatively new American subfield of gay and lesbian history (shepherded into the academy most notably by Martin Duberman, George Chauncey, Estelle Freedman, and John D'Emilio) complicates the analysis of sexuality in ways that are still being absorbed by many historians. A good biography of the Harlem Renaissance gay personality, Richard Bruce Nugent, would be a significant step toward a richer understanding of modernity at the intersection of race and sexuality, as would a nuanced recuperation of the homoerotic social spaces financed and presided over by the cosmetic heiress A'Lelia Walker.

To some, the contemporary professional situation has been regarded as a kind of historiographical jamboree in which virtually all agendas clamor for interpretive primacy based on little more than identity. They deplore, as a prominent Harvard Europeanist recently did, the rise of "victim-culture" in the academy. Even the equable Peter Novick waxed wistful over a "decline in the American integrationist ethos" which he sees reflected in the profession. And there is more bad news for some in the paradox that, by validating the historiography of all comers, all intellectual predispositions,

anthropological conditions, and sexual predilections, identity history invalidates---or seems to invalidate---identity itself. All becomes ontological flux in which once adamant categories are claimed to be labile or even illusory: gender and race become social constructs; whiteness a Roedigerian and Berubean trump card played by Anglo-Americans on late-arrival ethnic Americans; gender a patriarchal conspiracy to imprison women in separate, subordinate spheres.

In truth, however, the new reintegration of American history is irreversibly well underway, although it will almost certainly proceed dialectically. As the consolidating militancy and dogmatism of the new schools of history inevitably abates, the logic inherent in the four-fold construct of race-class-gender-sexuality will gather a momentum that enforces broader connections and contextualizing. To understand people of color, one must study them globally. Hence, the arrival of the newest subfield: Diasporic history or Atlantic (or comparative?) history with its pedigree descending from the Fernand Braudel, Immanuel Wallerstein, and other *annalistes*. This is inescapably the direction of historiography's future, a conceptual and methodological response to the ambient globalization of this century.

To make sense of gender and sexuality, one must historicize these categories across languages and cultures. But to head in this direction presents historians with the daunting assumption that languages will be mastered and a disciplinary dexterity acquired (anthropology, economics, sociology, religion, law). The proliferation of World History tenure-track positions advertised in *Perspectives* is surely a reflection of the *Zeitgeist*. At present, nevertheless, there appear to exist few exemplary diasporic or black Atlantic models that match in rigor and analysis Michael Gomez's *Exchanging Our Country Marks* (1998), James Campbell's *The Songs of Zion* (1995), Thomas Holt's *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain* (1992) and, *a fortiori*, Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (1997)

In conclusion, the old grand national narrative of much of the 20th century is being consigned along with John Bach McMaster to history. Its vaunted liberalism and integrationism were estimable values, true, but they could never really be more than creedal formalities because they served so well the cultural, economic, and institutional matrix whose guarantors possessed the power and the demographics to maintain a hegemonic social order that excluded those who, as John Bach McMaster urged, "were in every sense of the word . . . foreign."