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## Slavery, Colonialism, and Other Ghosts: Presence and Absence in the Rise of American Sociology, 1895-1905

Aaron Yates  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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Slavery, Colonialism, and Other Ghosts: Presence and Absence in the Rise of American  
Sociology, 1895-1905

A Thesis Presented

by

AARON RICHARD YATES

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
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Approved as to style and content by

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Moon-Kie Jung, Chair

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Mark Pachucki, Member

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Kiran Asher, Outside Member

---

Jonathan Wynn, Chair  
Department of Sociology

## ABSTRACT

### SLAVERY, COLONIALISM, AND OTHER GHOSTS: PRESENCE AND ABSENCE IN THE RISE OF AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY, 1895-1905

FEBRUARY 2022

AARON RICHARD YATES, B.A., NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Moon-Kie Jung

US sociology has historically denied slavery and colonialism as demanding of sociological study. The roots of this can be examined at the turn of the twentieth century in the early years of the institutionalization of the discipline in American universities. The inattention stems from a white supremacist racial ontology that underpins US sociology in general (embedded in the category of modernity and the category of sociology itself). There are traces or identifiable ‘moments of silencing’ during the first ten years of the American Journal of Sociology (AJS), the discipline’s first professional journal in the US, in which early (white) sociologists hide the colonial and slavery-dependent material roots of modernity behind a “positivistic” philosophy of social science and a mix of the biologically and culturally inflected ideologies of scientific racism. The persistence of the notion of modernity as given and the unconscious positivist epistemology of mainstream US sociology causes it to stall in face of the paralyzing contradiction between a stated interest in addressing inequality and a simultaneous refusal to examine the issues of power and inequality in the conditions of its own founding.

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## **I. Introduction**

In 1935 W. E. B. Du Bois argued that the transatlantic slave trade was integral to understanding modernity, that the institution of slavery had a fundamental role in shaping the development of American society and culture, and described the sudden freeing of four million black slaves in 1863 as the “most dramatic episode in American history” (Du Bois 1935). Yet one and a quarter centuries from the establishment of the first professional sociology journal in the United States the history and legacy of slavery has been all but erased from any meaningful accounting of the central discourses in American sociology. So complete has been the silence of US sociologists on this issue, that Orlando Patterson, reflecting on a career spanning more than five decades, lamented what he termed the “denial of slavery in contemporary American sociology” (Patterson 2019). Before setting out his argument for the ongoing relevance of US slavery as a topic of sociological research, Patterson individually names the seven “professional sociologists in America who currently work either directly or indirectly on slavery and its legacies” (2019). From the many thousands of professional sociologists in the US, including himself, Patterson could account for only eight whose work could reasonably be considered as contributions to our understanding of the significance for both sociology and society, of a phenomenon whose consequences Du Bois weighed as constitutive of modernity itself.

The silence has been similarly deafening with respect to the historical context of colonial land dispossession, indigenous genocide, and expansionism within which American sociology developed, not to mention the implication of early American sociologists in furthering these processes. There have been some attempts to break this silence in recent decades. A paper published in the *American Journal of Sociology* (*AJS*) by Raewyn Connell in 1997 argued that the colonial context of the founding conditions of US sociology had



effectively been erased from the discipline by the reshaping of the sociological canon after World War II. Connell analyzed changes in sociology textbooks across the twentieth century to demonstrate the shifts in the training of students of sociology that removed colonialism and “progress” from the core of the sociological project (1997). While the article appeared in the discipline’s oldest US journal, it was published alongside a comment from Randall Collins that basically dismisses the entire argument as a “guilt trip” and insists that American sociology is best conceived as an outgrowth of great European thinkers theorizing their respective societies with attention to dynamics that were not meaningfully shaped by the context of global empire (Collins 1997).<sup>1</sup> More recently, Julian Go discussed the context of global imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century, arguing that a survey of the first several decades of *AJS* publishing reveals an “imperial unconscious” that influenced early American sociologists and by extension their formulations of the basic concepts and categories of the discipline. Though Go is careful to make explicit that his aim is not to retrospectively call the founders of US sociology racists, he leaves little doubt that they were both aware of global imperialism (as pursued by both the US and Europe), and of mixed opinion as to the moral justifiability and the social, political, and economic utility of such pursuits (2013).

Neither the indignation of Du Bois nor the periodic interventions of Patterson, Connell, Go and others have proven adequate catalysts for shifting American sociology’s conceptual and methodological centers of gravity. This begs at least two questions: 1) If slavery and colonialism were so fundamental to the emergence of the modern US, then why

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<sup>1</sup> The comment from Collins begins immediately on the page after Connell’s article ends. In the second paragraph Collins reveals his measure of Connell’s contribution by referring to its “polemical power.” Without irony, Collins makes this rhetorical move to position Connell’s paper as a polemic. The implication is that polemics have no place in a social scientific journal.

have they not received more attention from American sociologists? 2) What are the core concepts and methods that have so persistently oriented American sociology, and why have they proven so apparently resistant to change? Patterson's answer, relative to slavery in particular, suggests that the denial of slavery can be explained by a combination of disciplinary parochialism, a bias toward presentism in theory and method, and a misguided approach to studying the cultural aftereffects of slavery on the descendants of enslaved people (2019). Alternatively, a recent article by Zine Magubane argues that American sociology's denial of slavery is fundamentally rooted in an unconscious white supremacist racial ontology that underpins general sociology. Going beyond the question of slavery alone, Magubane further asserts that the reluctance of sociologists to account for American imperialism as integral to modernity is rooted in the refusal of many scholars to conceive of the United States as an empire as opposed to a nation-state (2016). Others have also pointed to the curious insistence on rejecting analytical approaches that take the US as empire, despite its origins as a settler colony that, following independence, in various ways continued a project of expansionism in terms of territory and influence (see Go 2011; Jung 2015). And while there has been an increase in sociological studies of colonialism during the last decade or so, even those that treat the US as empire tend to focus primarily on US imperial practices beyond its continental territory. This continues to leave unexamined the US as an ongoing imperial project of the settler colonial variety (see again Go 2011). In all cases these authors suggest that part of what is needed is a shift in perspective that reconsiders the construction of basic sociological categories in ways that account for the silences and exclusions that have long shaped sociological thought. Along similar lines, a recent article by Jung sheds light on how the bounded category of the "social" as constructed within sociology makes it practically impossible to attend to extreme antisocial situations like US racial slavery without

profoundly rethinking such fundamental categories as ‘gender,’ ‘labor,’ ‘agency,’ and indeed the ‘human’ (Jung 2019).

As argued by Magubane, the persistent neglect of slavery and colonialism is constantly reproduced in a series of ‘moments of silencing’ in which slavery and colonialism are positioned as outside of modernity, and by extension peripheral to the central concerns of sociology as the “new science of modern society” (2016). Following Magubane, this paper argues that the beginning of an answer to both of the questions above is best explored by examining the conditions in which sociology was emerging as an institutionalized academic discipline in American universities. Placing them in historical context, and drawing on archival data from the first decade of the *American Journal of Sociology* (*AJS*)—the first professional sociology journal in the US—this paper traces patterns in the articles that constitute early ‘moments of silencing’ that laid the groundwork for the later continuous reproduction of a general sociology built on a now unconscious racial and imperial ontology.

This paper aims to synthesize elements of Magubane’s claim that American sociology is built on a racial ontology with Go’s concept of an imperial unconscious to analyze the rhetorical and analytical moves that make it possible to “conflate Europe with modernity without precisely saying what modernity is” (Magubane 2016: 381). In this paper my aim is to begin to sketch some of the theoretical and methodological characteristics of racialized knowledge production as a social process. I draw from the early years of the institutionalization of sociology as a discipline in the United States for illustrative purposes. More specifically, by analyzing the contents of the first decade of the *American Journal of Sociology* (*AJS*) within its social and historical context, and alongside contemporary sociological writings, I examine both the explicit and implicit meanings attributed by early American sociologists to concepts such as modernity, race, and progress. Through this

relational close reading of early *AJS* and its historical context, I identify specific patterns and analytical moves whereby the racial and other prevalent Eurocentric biases were encoded into the supposedly general (or universal) categories of American sociology.

## **II. Ignorance, Absence, and Racialized Knowledge Production**

In science and technology studies (STS), and the sociology of knowledge more broadly, the notion that scientific knowledge is the product of a complex social process is basically a given. Paradigmatic works in philosophy of science, sociology of knowledge, and STS have highlighted the role played by culture, training, and laboratory practices in the social construction of scientific knowledge (Kuhn 1962; Latour and Woolgar 1986; Knorr Cetina 1999). There has been a great deal of study related to the production of scientific knowledge in the form of facts, findings, theories, as well as their applications. What has received considerably less attention is the variety of social processes through which ignorance is produced (or perpetuated). In recent years we have witnessed the emergence of a growing cross-disciplinary literature that studies ignorance as a culturally produced phenomenon. In particular, a number of these studies center specifically around the production of ignorance or error in the sciences; in some cases including the broader social consequences of scientifically produced misinformation (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008).

Closely related to the question of ignorance as a social production, is the question of absence (Croissant 2014). There is a growing literature in the field of science and technology studies (STS) focused on expanding our conceptual understanding of absence in science as well as beginning the methodological challenges of attempting to study what is apparently not there (Frickel 2014). More recent attention has been directed toward the dependence of whiteness on an epistemology of ignorance (Mueller 2018; Mills 2007). In other words, key aspects of white identity require the perpetuation of a certain kind of ignorance about

history, about race in society today, and the relations between individuals, groups, and social institutions. While more attentive to historical context than many approaches to race studies that follow a presentist methodology primarily concerned with measuring racial sentiments through surveys, the literature on white ignorance less often examines in adequate specificity the historical roots of that ignorance in specific fields. For example, the emphasis is often on public perception or political imagination (Mueller 2018; Sullivan & Tuana 2007), but less often does the analysis take as its object the production of ignorance within social scientific knowledge production.

This recent swell of interest in ignorance and absence has affinities with a long tradition of critical scholarship that has not only questioned the content of what passes as legitimate scientific knowledge, but also calls into question the dominance of certain ways of knowing or epistemological stances. A prominent thread finds its roots in what Cedric Robinson called the “Black Radical Tradition” (Robinson 2000 [orig. 1983]). In this tradition he places critical scholars such as Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, and C. L. R. James, among others. In no small way, the critical edge of their intellectual contributions lay in their critique of the contradictions inhering in Western liberalism’s universal language of freedom, liberty, and democracy juxtaposed with the violent subjugation of black and indigenous people around the world. Of course, their analyses were also honed by a certain proximity to either the direct experience of, or the immediate aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery in the Americas.

Over the past decade an intense theoretical debate has emerged within the fields of Black and Native Studies that has questioned the conceptual compatibility of theoretical frameworks that center the legacies of slavery and those that center settler colonialism. While some posit that the two perspectives cannot be reconciled within the same framework,

others have been more positive about bringing the two perspectives together in generative ways. A recent book by Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, follows the latter approach by attempting to think of Black and Native Studies as dynamic and relationally constituted, and to explore how attending to the legacies of slavery and indigenous genocide interrupts “the linear and smooth flow of modern and postmodern thought on the questions of slavery and genocide.” Her project, in part, asks what changes are demanded in the “normative routes and knowledge systems” of “White settler colonial studies” if we give serious consideration to how “Black presence in the Americas casts a shadow on and informs the projects of genocide, settlement, and the remaking of ‘the human’ under ongoing relations of conquest.” King further points to the problem of “settler colonialism’s tendency to resuscitate older liberal humanist modes of thought to create new poststructural and postmodern humanist modes of thought that feed off of Indigenous genocide and Black social death” (2019). The way that King describes these knowledge processes is another way to get at questions of racialized knowledge production, and the way racial logics are encoded in the production of so-called scientific knowledge. Connecting our current moment to the historical legacies of slavery and genocide, and the inadequacy of “official” knowledge in accounting for their role in producing “modern” society, King writes:

Even as Black and Indigenous people and the world bear live witness—on the street, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook—to the real-time murder of their kin and relations, liberal political commentary, the academy, and the White left continue to use a form of speech that refuses to name the quotidian spectacle of death as conquest. (King, 2019: 11)

In its particular focus on the nexus of Blackness and Indigeneity, King’s work speaks to the generative possibilities of attempts to theorize the ‘afterlife of slavery’ together with

the ongoing settler colonial project (Hartman 2007). Toward that end, the approach taken in this paper is closer to the transformative spirit and aims of a continuous and evolving Black radical tradition than to the approach to study that seems most immediately concerned with filling “gaps” by thinking within the terms of a particular literature as given. Where some of the recent academic study of ignorance and absence proposes opportunities to develop theory and methods specifically for the elaboration of the categories themselves (Frickel 2014; Croissant 2014), my interest here is not about ignorance and absence as abstractions per se. My concern is more about how an analytical method that attends to presence and absence in dialectical relation can make visible the traces of power in the production of knowledge. Making visible the traces of power on the process of knowledge generation seems all the more urgent when the supposed legitimacy of that knowledge is predicated precisely on its claims to being independent of the corrupting influence of power.

Similarly to King, this paper attempts to think of slavery and colonialism in relation, as influential dimensions of the sociohistorical, political economic, and cultural context within which US sociology emerged. To that end, the analysis seeks to synthesize elements of what Zine Magubane terms the “racial ontology” of American sociology with elements of Julian Go’s concept of the “imperial unconscious” of early US sociology. In this case we will examine absence and erasure as the mechanisms that facilitate the forgetting of the once-upon-a-time conscious application of socially and scientifically accepted racial and Eurocentric ideologies to the study of social life. The institutionalization and subsequent “unconscious” reproduction of those ideologically inflected modes of study and explanation is what transforms an openly white supremacist paradigm into one characterized by a largely invisible (though still discernible if one stops to look) imperial and racial unconscious.

### **III. Racial ontology and the imperial unconscious**

To assert that there is a ‘racial ontology’ at base of the intellectual project of American sociology is to suggest that, despite its claims to generality, American sociology is at all times the result of a process of racialized knowledge production. In other words, it is a process of knowledge production in which racial ideologies and prejudices leave traces on the supposed “truth” claims resulting from the process. This paper seeks to demonstrate that in addition to the racialized character of general sociology, it is also rooted in an imperial unconscious that draws its legitimacy (in large part) from the essentialized notions of racial and social hierarchy that it employs to explain social differences. As I will demonstrate later in the paper, both this racial ontology and imperial unconscious are rooted in assumptions of “race” as a biological essence given by nature, together with the assumption that those who rule do so by virtue of their inherent superiority. A corollary of the latter assumption is that rule by force is also “natural” and those worthy of recognition as fully human subjects are those that can “force” others to recognize their status as such. By this logic, if a person or a “race” is apparently unable to throw off bondage, their failure is explained by recourse to their inherent inferiority. Before an in depth examination of how such conceptions are conveyed in early sociological texts, it may be necessary to offer some additional context for how the terms ‘racial ontology’ and ‘imperial conscious’ were introduced by their original authors in the literature on early US sociology.

In connection to our present subject, one of the more extensive studies included Connell’s analysis of a large sample of sociology textbooks dating back to the turn of the twentieth century, and the emergence of a narrative of American sociology’s history that erased its connections to global colonialism. As noted above, at the time Connell’s (1997) call to reconsider the implications of the sociohistorical processes that shaped sociology’s



foundations was fairly effectively dismissed as far as mainstream sociology was concerned. Go's more recent discussion of American sociology's 'imperial unconscious' recalls attention to the way that the era of global imperialism and expansion during which the first sociology departments and professional associations were forming in the United States would have influenced the thinking of the American branch of the discipline's chief proponents at the turn of twentieth century. To illustrate how the era's imperial formations informed the conceptual and comparative frameworks developed by early US sociology, Go draws from both the prevalence of terms related to 'empire' and 'colonialism' in the initial decades of *AJS*, and from lectures and addresses publicly delivered by the first several (self-styled)<sup>2</sup> sociologists to serve, in turn, as presidents of the American Sociological Association (known as the American Sociological Society at the time). He goes on to argue that these foundational comparative categories (e.g., traditional/modern, primitive/civilized, and so on) continue to shape sociological theories despite the sharp decline in explicit attention to issues of global imperialism after the first World War (2014). In other words, the basically openly imperial categories have continued to be used even as open analysis of imperialism declined. The fading of the origins of the categories to the background, to simply be taken for granted by generations of sociologists and applied to their analyses is what makes it an imperial 'unconscious' as opposed to proactively ethnocentric.

In other renewed calls for rethinking, more recent work includes the erasure of the transatlantic slave trade, US chattel slavery, and any meaningful interrogation of the racial ontology underpinning the early development of American sociology and the emergence of the theoretical and methodological frameworks that continue to shape research today

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<sup>2</sup> Many among the first generation of 'sociologists' had actually been trained in other fields such as political science, economics, philosophy, and so on.

(Magubane 2016). Though science and technology studies has most often taken the practices in the natural sciences as the site of data collection and analysis, some are now identifying persistent racialized absences in the community of researchers and the content of research, and thus calling for more critical reflexivity about knowledge production in the social sciences (Mascarenhas 2018). Arguably such calls are echoes of the kind of critical analysis of modernity that could take as its inspiration the work of W.E.B. Du Bois. Serious consideration of his work provides conceptual tools for a critical analysis of modernity with slavery and the global color line as constitutive elements of the social environment within which we carry out research (Iztigsohn & Brown 2020). Our aim to is to examine the content of early American sociology in terms of the extent to which the discipline's origins in practice sustain claims that there is a distance between sociology of race and general sociology, in other words that race is a special subtopic that is only relevant within a limited subset of research topics. At the same time, our immediate concern is the treatment (or lack thereof) of slavery and colonialism in early US sociology. Therefore, an extended analysis of the treatment of race in general by early American sociologists is beyond the scope of this paper. For our purposes we will briefly discuss the question of race in general in order to subsequently link it to the neglect of slavery and colonialism during the first decade of *AJS*.

In her 2016 article, Magubane argues that the erasure of slavery and of any relationship between the emerging conditions of “modernity” and the “struggles and strivings of people of African descent” was foundational to the establishment of early sociology as derivate of “a particular ‘Europeanness’ that is separate from and unaccountable to their existence” (2016: 370). This erasure from the general conditions of modernity, she continues, made it possible to relegate the “histories and strivings of people of African descent” to “a space of their own...defined as ‘race relations’ or the ‘sociology of

race’....which is itself set apart from ‘general’ sociology and its study of ‘modernity’ (2016: 370). Citing Bhambra (2014), she further asserts that segregating race as a “topic” within sociology obscures (or forecloses adequate interrogation of) the ways in which race has ‘structured and continues to structure the sociological enterprise’” (2016: 370).

Magubane (2016) discusses the roots of American sociology in the writings of pro-slavery imperialists George Fitzhugh and Henry Hughes, whose works in the mid-nineteenth century were the first publications in the United States to use the term sociology in their titles. She argues that their open and explicit embrace of biological racism and slavery becomes institutionalized in the American practice of the discipline through a series of analytical moves that embed their ideology in the basic categories and content of sociology yet removes the overt references to race. Whereas they wrote about “slaveholding modernity”, the later generation spoke of “modern man” “democracy” and “modern civilization”. Whereas they spoke openly about racial hierarchy, a half-century later the inheritors of their foray into sociological inquiry wrote about “race relations.” Among other moves, the shunning of the language of the “Negro problem” in favor of race relations has done wonders for American sociology’s capacity to avoid both the history of slavery and colonialism in the genesis of what they referred to as “the Negro problem” as well as its own origins in the writings of pro-slavery ideologues from the antebellum South (Magubane 2016).

Fitzhugh and Hughes were contemporaries of Auguste Comte, and similarly to the early generations of US sociologists at the turn of the twentieth century, his ideas captured their imaginations, and they found his work useful in furthering their own perspectives. If they were contemporaries of Comte, and taken with his ideas, it makes one wonder why their works were erased from the official history of sociology as it was constructed during

the discipline's institutionalization in the US. Leaving aside the question of why they and their writings were not canonized alongside figures like Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Darwin as the discipline was initially becoming institutionalized, what we can say is that the erasure was fairly immediate. Unlike the changes to American sociology's origin story in the wake of the World Wars discussed in Connell's 1997 article, the erasure of Fitzhugh and Hughes as among the writers considered by their successors properly included within "sociology" was already in evidence within the first decade of American sociology's first professional journal (*AJS*). In an *AJS* article published in 1904, Victor Branford discusses the founders of sociology and mentions numerous names throughout thirty-three pages of text. The general theme of the paper is to consider different thinkers in terms of their suitability for inclusion under the title "sociologist." Those mentioned by name included illustrious (or infamous) historical figures such as Plato, Bayard, Aristotle, Michael Angelo, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Condillac, Balzac, Nero, Judas, Monica, Beatrice, Messolima, Cleopatra, Helmholtz, Erasmus, Cardan, Professor Chandler of Oxford, Sir John Seeley, Rabelais, Gargantuas, Emerson, Buffon, Walter Scott, Zola, Professor Flint, Captain Cook, M. Block, Luther, Ruskin, Shaftesbury, Leonardo, Raphael, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Virgil, Dante, Milton, Hippocrates, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Machiavelli, Campanella, Roger Bacon, Mohammed (*sic*), Ibn Khaldun, Bodin, Montesquieu, Herder, Buckle, Le Play, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Vico, Turgot, Lessing, Kant, Condorcet, Polybius, Cicero, Bossuet, Leibnitz, More, Harrington, St. Simon, Charlemagne, Richelieu, Cromwell, Washington, St. Benedict, Hildebrand, St. Francis, Loyola, St. Bernadin, William Penn, Pestalozzi, W. von Humboldt, Hume, Lavoisier, Newton, Lamarck, Haller, Bichat, Quesnai, Adam Smith, De Witt, Quetelet, Voltaire, Diderot, D'Alembert, Franklin, Madame Vernet, Clamart, Feuerbach, Darwin, and more (Branford 1904).

Branford names more than seventy figures who lived anytime between his writing in 1904 and the farthest reaches of antiquity, yet none among that myriad of named figures with a reasonable claim to sociological thinking were either George Fitzhugh or Henry Hughes. Reading the discussion notes included at the end of the text one can find reference to Franklin Giddings alongside Schopenhauer, Moses, King David, Jehovah, Spinoza, Buchner, and Christ (*sic*) (1904).

Both Go (2014) and Magubane (2016) discuss the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis as a key moment in the shaping of US sociology and the setting of its conceptual aims and the sort of intellectual project that was to be institutionalized in American universities. While they each emphasize different dimensions of the event according to their relevance to the themes of slavery and colonialism, both authors note the gathering of prominent sociologists from Europe and the US, the presence but non-recognition of Du Bois as contributor to the deliberations about the discipline's future, and the tacit and uncritical inattention to the triumphalist display of the imperial and colonial exploits of Europe and North America.

#### **IV. The new science of modern society**

The first sociology departments in the United States were established at University of Chicago and Columbia University in 1892 and 1893 respectively. While there may have been more widespread engagement in the European academy with the notion of a social science called sociology at the time, the establishment of these departments in leading American universities actually precedes the formalization of similar institutional arrangements in Europe (Calhoun 2007). Three years later, in 1895, Albion Small and other faculty at the University of Chicago founded the *American Journal of Sociology (AJS)*, the first professional periodical dedicated to the subject in the United States. In the lead article of its first issue titled "The Era of Sociology," Small opens with the assertion that "Sociology has a foremost

place in the thought of modern men. Approve or deplore this fact at pleasure, we cannot escape it” (Small 1895: 1). While stating that the journal’s content would be “primarily technical,” Small was explicit about its corresponding aim of translating sociology into the “language of ordinary life” so as to avoid the reduction of sociology to “merely a classification and explanation of fossil facts” (1895: 13). For Small this was in line with the expectation that sociology should exert some “influence among practical men,” and so “must be able to put its wisdom about things that interest ordinary men in a form which men of affairs will see to be true to life” (1895: 14). He further insisted “[n]o subject which pertains to men’s pursuits is beneath the notice of sociology, provided it can be treated so that its relation to involved pursuits becomes more evident” (ibid.). Having thus defined the aim and scope of the journal and sociology in general terms, Small closes his agenda-setting article with a promise that “the editors” of *AJS* would ensure that the journal was “a factor of restraint upon premature sociological opinion, a means of promoting the development of a just and adequate social philosophy, and an element of strength and support in every wise endeavor to insure the good of men” (1895: 15).

For a journal thus conceived, it is only natural that we might wonder what Small and his colleagues considered the relevant features of modern life that required the urgent attention of sociological thought and research. Should we find a subject to be absent from its pages, are we to assume it did not adequately “pertain to the pursuits of men” or that it simply did not require explanation? We might also wonder what they meant by a “just and adequate social philosophy” or “the good of men”. How would the journal capture sociological writing capable of accomplishing such lofty aims? Or a more immediate question: To what extent might it be reasonably argued that the aims set forth by the journal’s founders have been (or are being) fulfilled since the above words were penned in

1895? Perhaps the more critical question would be: who and what was left out of their version of “just and adequate” and which “men” were to be beneficiaries of the “good” in modern society? What boundaries were set by the construction of those categories in early sociological theory? What histories and social phenomena were treated as external to the study of modern society? And what were the consequences for the theoretical and conceptual tools left for us by some of the early pioneers of the discipline? For the purpose of this paper we will restrict our analysis to consideration of these last few questions. In their theoretical construction of modern society, what was absent? In conceptualizing modern society, what is the shape of the “other” that must be simultaneously called into being whether explicitly or by implication?

Narratives of the early decades of the establishment of sociology as a discipline in the United States have done much to situate the history of the field in its social and institutional context. Numerous books and articles trace the connections between prevailing perspectives on race, gender, and modern society as conceived in the writings of early American sociologists and more widespread popular views in society at that time. Among scholars of the history of the discipline, there is little doubt that the founders of American sociology were “systematic racists” (Calhoun 2007).

There is a rich literature that analyzes the different versions of racial logics that were dominant over different periods and among different writers, however, most often the analysis is framed around the evolution of race-thinking as evidenced by theories and explanations explicitly preoccupied with questions of race. For example, in the 1990s James McKee presented a sweeping analysis of the “failure of perspective” that prevented scholars in the sociology of race from predicting the Civil Rights Movement (McKee 1993). In a volume commissioned to mark the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the

American Sociological Association (ASA), Howard Winant (2007) examines one hundred years of the sociology of race to offer a genealogy of racial thinking in the field. He identifies four paradigms of racial logics and situates them relative to three political orientations to the study of race. In the same volume Aldon Morris extends the analysis of McKee by questioning if the sociology of race may have evolved differently had the pioneering sociological work of W. E. B. Du Bois been taken more seriously among his contemporary white sociologists who occupied positions of influence. Foreshadowing his subsequent exposition on the place of Du Bois in the history (and perhaps present and future) of sociology, in this 2007 piece, Morris suggests that wider engagement with Du Bois's work may have produced a sociology of race equipped to predict the Civil Rights Movement (Morris 2007). In his now famous book, *The Scholar Denied*, Morris broadened his treatment of this theme further by arguing that Du Bois's early sociological writings from the 1890s and his instrumentality in the commission of the Atlanta University studies prefigured the approach to theory and urban studies subsequently credited to the Chicago school (as led primarily by Robert Park) (Morris 2015). Recent work by Earl Wright II develops a complementary argument with special attention to Du Bois's time at Atlanta University (2016). In the cases of these latter works, while the thrust of the analysis is less on the sociology of race in particular, they largely center around Du Bois himself and claiming a "rightful" place for him among American sociology's "founding fathers." This effectively leaves intact the conceptualization of race as a subcategory or issue for specialized attention for those so inclined.

Our purpose is to develop those lines of argumentation that push against the notion that it is possible to separate the sociology of race from a general sociology in which race is somehow not analytically relevant or consequential, with special reference to the



development of the field in the United States. This is an attempt to further substantiate Zine Magubane's charge that American sociology is founded on a "racial ontology" that construes what purports to be the "new science of modern society" as essentially the "science of the Negro problem" (2016). An implication of her assertion is that race is not merely a special topic nested within a more general category called society, but rather race is integral to the conceptual foundations of society as a category as elaborated by the pioneers of the discipline. In other words, it means that the early American sociologists were indeed commenting on the racialized structure of the modern world even when they purported to be speaking in general terms with no special or explicit reference to race. In order to reveal some aspects of the character of this "racial ontology" it is necessary to closely examine foundational texts in which American sociologists proposed to establish the boundaries of sociology as a distinct field of scientific knowledge production, and to map out its core concepts and problematics, particularly when there are not overt expressions of racial thinking. It is by analyzing the shape of the absence of overt racial argumentation that we can uncover the racial premises from which their ideas depart. In this way we go in search of the "other" that haunts the origins of the field in its American context.

One manifestation of this haunting is evident in how little they published on slavery and colonialism in the early years of *AJS*. Out of nearly a thousand papers published between 1895 and 1905, barely 3.3% are research articles which explicitly treat these themes. The publication in 1893 of Frederick Turner's popular essay about the significance of the "frontier" in US history, the acquisition of the Philippines after the Spanish War in 1898, and the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the Louisiana Purchase are just a few of the major events that were deeply linked with the history of slavery and colonialism (Turner 1893). If these matters were known to these early

sociologists as both historical phenomena (slavery) and ongoing processes (colonialism), then there is no doubt that if we focus on such texts it is possible to illustrate the kinds of ideas that characterized the scientific racism attributed by others to these disciplinary pioneers. In this case we will adopt a broader frame that includes such texts alongside others that are less obviously about the themes mentioned above, based on the notion that their apparent absence from the discourse leaves its own kind of mark, or has its own shape. They write about them without writing about them, and in that process the negative space around what is left implicit gives form to their concepts and categories.

Treating the early published record of American Sociology as an archive, and drawing from concepts like Avery Gordon's (1997) "haunting" or Saidiya Hartman's (2008) work on silence and absence in archives, I will present a two stage analysis. The first stage is an analysis of the thematic coverage and theoretical and methodological paradigms prevalent between 1895 and 1905. The second stage will present a close reading of early sociological texts that purport to define sociology's problems and methods, yet employ various rhetorical strategies to position slavery and colonialism (and by extension, race) as outside modernity, as specialized interests that were by no means necessary for a general understanding of modern society. Following Zine Magubane, this will reveal features of what she calls the "racial ontology" of American sociology, that, in its erasure of slavery and colonialism hides the imbrication of white supremacy in the very foundations of the sociological enterprise, misconstruing race as merely a special topic set apart from the mainstream concerns of general sociology. Though our case is specific, accounting for the rhetorical and discursive strategies that facilitated the institutionalization of a racialized notion of modernity may be useful to other analytical contexts where the erasure or suppression of certain histories and perspectives is a feature of the process of knowledge production.

## V. Slavery, colonialism, and other ghosts: A case of haunting

“How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly?”  
Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (1997)

Absences and erasures can be viewed at different registers when accounting for the ways that they served to mark the boundaries of the sociological, the modern, and the human at the turn of the twentieth century. In any respect, the absence or erasure leaves its own traces, its own shape, such that when the absence itself becomes the object of attention it can profoundly alter what was previously believed to be all that was there. Some scholars have conceptualized the traces of absences and erasures as a kind of “haunting” that plays its part in structuring language and thought (or more precisely the descriptions of the “social world” and the “social world” itself) even when it remains unnamed and unacknowledged. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon discusses haunting as a “constituent element of modern social life” (1997). Gordon’s project can be read as situated at once within sociology, and at the same time critical of it, and particularly critical of its prevailing epistemological order. Drawing from Foucault and others, Gordon presents a compelling argument for problematizing sociology’s claims to producing facts, and emphasizes the importance of reckoning with the influence of power on the production of knowledge, thus blurring the boundaries between “fact” and “fiction.”

In this connection, Gordon writes about sociology’s broad concern “with both the production and the interpretation of stories of social and cultural life” as dependent on assuming a clear division of academic disciplines (as projects of knowledge production) into the categories of “literature (story/fiction)” and “social science (fact)” (1997: 25). This division, she argues, is uneasy because of both the entangled histories of sociology and literature as disciplines, and because “sociology’s dominant methods and theoretical assumptions constantly struggle against the fictive” (1997: 25). She clarifies that her use of

the term fictive does not refer only to literature, but on a more fundamental level to “the ensemble of cultural imaginings, affective experiences, animated objects, marginal voices, narrative densities, and eccentric traces of power’s presence” (1997: 25). “For sociology,” she posits, “the fictive is our constitutive horizon of error; it is what has been and must be exiled to ordain the authority of the discipline and the truthful knowledge sociology can claim to produce” (1997: 25). Gordon further elaborates on the constant struggle between sociology’s preoccupation with “facts,” and the perpetual danger of their contamination with “fictions.” She writes:

As a mode of storytelling, sociology distinguishes itself from literature by its now historical claim to find and report the facts expertly. The maintenance of a disciplinary object, social reality, that meets something akin to the juridical strict scrutiny test is predicated upon a clear distinction between what is (socially) real and what is fictional. As Michel de Certeau puts it, “At the level of analytic procedures...as at the level of interpretations...the technical discourse capable of determining the errors characteristic of fiction has come to be authorized to speak in the name of the ‘real.’ By distinguishing between the two discourses—the one scientific, the other fictive—according to its own criteria, [sociology] credits itself with having a special relationship to the ‘real’ because its contrary is posited as ...[fictive]” (1983: 128). To the extent that sociology is wedded to facticity as its special truth, it must continually police and expel its margin—the margin of error—which is the fictive. But these facts are always in imminent danger of being contaminated by what is seemingly on the other side of their boundaries, by fictions. Like a taboo that is always being approached in the act of avoidance, when sociology insists on finding only the facts, it has no other choice but to pursue the fictive, the mistake it seeks to eliminate. A marginal discourse, the story of how the real story has emerged, consistently shadows and threatens to subvert the very authority that establishes disciplinary order. (1997: 26)

It is this kind of tension between early American sociologists’ claims to produce and interpret facts on the one hand, and their reliance on “fictive” notions like bio-essentialized “race” on the other to which the analysis in this paper seeks to attend. In the content analysis section, it is this kind of attention to the relationship between the claims and their underlying assumptions that the paper attempts to elaborate.

In terms of methodology, this paper draws from Gordon's application of a dialectical analysis that relationally attends to "*permissions and prohibitions, presence and absence, and apparitions and hysterical blindness*" (emphasis in original) (1997: 17); by "writing ghost stories" (1997: 22) and "seeing the unseen" (1997: 196) and attending to what is there as a "seething presence," (1997: 8) or that which haunts that which is there. As a method for the analysis of "haunting" and "ghosts" Gordon proposes:

I suppose you could say that the method here involves producing case studies of haunting and adjudicating their consequences. What kind of case is a case of a ghost? It is a case of haunting, a story about what happens when we admit the ghost—that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present—into the making of worldly relations and into the making of our accounts of the world. It is a case of the difference it makes to start with the marginal, with what we normally exclude or banish, or, more commonly, with what we never even notice...It is not a case of dead or missing persons *sui generis*, but of the ghost as a social figure....It is a case of modernity's violence and wounds, and a case of the haunting reminder of the complex social relations in which we live. It is a case that teaches a lesson (or two) about how to write what can represent that haunting reminder, what can represent systematic injury and the remarkable lives made in the wake of the making of our social world. (1997: 24-25)

In light of Gordon's invitation to "start with the marginal" and with what we "normally exclude or banish," this project asks just how absent (or present) were analyses of slavery and colonialism in the first ten published volumes of *AJS*? And further, in what ways does their presence/absence tend to acknowledge or tend to erase "modernity's violence and wounds?" In other words, what ghosts haunt these early texts? And what are their stories?

Such an undertaking necessarily entails close attention to the structures and patterns in language through which presence/absence is conveyed, or through which violence and power are erased. Given the extreme violence characteristic of both slavery and the elimination of indigenous peoples as an imperative of a settler colonial project, the analysis undertaken here is also informed by the work of some Black feminist scholars that have

given special attention both to slavery and violence, and to questions of reckoning with silences in the archives, and the subsequent challenges in attempts at representation. In “Venus in Two Acts,” Saidiya Hartman (2008) outlines the calculated imaginative work required to read archives against the grain, to look for what the creators of the archive did not know they had taken for granted, and to grapple with what voice can(not) be given for the dead when their voices left little or no trace. Another cue can be taken from a classic work of literary and cultural theorist Hortense Spillers (1987) in which she attends to the relationship between semantic construction by exclusion and what is produced by the foreclosure (in language) of other possible meanings, with special attention to the history of US chattel slavery and the representation of Black people.

These theorists provide illustrative examples of a method of reading that attends to the construction of meaning in terms of both what is said and not said (or perhaps what cannot be said), how life is captured (and/or distorted) in certain grammatical or syntactical constructions, and attention to the articulation of the production of narrative and the social and political culture (and power relations) whose management those narratives variously disrupt or reinforce. By analyzing the construction in language of categories like “mother,” “father,” “slave,” “master,” “property,” “family,” “kin,” “gender,” “sexuality,” etc. Spillers offers a reading of the “American Grammar Book” through which the non-humanity of the “ungendered” captive African has been repeatedly accomplished (1987). The essay is an example of how one traces the relations of power and dominance through a reading of the traces of those relations in the archive. In this case the archive is narrative construction in the sociological and historiographical writings of authorized producers of knowledge, those invested with the structurally validated authority to “name” (as Spillers might put it), in conversation (or perhaps contrast) with narratives of the “object” as captured by

autobiographical works such as those belonging to Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs), Frederick Douglass, and Malcolm El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. Another relevant example of this method is the analysis of Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection* and the way she deconstructs and re-conceives the categories of “agency,” “redress,” “freedom,” “power,” “gender,” “rights,” and others in light of a deep interrogation of how the meanings of such terms are recast when account is given of the constant terror produced by the “quotidian violence” of slavery (1997).

Of particular relevance for the method of analytical reading of archival texts in this paper, is the necessity of seeing “ghosts” by reading “between the lines.” Spillers suggests that we could “interpret the whole career of African-Americans” as an “*intruding* tale” inhabiting a “‘garret’ space—‘between the lines’”. Her essay further demonstrates a method of reading in which one explores the construction of meaning (and its implications for social and political life (or culture)) in terms of the mutually constitutive relationship between that which is said and that which is left unsaid, between the text and its context. In other words, it is a way of reading that is attentive to the way the context of language shapes the meaning of specific categories and through grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, shape the terrain on which the kind of complex thought reflected in the production of historiographical and sociological knowledge takes place. Because our concern is precisely the early construction of sociology’s fundamental categories as developed in the United States, such a way of reading allows the kind of examination that can re-join certain categories to their context, and thereby, their implications for the underlying assumptions or premises regarding the ontological and epistemological building blocks of sociological theory and method (relative to the ongoing boundary-setting work inherent to the elaboration of any category).

If we could say that—in its one and a quarter century inattention to empire and colonialism and its perpetual denial of slavery—American sociology is haunted by the stories not told of the imperial and racial terror and violence through which ‘modernity’ was constructed, then we could also say that this contextual and substantive haunting has been coterminous with an accompanying haunting of a foreclosed epistemological order. The ghosts of the latter haunting can be conceived as ways of knowing rendered illegitimate in order for what George Steinmetz terms ‘methodological positivism’ to maintain its position as the dominant epistemological approach from which sociological knowledge derives its authority and legitimacy as ‘scientific’ (2005). In the sections that follow, this paper attempts to begin telling the stories of the ghosts that have haunted American sociology since its inception.

#### ***A. Topic analysis***

The aim of this paper is to investigate the relative silence of early US sociology on matters of slavery and colonialism along two related, but distinct registers. First, I examine the presence/absence of slavery and colonialism as substantive topics or areas of research as preserved in the published sociological record. This part of the analysis entails a survey of the topics or subjects addressed by sociology papers published in the United States. Second, I look more closely at a subset of the papers that most explicitly attempt to define general sociology’s concepts, categories, and methods. This second register, presented in a separate section that follows, involves the close reading strategy outlined above whereby I analyze the specific arguments in the papers for their relevance to slavery and colonialism, “reading between the lines” for the meanings constructed through their various silences and exclusions, as well as the premises or assumptions upon which the paper’s arguments are based. As the only recognized professional sociology journal in the United States during the



period of 1895-1922, I draw all of the papers to be analyzed from the *American Journal of Sociology* (*AJS*) for both dimensions of the overall investigation.

The analysis presented in this paper treats the corpus of texts published in the first ten volumes of *AJS*, between 1895 and 1905, as archival data. Access to the corpus was provided by JSTOR's "Data for Research" service. JSTOR currently has archives that include publication years 1895 through 2015. The corpus for this entire period was included in the data request, and JSTOR provided full text for 25,258 records. The data request also included corpus data for the *American Sociological Review* and *Social Forces* for the same period. The full dataset contains over 54,000 records. Along with the text data, JSTOR also included metadata files for each record in .xml format, as well as ngrams1, 2, and 3. Future projects will expand the current inquiry to include a more exhaustive subset of the larger dataset. As noted above, this paper will focus more narrowly on the early years of *AJS* during which time it was the only professionally recognized sociology journal in the US.

In an iterative process involving at least three distinct stages, I hand coded just over 941 texts published across the first ten volumes of *AJS*. In the first stage I coded each record by type according to categories that included: article, review, editorial, note, and misc among others. Once each record had been categorized by type, I selected only the articles as a subset for further analysis. This reduced the overall number of records to be analyzed to 401. Only the articles were selected because the focus of this paper is the development of sociological thought as captured in the sorts of original articles published in the journal. While there is something to be said for patterns in the tone and substance of book reviews, as well as for the selection of books with review articles published in the journal, in this case we are more immediately interested in the self-conscious development of US sociology in

original works, rather than ambiguously sociologically inflected reviews of books written in a variety of disciplines thought to be relevant to early sociological thinkers.

In another round I reviewed each article in order to classify them according to two distinct aspects. The first aspect included identifying central themes addressed and coding articles by subject matter. The inclusion of abstracts for published papers was implemented for *AJS* in 1922. Because the first ten volumes predate the convention of beginning articles with summaries of key themes and arguments, I determined the topics of articles in two primary ways: 1) by title, and 2) by reading the first few pages of the article. In some cases I read entire articles when the primary methods of identifying the key subject matter seemed unreliable. Examples of subject categories include: civil society, industry, crime, education, Christianity, religion, social dynamics, governance, democracy, social philosophy, race, slavery, social reform, theology, eugenics, progress, history, the state, colonialism, Civil War, ethics, modernity, and more. Naturally, every paper contained multiple topics, and so the categories are not mutually exclusive. If a paper was about work conditions for women in sweat shops it would include at least the codes ‘women,’ ‘labor,’ and ‘industry.’ **Table 1** shows the frequencies for the 25 most prevalent themes as well as the frequencies of papers falling within our categories of interest for explicit engagement with the subjects of slavery, colonialism, and their bearing (if any) on modern society.

**Table 1. Top Frequencies of paper topics in *AJS* Vols. 1-10**

<b>Topic</b>	<i>count</i>	<i>count/total papers</i>
civilization	163	41%
theory	155	39%
sociology	149	37%
discipline	132	33%
methodology	79	20%
social philosophy	69	17%
nation	64	16%

industry	62	15%
governance	59	15%
economy	59	15%
law	57	14%
cities	54	13%
religion	45	11%
labor	45	11%
policy	45	11%
philosophy of social science	42	10%
politics	42	10%
biology	40	10%
global	40	10%
social dynamics	39	10%
social reform	38	9%
social science	35	9%
state	33	8%
education	32	8%
race	31	8%
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slavery	17	4%
indigenous	14	3%
colonialism	9	2%
frontiers	9	2%

Perhaps unexpectedly, among the most prevalent themes found among the papers was “sociology” itself. More than a quarter of the papers had as their central theme arguments, definitions, and clarifications about how sociology should be understood as a type of scientific knowledge, its position relative to other disciplines, its implications for public policy, its core theoretical constructs, and how sociological research and theorizing should properly be done. Most immediately, this reveals how self-consciously these early American sociologists were attempting to carve out space within the academic and intellectual field for a project they were calling sociology. The types of claims they were making about the nature of sociology, among other things, drew heavily from the work of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Charles Darwin. There was some discussion of categories that, even at that time, were associated with Marx (e.g., labor, capital, etc.), but the editors and contributors to

*AJS* were more inclined towards Benjamin Kidd's refutations of Marx (see Small 1895). As demonstrated in a previous section, many papers were explicit in their assertion that sociology should be understood as a science in the same manner as the natural sciences, and similarly in their view that sociology's aim was the discovery and articulation of transhistorical laws of social life. In addition, the discussions in the early papers fit rather neatly into the kind of methodological positivism that Steinmetz argues has become a sort of persistent epistemological unconscious that continues to characterize mainstream US sociology today (Steinmetz 2005). Among the key points of compatibility between the discipline-defining ideas in early *AJS* and the "epistemological unconscious" described by Steinmetz are the adherence to an empiricism that "conflates 'essence' with 'phenomenon'" and the 'scientistic' assumption that "the social world can be studied in the same manner as the natural one" (2005: 112, 115). Both of these positions are involved in the bio-essentialized racial thinking that characterized the (non)treatment of slavery and colonialism during the first decade of *AJS*.

Among the other prevalent topics for papers were matters of industry and labor, governance, discussions of various features of the "modern" nation-state, cities or urban studies, and matters of religion. From among the 401 papers analyzed, only 17 were found to contain mention of slavery (chattel or otherwise), 14 that contained significant reference to indigenous populations, 9 that either mentioned or had (by their non-recognition of it) some bearing on colonialism, and 9 that related to the previous two due to focus on the issue of 'frontiers.' While it might seem natural to expect that no particular topics would appear over and over again, as discussed above regarding the high volume of papers attempting to establish the boundaries and imperatives of sociology, it seems more logical to assume that there was a correlation between the topics of published papers, and the preoccupations of

the authors and editors about the most fundamental social forces of their times. In light of this, it becomes more peculiar that four percent or less of the papers deal with the quite immediate questions of slavery and colonialism while some of their contemporaries recognized their central importance to the rise of modern industrial capitalism.

Though written several decades after our period of focus in 1895-1905, Du Bois's note in *Black Reconstruction* on how Black labor was "the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale; new cities were built on the results of black labor, and a new labor problem, involving all white labor, arose both in Europe and America," makes clear the centrality of slavery to the rise of modern industry (1935). For all the talk of industry and labor, none of them considered slavery as relevant. Of course, a system of commerce with a foundation stone in slavery, was also only possible because of the settler conquest and occupation of land. This makes clear that displacement and elimination of indigenous peoples in the territories that make up the United States was also a necessary condition of possibility for the emergence of what these sociologists imagined to be the modern world. The scant attention to modernity's founding violence paints the history of sociology as the history of a discipline trying to define its object of study while continuously suppressing the historical processes which produced its object of investigation. By taking "modern society" as its residual category and taking race—or the sociology of race—as a subfield or sub-category of society, it makes invisible the fundamental imbrication of race in constituting modern society. In other words, without race, or more precisely white supremacy, there would be no modern society as we know it.

The second aspect for which coding was done during the second round pertains to my assessment of the underlying theoretical or conceptual paradigm according to which the

arguments in the articles had been formed. For the purposes of the current study, ‘paradigm’ is being used rather loosely to refer to the (often) metaphysical premises or assumptions upon which a paper’s argument seems to be based. This can include the ontological and epistemological foundations of the analysis in a given paper, whether made explicit by its author or left implicit and operating at the level of what the author has taken for granted. While I drew on the same primary means of identifying subject matter discussed above, the identification of a paradigm emerged inductively and relied more heavily on the reading of articles. As I proceeded through the multiple iterations of coding, I was able to see certain patterns of repetition in the use of terms and concepts associated with particular paradigmatic thinkers (e.g., evolution and social control were often related to ideas attributed to Herbert Spencer or Edward Ross respectively). There also was a fair amount of repeat publishing of the same authors across the ten volumes. Sometimes this meant authors writing about a variety of themes throughout the decade, but more often this was connected to the publication of series of articles treating various elements of some overarching theme (e.g., “social assimilation”). Sometimes these articles had three or four separate pieces, while others had more than ten and even up to eighteen different installments. Recognition of this pattern in the titles, authors, and paradigm-specific terms and concepts eventually made it possible to anticipate the compatibility of a paper with the paradigm by title alone.

Many of the papers, especially those concerned with either theory or attempting to define the boundaries and imperatives of sociological inquiry, were overwhelmingly preoccupied with the elaboration of evolutionary theories of social development most often attributed to a combination of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Charles Darwin. Lester Ward, Franklin Giddings, and Albion Small were among the theorists based in the United States whose ideas (often building on or in conversation with the work of those named in

the previous sentence) were also taken as points of departure or reference for papers concerned with progress, social evolution, and civilization. This preoccupation with evolutionary theories is not surprising as the pattern has already been noted by Connell (1997) as among the defining features of American sociology in the period before World War I. Connell's assessment has also been echoed by Calhoun (2007) and others writing in the volume *Sociology in America* that was compiled to mark the occasion of 100 years since the founding of the American Sociological Association in 1905. Examples of codes used to classify papers relative to paradigms include: methodology, theory, social evolution, evolution, Comte, Spencer, history, biology, philosophy of social science, frontiers, discipline, and social control. One or more of the paradigm-related codes were applied to more than a quarter of the 401 papers in the dataset. On the whole you could say that the historical consciousness that seems to run through these papers was one which imagined the sociologists to be at the cutting edge of human progress, and now turning their attention to developing "scientific" explanations for how they came to be so advanced.

### ***B. Content analysis***

In the process of coding and analyzing the topics addressed by the 401 articles referenced above, I also identified a subset for closer reading "between the lines" for their relevance to the construction of general sociology and their (in)attention to slavery and colonialism in the construction of its supposed objects and methods of inquiry. For this subset I identified 42 articles that were the most explicitly aimed at defining sociology and marking it as a distinct social science. For the purposes of this investigation, I focused on articles that were addressed to the emerging field of sociology itself, or the broader social scientific field. In this instance I chose to exclude one series of articles under the title "Introduction to Sociology" by de Greef because that particular series was a translated

reprint of a series of introductory lectures prepared by de Greef and was thus addressed primarily to students.

The remaining articles in the subset include stand alone articles as well as several series with multiple installments. For example, there is a series by Albion Small with nine parts under the title “The Scope of Sociology.” The subtitles include “the development of sociological method,” “the assumptions of sociology,” “the problems of sociology,” “the primary concepts of sociology,” “premises of practical sociology,” and so on. Another series by Lester Ward under the title “Contributions to Social Philosophy” was published in installments with subtitles that included “sociology and cosmology,” “sociology and biology,” sociology and anthropology,” “sociology and psychology,” “the data of sociology,” and “the purpose of sociology.” An eight part series by Edward Ross called “Moot Points in Sociology” had subtitles such as “the scope and task of sociology,” “social laws,” “the unit of investigation,” “the social forces,” and “the factors of social change.” among others. A shorter three part series called “Contemporary Sociology” by Lester Ward addressed his perspective on a number of prominent sociological frameworks at the time.

Mixed in with the series mentioned above were articles by a handful of other authors that addressed many of the same themes in their own way. For instance, a group of articles published in late 1904 appear to be based on the addresses given by their authors at the 1904 Congress of Arts and Science in St. Louis. By George Vincent there is one titled “The Development of Sociology.” Franklin Giddings authored one called “The Concepts and Methods of Sociology,” and together with a third piece by Gustav Ratzenhofer named “The Problems of Sociology” all three papers appear consecutively in the September 1904 issue of *AJS*. Within the first ten volumes of *AJS* can also be found a pair of articles by a Philip Fogel of Princeton University called “Metaphysical Elements in Sociology.” An Edward



Hayes of Miami University also has a pair of articles in consecutive issues of *AJS* under the name “Sociological Construction Lines.” Finally, there are several other individual articles by people like Albion Small, Lester Ward, Victor Branford, Rene Worms, and George Vincent. Small’s include the titles “The Subject-Matter of Sociology,” “What is a sociologist?,” “Static and Dynamic Sociology,” and “The Era of Sociology.” Small’s “Era of Sociology” piece and one by Ward titled “The Place of Sociology Among the Sciences” were both referenced in an earlier section of this paper. The articles included in the subset by Branford are one called “On the Origin and Use of the Word “Sociology,” and on the Relation of Sociological to Other Studies and to Practical Problems,” and another under the name “The Founders of Sociology,” the latter of which was also previously noted for its extensive consideration of historical figures that could be argued to have been “sociologists” with the conspicuous absence of George Fitzhugh and Henry Hughes, the first two authors to employ the term “sociology” in the titles of their work in the U.S. Context (Magubane 2016).

Both from the frequency of such articles throughout the first ten volumes of *AJS*, together with consideration of their content, a picture emerges of a profoundly self-conscious intellectual movement. The articles in this subset over and over again present various definitions of sociology, its organizing object of inquiry, and its characteristic perspective. They do this with constant reference to other disciplines. Disciplines from physics to chemistry and biology, psychology, anthropology, economics, political economy, philosophy, history, astronomy, social psychology, and more were invoked in primarily two ways. First, references to what we typically recognize today as the “natural” sciences were consistently introduced as analogous to sociology, conceived to be a science in the same respect with its own proper object of inquiry. The references to the disciplines commonly regarded as social sciences were most often introduced in order for the authors to argue for

why sociology did not duplicate or usurp their established spheres of investigation. The authors were also at pains to argue that sociology should not properly be considered a subfield (or sub-discipline) of any of the older or more institutionally established disciplines at the time. In fact, the authors more often argued for sociology as the most general and synthetic science of them all. In effect, suggesting that in any logical hierarchy of the sciences, sociology would stand at the top because of its aim of drawing together all of the insights and evidence produced by the other disciplines, and then integrating them into more general social laws. By examining these articles it becomes clear that the “sociology” being developed by these pioneers of its institutionalization was being self-consciously constructed as “science” and deliberately demarcated from longer established disciplines by its generality and all-encompassing emphasis on the “social.”

In defining sociology’s object broadly as “the social,” these authors were making an implicit connection between “the social” and “modernity.” The two terms were discussed as effectively synonymous. And as you can imagine, the supposedly all-encompassing realm of “the social” (or the modern) was constructed in a much narrower sense than the universal sounding language suggests. It involved exclusions that included questions about which peoples and civilizations could be properly considered “social” (or modern), as well as questions about which historical events and processes are necessary to study in order to understand the “social” (or the modern). There are numerous accounts of the systematic racism among the early pioneers of sociology in the United States (Magubane 2016; Calhoun 2007; McKee 1993; Turner and Turner 1990). Therefore our question is not whether the early codified sociological knowledge (as captured in *AJS*) similarly reflects racial biases, but rather the specific implications of those biases for the ways that the formerly enslaved and indigenous people in North America were conceived, and for the rationalizations through

which the genocidal and violent histories of colonialism and American chattel slavery were placed outside the realm of necessary considerations for those occupied with the study of modern society. This leads us to ask of the articles in this subset, what kinds of ghosts haunt and trouble the visions of modernity painted by their authors? In this paper we will consider three kinds of ghosts that manifest as the taking of certain fictions as fact: 1) the fiction of race as bio-essential reality; 2) the fiction of violence and conflict as a tragic but natural element of progress; and 3) the fiction of Europe and the United States as the embodiments of the purpose and direction of social evolution. Though not an exhaustive list of the ideas that we now recognize as erroneous, the three above were chosen because of their special relevance as foundational to a white supremacist racial ontology suitable to justifying the exclusion of slavery and colonialism from early sociological constructions of modernity.

### *1. Race*

In describing the subject matter of sociology, the sorts of things the discipline was supposed to investigate, many of the authors give accounts of varying specificity of what should be included in the purview of the “societary science.” They tended towards wide-ranging and universal sounding claims about how all encompassing a gaze they imagined for sociology. This largely meant defining what “classes of facts” pertained to “association” or “the social” or “society”. These elaborations often made explicit mention of “race” as a factor to be brought within the range of sociology’s power to interpret. Moreover, the existence of “races” as essentially distinct populations was often taken for granted in this respect.

The authors often presumed essential racial distinctions in connection with the presumption that the relationship between races (as distinctly identifiable populations) was a hierarchical relation defined by relative superiority and inferiority. One example of this can be found in Small’s elaboration of the kinds of associations that are among the so-called

problems to be taken up by sociologists when he writes: "...general sociology names, among other associations, that of superior races with inferior races" (Small 1900: 808). This passage is positing superior and inferior "races" as distinct groups, the interrelations of whom sociology ought to study. To further illustrate his intention, he offers that if one wished "to take up, as a serious scientific problem, the status of the colored race in the United States," then "general sociology [would] furnish the landmarks" (1900: 808). In another instance, Ross also invokes the notion of distinct races existing in hierarchal relationship in a discussion of Spencer's ideas regarding the effects of industrialization on the "definiteness of arrangement" in the social order of a society. In this connection, Ross references "composite societies" in which "there are castes corresponding to races anciently stratified, and where the iron distinctions of function and occupation are a heritage from successive conquests" (Ross 1903: 107). The passage implies, but does not go on to explain, the process through which "races" could come to be "stratified" and thus solidified into a caste system. Nonetheless it again implies both a distinction among "races" and that the relationship between them can be characterized as one of relative superiority or inferiority, with implications for the position and occupation of members of such "races" in a given society.

Other patterns that involved the presumption of essential racial difference involved use of biological or anatomical analogies to discuss society, social relationships, and the object of sociology as a science. As early as the second issue of *AJS*, Rene Worms was writing that "The sociologist must pass in review all societies and all the classes of facts which they present" (Worms 1895: 149). Worms goes on to explain the "rational order" by which such a process of study could proceed, stating,

"It is necessary for him to study the human groups one by one. In each of them he examines...in the first place the anatomy, in the second place the physiology. He observes the

physical environment in which the society under consideration lives, the men who compose it, the race to which they belong, the groups (families, associations, cities) into which they are divided—in a word the anatomy of the social body” (Worms 1895: 149).

Worms connection between sociology as the study of the “anatomy of the social body” and the inclusion of “the race to which they belong” as among its components once again reinforces a biological sense of the term race. This interpretation becomes more plausible when the subsequent passages from Worms sets out examples of what he intended by his assertion that “It is fundamental to sociology to desire to embrace all societies in all times and places” (1895: 154). Worms goes on,

“It examines the negroes of Africa, the savages of Oceania, the red races, the Turanian or Semitic tribes, the ancient Aryan *gentes* (emphasis in original), with as much profit as the most refined modern civilization” (Worms 1895: 154).

Here Worms lists what we are meant to recognize as different racial groups that sociology ought to study. The justification Worms provides for the importance of studying groups that he defines as inferior, barbaric, and savage through their juxtaposition with their presumed opposite, “the most refined modern civilization,” is that “in order to comprehend our own societies it is necessary to understand rudimentary societies, for our civilization developed out of their barbarism and their savagery; our social organizations have passed through phases which are recalled by those with which these rude societies stopped developing. If we wish to explain our actual modern states, we must study ancient states, and also the inferior contemporary groups which they resemble in so many particulars. It is only by exact knowledge of the past that we can interpret the present and look into the future” (1895: 155). Not only does the passage rely on the notion of race as essentially given, Worms separates all of the groups listed from the realm of modernity by using phrases like “our own societies,” “our social organizations,” and “our actual modern states” as distinct from “these

rude societies” and “inferior contemporary groups.” Relating back to the previous issue of connecting notions of racial difference with hierarchy, the passage further articulates notions of racial and civilizational superiority with teleological assumptions about social evolution. This last point we will return to later in the section on the selective historicism of these early sociological thinkers. Immediately following the above passages, Worms again reinforces the physiological conceptions of stratified racial difference by restating the sociological approach to “determining the anatomy of the society studied” as involving study of its “double environment—the external or physical environment (soil, climate, minerals, flora and fauna), and the internal or human environment (race, population, subordinate human groups)” (1895: 155). Sociology, as sketched out by Worms in this article, is the scientific study of the social body, whose anatomical elements include “race” and “subordinate human groups.” Furthermore, the way that Worms refers to the “negroes of Africa,” “the red races,” the “Turanian or Semitic tribes,” and “the savages of Oceania” as races different from his own, and yet never names his own race more specifically than by implication in his references to “our actual modern states” and “our own societies” calls to mind the argument of Fields and Fields (2012) that “race” was a concept that at one point only applied to those being defined as non-white.

Sociology as conceived by Lester Ward conveyed similar sentiments to those expressed by the above passages quoted from Rene Worms. In one of his discussions of the significance of Auguste Comte’s contribution to the emerging sociology, Ward praises Comte for his view that “sociology should deal mainly with the line of leading civilizations and races, because these represent the last and highest stages of culture and civilization, and present the most complex and difficult phenomena for investigation” (Ward 1902: 631). He further asserts that such “leading civilizations and races” “possess a far greater practical

interest than the outlying and more backward races and civilizations” (1902: 631). Ward writes that he considered “one of the great merits of [Comte’s] work” that he “did not treat uncivilized and savage races,” suggesting that despite the temptation, to allow “the treatment of the lower races to absorb all attention” would “narrow sociology down to mere anthropology” (1902: 631). Similarly to Worms, Ward’s writing posits essential racial differences, and associates them with hierarchically arranged stages of social evolution, and places himself as representative of “the last and highest” stages of “civilization and culture.” The point of distinction between the direction taken by Ward as opposed to Worms is that Worms was arguing in favor of sociology taking an active interest in the so-called “lower races” whereas Ward is arguing that sociology should more properly be focused on “leading civilizations and races,” devoting less (if any) attention to populations defined as “outlying” and “backward.” Again, we will return later to the issue of the teleological dimension of these arguments. At this point our intention is to illustrate the imbrication of essentialist and biological notions of race together with notions of hierarchical schemes for interpreting human difference regardless of whether that difference is defined in racial, cultural, or civilizational terms.

The concept of race as entangled with biology also appeared through the not infrequent use of phrases like “race-crossing,” “race intermarriage,” “racial intermixture,” or “sections of the same race...that split off from the parent stock” (Small 1902; Ward 1902; Ross 1904). By using such phrasings they privilege the interpretation of race as primarily biological and hereditary. In the articles in this subset, it was not uncommon for discussions of “assimilation” to be framed as biological terms, at times with notions of “*pure races*” and “*mixed races*” (emphasis in original), presumed to be characterized by “permanent forms” in the case of the former and “fluctuating traits” in the case of the latter (Ratzenhofer 1904:

184). The somewhat expanded context of Ratzenhofer's reference to "pure races" is a question about the "differences of value to be attributed to the *pure races*," whose purity is supposedly the result of having developed "permanent forms of racial mixtures through in-and-in breeding" (1904: 184). In a different discussion of assimilation, Edward Ross suggests even under conditions of conquest, "two societies" would "gradually assimilate" so long as "racial difference be not too great...a process of equalization sets in which causes the original social individualities to disappear in a higher synthesis" (Ross 1904: 205). What Ross seems to be saying, in not so many words, is that when two apparently racially distinct populations come into contact because one group has conquered the other, the two groups will eventually be indistinguishable and become effectively one group through inter-breeding and intermarriage, that is, of course, unless their "racial difference be not too great." His inclusion of that clause implies that there are some racial differences that are so deep that they would prevent a conquering population from assimilating a conquered one.

Conspicuously missing from his statement and the larger context from which it is drawn is any specifically identified historical example that might have inspired Ross to include this caveat. But given the historical and social context in which Ross was writing, it seems difficult to imagine that he could be referring to anything other than what was framed by his contemporaries as the presumed inassimilability of African Americans (or perhaps the Chinese as per Simons 1902). In perhaps the most dramatic example of biologically rooted conceptions of race, on one occasion Ward goes as far as to posit different species of Europeans when he asks "...has it ever been proved that Napoleon Bonaparte, the Corsican, was not the species *Homo mediterraneus* rather than *H. europæus*?" (Ward 1902: 479). This passage takes the notion of race as essentially hereditary a step further by implying that racial differences could be thought of on similar terms to differences between species.



Even the notion of capacity for change was at times defined by these authors as a racial characteristic. In his extended discussion of the causal factors that sociologists should consider relevant to questions of social change and social evolution, Ross suggests that some human populations are incapable of change (presumably in the direction of “higher” evolution),

“Peculiarity of environment or of race may neutralize stimuli and so preserve a social form intact. Beyond a certain point in development, harsh climate, barren soil, absence of wood and minerals, and lack of natural waterways may interpose a bar which no amount of inventive genius can avail to break. Again, impassable barriers such as mountains, deserts, and seas may prevent a group finding other groups to struggle against, combine with, or borrow from. Nor are all races equally capable of ascent. Those varieties of mankind cradled in the happy climes where Nature spreads the table, having never been sifted by hunger and cold, or disciplined to toil and forethought, lack the energy to avail themselves of the treasures civilization showers into their lap. What is stimulus to some races is no stimulus to them. They can perish, but they cannot change” (Ross 1904: 790).

We will return to this passage from Ross later, particularly his claim that some populations “can perish, but they cannot change,” in connection with the way it might be leveraged as justification for the extermination or dispossession of certain populations.

On occasion, there were questions posed by the authors that on the surface appear to open the question of how essential characteristics of “race” should be considered after all, however, such passages often proceeded in ways that undermined the plausibility of the authors having rejected essentialized conceptions of race. For example, the passage quoted above from Small regarding the ability of sociology to “furnish the landmarks” for a scientific understanding of the association of “superior races with inferior races” where Smalls offers the example of “the status of the colored race in the United States,” Small later presents questions about the origins of the “assumed inferiority and superiority of the two races.” He asks if their relative value is rooted in physiological differences, or “psychical,” or some combination of the two. He asks if the differences are “accidental or essential” and questions the likelihood that “the distinguishing differences can be made to disappear.” But

these somewhat open sounding questions are betrayed by the following question in which he asks “What is likely to occur as this association of two unlike races continues?” With his last question he returns to the assumption of the “colored race in the United States” being a distinctly identifiable group unlike the unnamed “superior” race against which the “colored race” was offered by Small in contradistinction (Small 1900).

A similar progression of questions that sound broad and opening with respect to race, that subsequently reinscribe essentially biological notions of race by implication further down the line of questions can be found in a paper by Ratzenhofer in which he sets out the problems meant to be addressed by sociology. Describing the questions that become relevant to a sociological investigation into “the nature of man—that is, his native talents,” Ratzenhofer argues that one is quickly confronted by “the tremendous *race-problem*” (emphasis in original) (Ratzenhofer 1904: 184). In this connection he presents the following series of questions:

- a) Is the origin of the human race such that it can be regarded as a unity? What social and ethical consequences follow from the answer to this question?
- b) What *value* has the race-concept for social evolution in general, and in particular in given times and places?
- c) What differences of value are to be attributed to the *pure races*, which have developed the permanent forms of racial mixtures through in-and-in breeding, and what values are to be assigned to the *mixed races* with fluctuating traits?
- d) What consequences for social development follow from the fact of *race-difference*, and of the *variety of inherited talents*..., as products of biological development, of history, of locality, of environment, and of prevailing ideas? (all emphasis in original) (Ratzenhofer 1904: 184)

In this series of questions we see in the beginning questions that leave open the possibility that there are no essential racial distinctions among human beings, but that apparent agnosticism fades as by the third question we are confronted by questions of “pure races” and “mixed races,” and by the end we are no longer wondering if “the human race...can be regarded as a unity” but rather considering the implications of “the fact of *race-difference*.” Whatever openness was promised by the initial questions, it is replaced by the presumption

of race as given by the end of the series. In the passages that follow, Ratzenhofer goes on to explain why he considered sociology uniquely prepared to investigate those questions related to the “race-problem” precisely because of its aim to synthesize the relevant insights developed from the standpoints of “ethnology, or anthropology, or geography, or biology,” each of which alone would only be capable of addressing the issues in part (Ratzenhofer 1904: 184-5).

In a particularly disturbing example of the race assumption at play, racial difference was assumed to hold enough causal weight to bring about social revolution. In a piece elaborating on the perspective of sociologists and the problems that sociology should explain, Small provides the following comments on the issues involved in developing a sociological—rather than historical—explanation for revolutions:

“What causes revolutions? Our few and meager studies in history furnish us here and there a single case in point, but no sufficient basis of induction. In one case it is intolerable oppression. In another it is successful war. In another, famine. In another, fanaticism. In another, dogmatism. In another, decay of faith. In others, greed, love of adventure, race jealousy, dynastic pride, political expediency, commercial ambition, or an outbreak of sheer social madness. The historian of a certain type fulfills his mission if in one case he fully makes out the actual cause or causes of a single revolution....” (Small 1897: 161-2)

In the above excerpt, Small presents a list of potential causes of revolution in which intolerable oppression is a cause distinct from famine, decay of faith, fanaticism and more. Within the list is included “race jealousy” as yet another distinct cause of revolution. Neither in the passages before nor following the quote does Small make explicit mention of Haiti, but given his list, can we interpret his reference to race jealousy as a cause of revolution to be anything other than an implicit reference to the Haitian revolution? Moreover, by juxtaposing “race jealousy” and “intolerable oppression” as different potential causes of revolution, the implication is that the racial slavery against which the Haitians revolted did not constitute intolerable oppression. By implication, the Haitians were not suffering

oppression, rather they were jealous of the status and position of their enslavers.

Alternatively, Small's comments imply that the conditions against which the Americans rebelled in order to establish independence from the British monarchy did represent resistance to oppression. In other words, the way that Small formulates this list implies that the Haitians (and by extension people of African descent) did not count as subjects that could be described as oppressed, but simply jealous of the position of those that colonized and enslaved them and their ancestors. This implies even the ability to experience oppression was somehow entangled with notions of racial difference, and that those races defined as inferior were by extension not susceptible to the status of being oppressed.

## *2. Naturalizing violence*

Another significant pattern in the formulations of sociology and its scope, methods, and problems that carried throughout the articles in the subset was the use of abstractions and euphemisms to naturalize and diminish questions of violence. Time and again historical events and process which we know to have been violent and coercive were portrayed by these authors in matter-of-fact ways that naturalized the violent aspects of such processes as if they did not require analysis. Rather than analyzing the factors at play when so-called modern societies systematically annihilate or exploit populations they have defined as backward, and in the process label themselves "civilized" and the targets of their violence as "savage," the authors of early *AJS* preferred *a priori* assertions about the inevitability of the strong trying to dominate the weak, and it being human nature to seek conquest and dominion over people and things.

In this way historical events like the displacement and massacre of Native Americans by British colonists (and later US settler colonists) are replaced by discussions of "migration to a new environment" and "increase in population." Perhaps one of the clearest examples

of this is provided by Edward Ross in one of his articles presenting what he considered to be a sociological perspective on the causes of social change. Throughout the article Ross uses abstract language that emphasizes ostensibly morally neutral processes that impact social conditions with little need to examine individual or group will. For instance, at one point he suggests that the "...unequal increase of population on the opposite sides of a frontier...sets up a current of migration which replaces one race, language, or civilization by another, thereby entailing changes in society" (Ross 1904: 87). By his logic, we would be given to assume that the destruction of a "race, language, or civilization" by another can be understood as resulting from different birth and mortality rates on either side of a border. Ross appears to take the violence of the process into account in the next part of the passage when he states that if that frontier "is a political one, the movement is likely to take the form of an armed invasion, and the society must sustain the shock of war" (1904: 87). The following sentence, however, in which Ross completes his thought, renders the previous reference to violence as if it were simply a natural process when politics (though Ross does not explain what he means by politics) meets differing rates of population increase. Ross ends the passage with a reference to "the assaults of the Germans upon the Roman empire," which he asserts "were prompted by overpopulation" and further that "the eventual failure to withstand them was due to the fact that infecundity had reduced the empire to a hollow shell" (Ross 1904: 87). So here Ross presents an abstract claim about the relationship between population growth and the replacement of one civilization by another, one that could be called into question in light of the historical founding of the country in which Ross was writing, but rather than make explicit connections to his immediate historical context, Ross draws an example from the history of the Roman empire. Moreover, he uses that example to suggest that the most fundamental causal relationship for the German attacks

against the Romans was “overpopulation” within the German territory, whereas Rome was suffering from a period of infertility that made them too weak to adequately defend their territory. Again, if we extend such logic and apply it to other cases, then following that formulation there would be no need to analyze the colonial history of the United States in terms of its violence, because it can be explained as arising from some kind of overpopulation in Europe and an indigenous population in the Americas insufficiently large to keep them out. Neither the question of the legitimacy of movements to colonize nor justification for the violence that ensues enter the equation. The matter is, in effect, reduced to a question merely of numbers. Albion Small echoes the same logic in another article in which he puts forth the claim that the “chief reason” for the differences in colonial policy between Germany and the United States “is the physical difference between German overpopulation and American under-population” (Small 1902: 198).

Ross basically uses the terms “migration” and “colonization” as interchangeable. In addition to explaining the elimination of one population by another, Ross uses a similar emphasis on population to explain slavery in terms of “scarcity of labor:”

The scarcity of labor may lead to the enslavement of weaker races. The community being little differentiated economically or socially, manhood rather than property control the commonwealth, the temper is individualistic and liberty-loving, and popular institutions take root. Equality before the law is insisted on. Primogeniture is renounced. The state has little power to withstand public opinion. The spell of tradition is broken and the hereditary principle is weak. The spirit of society is either humanitarian and plutocratic, but not aristocratic. (Ross 1904: 93)

Again, applied to the history of US colonialism and slavery, Ross’s explanation suggests that the reason for the centuries long slave trade and chattel slave system was simply the scarcity of laborers in the colonized territories in the Americas. The above passage also reinforces the examples given in the previous section of the assumption of essential differences of race because Ross takes for granted that there are strong races and weak races. Not only does

Ross reduce slavery to a question of labor scarcity, he does so in a manner that finds no contradiction between the presence of a slave system and a social order in which “[e]quality before the law is insisted on.” In his assertion that “manhood rather than property controls the commonwealth,” he appears to nonchalantly imply that for those recognized to fit the category “man,” social inequality would be negligible, and freedom and individuality would be the most cherished values.

Earlier in the same the article, Ross had already suggested that the increase of population was also suitable to explain why slavery would eventually be abandoned. Whereas the need for labor in a sparsely populated colonial territory would lead settlers to “resort to systematic slavery and the slave trade,” once the land has become so occupied that “the laborer has no longer a direct access to natural resources” and “must offer his services for wages,” according to Ross, reaching this point would lead “slavery and serfdom [to] begin to disappear, for coercion is no longer necessary to secure a supply a laborers” (1904: 83). When considered relative to the actual course of events in the US up to and during Ross’s lifetime, his description of the passage from settlement to slavery to non-coercive wage labor is simply inaccurate. W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903 just one year before Ross’s article appeared in *AJS*, details many of the prevailing strategies that had been employed by white Americans after the Civil War in order to re-entrap the formerly enslaved into forced labor as part of a prison plantation system or in exploitative tenant farming arrangements with their former masters (Du Bois 1903). What is bizarre is that a previous installment in the same series of papers by Ross alludes to that very phenomenon when he notes that if certain biases practiced by “southern justices...in imposing on negroes excessive fines and binding them to work for the planter who pays the fine, will, if unchecked, gradually remand the colored race into slavery” (Ross 1904: 795). So if Ross was

aware enough to acknowledge continuing systematic racial bias, and to remark that such processes left unchecked would basically constitute re-enslavement, why would he subsequently propose such a unidirectional movement from slavery and serfdom to (supposedly) non-coercive wage labor just a few months later?

Similarly perplexing is the sanitized way that Ross makes reference to the ambiguity around whether lynching ought to be interpreted as a sign of “social health” versus one of “social disease.” He writes, “So long as divorce and lynching and political crime and the trust movement lend themselves to precisely opposite interpretations, there is no firm line to be drawn between social health and social disease. Each school of thought has its own diagnosis of the morbid, and no objective tests have yet been agreed on” (Ross 1904: 781). Ross is saying that whether lynching can best be understood as an evidence of “social health” as opposed to “social disease” is an ambiguous question because—along with examples like divorce, political crime, and the trust movement—it was one among phenomena that “lend themselves to precisely opposite interpretations.” His statement implies that the question of whether it is evidence of social health or social disease for a society to be confronted by a persistent pattern of extrajudicial killings by mobs—almost always carried out by white mobs brutally killing black people(s)—is open and could be reasonably interpreted in opposite ways. For Ross, lynching could as plausibly be a sign of “social health” as it could plausibly be a sign of “social disease”. In order for it to be even remotely plausible to characterize lynching as a sign of social health, what would have to be true about its victims? What would have to be true about its perpetrators? If, by the time of Ross's writing it was generally established that people in the United States had a right to trial by law, what could possibly allow for extrajudicial killing by mob? For lynching not be recognized as murder, an unquestionable sign of social disease, the person or persons killed in the lynching would



have to be someone or some ones whose personhood was unrecognized by society. In other words, it would not count as murder, because the (black) person killed did not count as a person. Moreover, in order for the initiative thus exercised by such mobs in the killing of those misrecognized as non-persons to be a sign of “social health,” it would have to be understood as society expelling waste or some otherwise harmful element from the social body, so to speak. Here again, we see the presumption of black inhumanity as a necessary logical justification in order for Ross's statement not to be written off as sheer absurdity. The fact that it was not written off, either by Ross or his peers, is its own indication of the unfixed status of the figure of the black as (in)human. If it is unclear (to them) whether or not black people were human, then it is unclear whether or not their annihilation should be read as a sign of “health” rather than “disease.”

The kind of non-subjecthood for people of African descent (and others) implicit in Ross's statements above comes out in other of his writings as well. In one case he suggests that the abolition of slavery “spread largely by national example,” which he likens to the “women's movement” and “social legislation” without reference to the scale and ferocity of violence and conflict that precipitated the formal abolition of slavery in multiple cases (not least of which include Haiti and the US) (Ross 1904: 194). The same passage includes a euphemistic explanation for the establishment of “new social arrangements,” implicitly originating in Europe, and subsequently “blown throughout the world” where “peoples at the most diverse stages of culture are eagerly adopting the jurisprudence, the laws, and the institutions of the most advanced societies” (1904: 194). Rather than emphasize the imposition of many such arrangements, Ross chooses to frame it as if colonized peoples were basically voluntary imitators of whatever colonizers represented. Along these lines he elsewhere reframes colonial imposition as “simple borrowing” on the part of “a backward

people” that had come in contact “with a highly cultured one” (1904: 194). On another occasion Ross suggests that sociological knowledge had been significantly augmented by those whose reputations were won by “exposing the hidden link that unites slavery with cotton culture, caste with conquest, manhood suffrage with free land...” (Ross 1903: 768). One cannot help but wonder from whom Ross imagined the links between slavery and cotton culture to have been hidden such that drawing attention to the connection would impress enough to attract the admiration of an intellectual field. The subjectivity of those who experienced the links were clearly not in Ross’s mind when he presented slavery and cotton culture as “remote institutions” (1903: 768). In a similar fashion, the subjecthood of indigenous people (and women in particular) did not seem to factor into Ross’s thinking when he wrote that the “irregularity of sex relations in a colony is not an echo of primitive times, but the consequence of the lack of white women and the abundance of native women” (Ross 1903: 111). This last passage appears in Ross’s discussion of the supposed factors that determine the extent to which social relations in a colony would resemble social relation in the “mother country.”

The arguments articulated by Ross and considered above are compatible with sentiments conveyed by Albion Small across a number of other articles in the subset. On numerous occasions Small referred to an essential relationship between the “nature of man” and a desire for mastery or control over both things and people. In one passage he describes “one fraction” of human nature as “an eagerness to be a god” whose “rule requires a realm” (1900: 183). Once again implying that coercion is simply natural, Small goes on, “The lordship of man over man occurs wherever force can assert it, and the sense of justice does not estop (*sic*) it...It is part of complete human personality to exercise lordship over things. The savagery of the savage is primarily his inability to lord it over things” (1900: 183). In this

case Small is asserting that desire to dominate is an essential feature of human beings, and that the power to control things and people is what separates “man” from the “savage” who is unable to do so. According to Small’s logic here, it is precisely their ability to colonize, displace, and enslave others that would qualify the American colonists as (hu)man rather than their “savage” victims who were, by definition, not (hu)man because they did not or could not reverse that relationship. To underline the connection between these ideas and the sort of social science being constructed by these authors, the above comments from Small appear in an article with the subtitle “The assumptions of sociology,” in which Small presents what he considers to be the taken for granted premises of sociological knowledge. In other words, these are ideas that Small is presenting as building blocks upon which sociological knowledge should be constructed, notions that are assumed rather than explained. Small reinforces related notions on other occasions by asserting that it is an “essential fact” that in any group to some degree or other “there will always be a gravitation toward definite arrangement of leaders and led, or boss and bossed” (1902: 227).

Franklin Giddings appears to have shared the same underlying sentiments regarding the quest for dominance as an essential characteristic of human beings as individuals and as groups. Rather than framing it in term of violence or war, Giddings adopts “the evolutionist point of view,” electing to contextualize such struggles and “all the transformations that occur within any social group” as “a phase of that ceaseless equilibration of energy taking place throughout the universe,” asserting that “[e]very social group, animal or human, since time began, has been in ceaseless struggle with its material environment and with other social groups...Whatever has happened to it or within it is most intelligibly accounted for if we view the process as one of equilibration of energies, between the group and its environment, or between group and group, or between unequal and conflicting elements within the group

itself" (Giddings 1904: 173). By Giddings's logic, again we would have to interpret any instance of domination by one people over another as reflecting some deeper equilibrium of "energies" and therefore the relative positions of the dominant and the dominated are merely indication of whose "energy" was superior. He further develops his idea to suggest exactly that later in the following passages when he takes up "processes of internal equilibration" in terms of three aspects: "First among these is the differentiation of the mind of the population, consequent upon some degree of unlikeness and inequality in the responses of differing individuals to the common stimuli to which all are subjected. This is followed by the segregation of resembling products into types and classes. Secondly, there is an evolution of the consciousness of kind, with increasing attention to means of communication and association. Thirdly, there is a struggle between strong individuals and weak, between leaders and followers, between strong and weak classes" (1904: 173). This third struggle he further breaks down into three scenarios: "(1) the subjugation and perhaps the enslavement of the weak by the strong; (2) economic exploitation; (3) the uplifting of the weak by the strong through education, justice, and economic aid," concluding that the "moral advance of society is a progress from equilibration through subjugation and exploitation to equilibration through uplifting, and it depends upon the broadening and deepening of the consciousness of kind" (1904: 173). Giddings presents slavery and exploitation as merely phases of a process of "equilibration" that eventually culminates in the subjugated and exploited groups (aka "the weak" in his terms) being "uplifted" by "the strong" "through education, justice, and economic aid." In this formulation violence is again rendered unproblematic because it is simply a natural feature of achieving social equilibrium when there are differences between "strong" and "weak" individuals and classes.

Small also contributed his share of euphemistic phrasing about the nature and consequences of the onset of global European imperialism. In one passage, in an attempt to suggest a mutualistic dynamic in the cultural and political influence exerted by Europe and other regions, he ends up basically flattening power relations. He writes, “The commercial system of Asia, Africa, and South America is both cause and effect of the commercial and fiscal system of England and America. The social customs of the Bushmen and Fuegians may not supplant those of European nations, but they supply material for revision of our ideas and for broadening our conceptions of social utility. The knowledge gained by rude races and that derived by the keenest science are interchanged, and the culture of the world tends to become one” (1900: 347). Here again we see racial difference taken for granted, as well as the presentation of the way that “the culture of the world tends to become one” as simply the result of the mutual (if disproportional) exchange of knowledge between Europe and the “rude races.” Even the title of the paper from which the passage is drawn, “some incidents of association” is recognizable as a euphemistic abstraction when we consider the networks of colonial relations that produced the world referred to by Small above. Other euphemistic abstractions include Small’s reference to Columbus “discovering America” (Small 1902: 220). In midst of the nation-wide problem of lynching, and the continuing formalization and extension of Jim Crow segregation and legislation in the South, Small also refers to all such issues involving racial violence and domination with the euphemistic term the “process of adjustment between whites and blacks” (Small 1897: 167). He similarly excludes any suggestion of violence or oppression when he concocts a speculative comparison between the “race-sentiment” in the southern versus the northern United States. According to Small’s imaginative anecdote, the “best illustration” of how the “invisible presence” of the “whole sum of facts in a society by which tradition and derived standards

impose themselves upon the individual” can be detected by considering what he posits as “the race-sentiment in the South...as contrasted with the promiscuity of sentiment on the same subject in the North” (Small 1902: 200). The imaginary anecdote follows a “visitor from the North” who “goes to a southern state” where “he detects something in the social tone which he has read about, but never before directly experienced,” and “finds himself among some of the most genial, warm-hearted, high-minded people he has ever seen,” “but finds them governed by a code of sentiments toward the colored man which seem to him unintelligible and inconsistent” (1902: 200). Small attributes the difference to the North and the South representing “two different spiritual environments,” where “the southern man lives in an environment of race-distinctions” while the “northern man lives in an environment of merely personal distinctions,” and that for “the northern man personal likes and dislikes, social inclusion or exclusion, will depend on the individual...[h]is being a negro mak[ing] no more difference than his being a Spaniard or Italian or Russian or Englishman,” whereas to “the southern man the idea of a socially acceptable negro is a contradiction in terms” (1902: 200). In the passage Small creates an imaginary example that—as our analysis of their ideas on race, slavery, and violence has already shown—overstates the difference between the racial thinking Small differentially attributes to the North and the South.

Another example of the way violence was pushed into the background is illustrated by a passage in which Small poses the rather odd juxtaposition of the position of enslaved Africans in the American colonies relative to their enslavers as analogous to the position of their enslavers relative to their homelands in Europe. The broader passage is one in which Small is making an argument for the relationship between “economic action” and the “group conception of rightness” (Small 1900: 342). Small posits that the “African slave trade lasted as long as Boston shipowners could keep their consciences quiet enough to accept their

share of its profits,” notes that the “early policy of our settlers toward the Indians tended to a level corresponding with the assumption that no Indian has any rights which a white man is bound to respect,” and concludes that the “colonial policy of most European nations today...illustrates the conception that colonists are not only subjects of the government, but a species of common slaves of the more favored subjects, to be exploited in the interest of the ruling people” (1900: 342-43). By implication Small’s argument suggests that the status of the enslaved African relative to the colonial enslaver is analogous to the status of that colonial enslaver relative to “the more favored subjects” in “most European nations.” The phrasing “no...rights which a white man is bound to respect” also reveals the conflation of the marginal statuses of Native Americans and Black people as expendable through Small’s modification of Roger Taney’s infamous words in the US Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott* decision. Just three years later, the same comparison was made when the decision in *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*, that the power to disregard or abrogate treaties with Native nations in the US resided unilaterally with Congress, was described by US senator as “*Dredd Scott* [emphasis in original] decision No. 2, except that in this case the victim is red instead of black” (Jung 2015: 66).

Perhaps it becomes less peculiar that these early thinkers were at such pains to deemphasize the importance of violent conflict and domination when we consider the following claim from Lester Ward suggesting they had often been over-emphasized: “Migrations and the vicissitudes of empire, even the doings of the persons who happen to stand in the front of these movements, belong here, but their importance is apt to be exaggerated” (1896: 743). In the same article Ward deepens this sentiment by invoking “natural selection” as the process shaping social evolution. He offers that the “proper care of the young” was the “first subject to which associated man turned his attention,” and that

“[n]atural selection alone would secure this, since those who neglected it would be eliminated” (1896: 746). He further posits this as the “basis of the institution of marriage...in primitive and advanced races,” arguing that despite varying forms of the institution, it had “in all cases more or less successfully adapted to this end” (1896: 746). In other words, if the family is the most basic social institution, and that institution’s development is shaped by natural selection, then there is little reason to consider the dead because the fact that they perished itself is proof of their inferiority.

These sentiments were echoed in the piece from Ross quoted in the previous section in which he claims that some races may perish but not change. Moreover, it is aligned with the sort of ideas promoted by the eugenics movement as articulated by Francis Galton in an article titled “Eugenics: Its definition, scope, and aims,” published as the lead article in the first issue of the tenth volume of *AJS*, less than a decade after Ward penned the above lines (Galton 1904). Though Galton’s paper was not part of the more limited subset defined for the purposes of the content analysis, it is instructive because of how explicitly the ideas presented therein resonate and synthesize the thinking presented by these other authors into a coherent perspective on social evolution. In that paper Galton defines eugenics as the “science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage” (1904: 1). Drawing on repeated analogies comparing people to various animal species, he asserts “The aim of eugenics is to bring as many influences as can be reasonably employed, to cause the useful classes in the community to contribute *more* (emphasis in original) than their proportion to the next generation” (1904: 3). Galton echoes the reasoning of Ross and Small by suggesting that the rise and fall of nations was based on variations in the proportion of offspring contributed by the “upper classes,” classes which have been “classified according to civic usefulness” (1904: 3). He then



appears to lament “the tendency of high civilization to check fertility in the upper classes,” suggesting that there may be some connection between that supposed tendency and the factors that “bar the fertility of most species of wild animals in zoölogical (*sic*) gardens” (1904: 3). Noting that among the vast number of animal species that had been tamed at the time, “very few indeed are fertile when their liberty is restricted and their struggles for livelihood are abolished,” he posits that the species that did retain their fertility and were “otherwise useful to man” became domesticated. Galton uses this point to further speculate that the same process could be applied to encounters among different human groups in a way that euphemizes and dismisses questions about the violence of indigenous annihilation and slavery. He states, “There is perhaps some connection between this...and the disappearance of most savage races when brough into contact with high civilization...But while most barbarous races disappear, some, like the negro, do not. It may therefore be expected that types of our race will be found to exist which can be highly civilized without losing fertility; nay, they may become more fertile under artificial conditions, as is the case with many domestic animals” (1904: 4). In this passage Galton suggests that some “races” or “types of our race” may become more fertile under “artificial conditions” that he calls “highly civilized.” In plain English, his claim is that people of African descent are capable of increased fertility under slavery. His reference to “artificial conditions” is a particularly egregious euphemism for the violence of forced breeding that occurred under the slave system. None of this is treated by Galton (or those who elected to publish his work) as problematic. Early in the passage he euphemizes the active massacre of indigenous populations around the world with the passive descriptor “disappearance” as if their decimation just happened without intention or agency. He assumes that he represents the highest stages of human evolution, he assumes that race is biological and connected to

“inborn qualities,” and he obscures the exercise of imperial violence behind sanitized language like “brought into contact,” “highly civilized,” and “artificial condition,” finally comparing Africans to “many domestic animals.”

### *3. Selective historicism*

“Finally of all these truths there has now been a synthesis; a wider law has been discovered that embraces them all, and the whole universe, from the nebulae and the remotest stars to mankind and human society, is seen to be evolving and rolling on toward some unknown goal. The law of evolution has been disclosed. Where is the eddy so hidden and sequestered in social life that it has not felt some seismic jar from this vast psychic earthquake?”

Lester Ward, “Contributions to social philosophy. IX. The purpose of sociology” (1896)

History and historical perspective were important issues for early American sociologists. They were referred to by the authors in my subset countless times. They wrote numerous discussions of how sociology was connected to history, and yet a distinct discipline, how sociology was also distinct from the philosophy of history, and turned almost exclusively to purportedly historical examples to illustrate or give evidence to support their conceptual and theoretical claims. It could be argued that their emphasis on history is not surprising when we consider their preoccupation with social evolution as a historical process and also the most central problem for sociology to explain. In this case my concern is more about the peculiar and inconsistent ways that these authors would historicize their ideas, and the assumptions that led them to give analytical attention to certain historical processes while ignoring others, or to selectively invoke certain historical (and ongoing) processes in ways that did not seem to challenge the basic teleology reflected in their historical imaginations.

Aside from the passage quoted in epigraph at the beginning of this section, one of the most direct and clear statements of the importance of history for sociology comes from Worms when he wrote, “It is only by exact strongest knowledge of the past that we can interpret the present and look into the future” (Worms 1895: 155). Along similar lines, Small argued that the task of sociology was to “organize all available of the conditions of human

life” and “to lay a reliable foundation for reflective conduct in analysis and synthetic interpretation of general social relations, as given in all available knowledge of past and present associations” (Small 1900: 781). In other instances, he presents sociology as different, yet dependent on history, “This enlightening organization of knowledge is not history...but it is dependent on history. The process which the sociologist calls for at this point is to the historian’s task somewhat as the public prosecutor’s is to that of the various detectives who work up evidence on a case” (Small 1897: 162). Several years later he repeated the exact same argument in more direct terms without the use of analogy, “...the sociologist is not primarily and specifically a historian. He is dependent upon the historian. He has to learn how to take the facts that many historians authenticate and coin them into general truths about associated human life” (1900: 781). Small’s assertions that the task of sociology involved incorporating knowledge of the past into “general truths about associated human life” shows not only the importance of history to fulfilling the aims of sociology, but it also pointed toward the assumption of a certain kind of temporal continuity connecting past social processes to present ones. What is implicit in the previous quotes is made explicit in a different passage where Small wrote, “...very few people have ever seen that a part of their life was lived a decade, a century, a millennium ago. Our life is not all today and tomorrow. Its yesterdays are just as really parts of it as any of its present moments...In plain prose, our lives, ourselves, are atoms of the life of humanity that has been working to form us through all the ages” (1897: 150). This passage reveals the fundamental continuity between supposedly past and current events and processes as conceived by Small. Moreover, in its assertion of historical continuity, it also implies a certain inevitability in the flow of time when he says at the end “...our lives...are atoms of the life of humanity that been working

to form us through all the ages.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, we are connected to the past and appear today because our existence has been the aim of all previous human life.

The teleological thinking implicit in the above passage appeared across all the papers and was often connected directly with ideas about evolution. The basic notion was that “modern” society, of which these authors self-identified as both representatives and interpreters, was the intended fruit of the evolutionary process and its highest fulfilment. Some examples of this logic were discussed in previous sections. This teleological thinking was not a completely unconscious bias or unrecognized assumption. To the contrary, the “teleological assumption” is given by Small as the fifth in a list of those assumptions he deemed necessary to the foundation of sociological thinking (Small 1900: 44). He defined these assumptions as “all those aspects of reality which form parts of the background of sociology, which, however, do not fall within our immediate field of investigation” (1900: 43). In other words, they were aspects of reality taken for granted to be a certain way, but not investigated or studied and found to be that way (or otherwise). In a subsequent discussion of the importance of this teleological assumption, Small went on to assert, “Some conception...of the proximate or ultimate goal toward which society tends is a necessary finial of sociological theory” (Small 1900: 201). For Small not only did a teleology have to be assumed, but some notion of “the ultimate goal toward which society tends” was the necessary crowning adornment for sociological theory.

Time and again the idea of evolution was connected by these authors with talk of “historical stages of development,” “stage[s] of evolution,” and “progress.” In a 1904 paper, George Vincent put it succinctly, “The idea of evolution as illustrated by social changes is

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<sup>3</sup> As an aside, one cannot help but wonder about the implicit boundaries around the “us” to which Small refers in this case.

the great central concept of nineteenth-century sociology. It is everywhere dominant, and every problem has been stated or restated in terms of the developmental doctrine” (1904: 156). In a previous section we noted Giddings confession to “accept the evolutionist point of view” (1904: 173). While considering the question of the proper relationship between freedom and authority in civilization, a paper by Ratzenhofer asserts, “Social evolution presses more and more toward an organizing order...if it is to be possible to lead the majority of men into satisfying conditions” (1904: 185). In praise of Ratzenhofer’s ideas, on another occasion Ward celebrates his work as having shown “the precise *modus operandi* of the whole process of social assimilation through successive subjugations” and having “work[ed] out every step in the long train of consequences...bringing about...one after another...in a uniform (unilateral) order the several conditions: conquest, caste, inequality, law, the state, the people, and the nation” (Ward 1902: 762). This last passage conveys both a teleological notion of humanity as passing through evolutionary stages, and gives some of those stages names. The idea of stages was also connected with ideas of progress. The following passage from Ward again presents both a directional process and a set of names to demarcate the degree of progress represented by each: “The several stages of culture, savagery, barbarianism, civilization, enlightenment, or by whatever names they may be designated, are so many steps in the general progress of what is called civilization...” (1896: 745).

For these authors the aim and purpose of evolution went hand in hand with progress, and by extension, if sociology was to be the science concerned with the evolutionary process, by extension it was also intended advance or even accelerate it. Ward argues as much in the following passage,

“The supreme purpose is the betterment of society. The knowledge is the important thing. The action will then take care of itself. But an important part of the knowledge is that action is its object. It was shown in the last paper that the greater part of the action of civilized men is telic, or results from purpose and not mere impulse. The study of sociology is calculated to enlighten the individual purposes of men and harmonize them with the good of society. It will tend to unify action, to combine the innumerable streams of individual effort and pour their contents into one great river of social welfare. Individual telesis thus verges into collective telesis. In a democracy every citizen is a legislator and government simply becomes the exponent of the social will and purpose. This becomes more and more true as the constituent members of society see things in their true light. Society can only act upon those things with regard to which there is a substantial unity of opinion. There is no more false dogma than that it is necessary for individuals to work at cross purposes. So long as many of the prevailing notions in society are false divisions and dissensions will occur, and these, I grant, are educating in the school of experience. But the greater part of them are unnecessary and disappear as communities become enlightened.” (Ward 1896: 455)

In the above Ward posits that the whole purpose of sociology is to bring about the improvement of society by providing knowledge to replace the apparently false prevailing notions that were the cause of “divisions and dissensions.” He also asserts that since sociological knowledge is concerned with action, then so long as sociology produces knowledge, the necessary action to improve social conditions will automatically occur. Ward’s comments also suggest that sociological knowledge would perform a unifying function through which individual efforts would “harmonize...into one great river of social welfare.” At the very least we can say from our present historical vantage point that sociology has not even remotely approached the accomplishment of so lofty (however misguided) a goal as the one set before it by Ward and his contemporaries. Ward ties sociology back in with the teleologically historical imagination we have been discussing with the inclusion of his closing assertion that “as communities become enlightened” (through the knowledge garnered from sociology, allowing members of society to “see things in their true light”) all of the various “unnecessary” “divisions and dissensions” afflicting society would “disappear.”

In the same paper, Ward elaborates on the sort of “betterment of society” to which he is referring with statements like “What is more agreeable is better” and “The agreeable is the good. The disagreeable is the bad.” He continues in the following terms, “Social betterment is the passage out of a pain economy into a pleasure economy, or from an economy that yields only the satisfaction of physical needs to one that fills out the higher spiritual aspirations. Social progress is that which results in social betterment as thus defined, and all the other supposed ends are either simply means to this end or they are names for the various aspects of it...” (Ward 1896: 456). He then proceeds to define “social evolution” as “the term commonly employed for the general spontaneous movement in the direction above indicated” (1896: 457), and argues that while there have been “race that have degenerated” and “[e]mpires have declined and fallen,” yet “new races and new empires...have simultaneously risen far higher than the first” (1896: 457). He asserts that so far “in human history the series has been upon the whole an ascending one, and man has slowly but rhythmically, and somewhat fitfully advanced” (1896: 457). These comments lead him to question what benefit there could be to the development of a sociological science if social evolution has thus far proceeded without it. His conclusion is that if the science of sociology is able to understand “the laws of nature, either physiological or social” then “it is possible...in strict proportion to that knowledge...to ‘assist nature’ in its struggle against all the powers of a hostile environment,” at which point Ward reaches his final conclusion that “The real answer...to the question as to the purpose of sociology is: *to accelerate social evolution*” (emphasis in original) (1896: 457). For Ward, evolution had a direction, and it was sociology’s purpose to generate knowledge that could speed humanity’s arrival to the promised destination.

The idealistic bent in the sections quoted from Ward above had echoes in the work of the other authors as well. Ross expressed similarly utopian ideas about how science had replaced more coercive forms of authority when he wrote that “the triumphs of science lead men to value knowledge rather than religion or power. Science grants the health vainly besought by the worshiper; it turns aside the pestilence; it secures the husbandman his increase; it is a buckler against enemies. The decline of violence has, no doubt, done much to put the big brain above the strong arm, but even war is coming to be a test of intelligence rather than a test of brute strength. Knowledge and money, or if you please, Science and Wealth, seem likely to become the heirs of the dying powers of the past” (1904: 547). Ross never explains how it is that one can conceive of science as somehow separate from questions of power. It is all the more confusing for him to apply a separation between them while connecting science to military prowess in the same paragraph. Nonetheless, the passage conveys both idealized notions of science and progress, and suggests that the advancement of knowledge and wealth are somehow linked with a decline in violence. Once again, hindsight is more than adequate to suggest that Ross’s conception was missing some critical elements. Another example of this idealistic thinking about social betterment and progress is furnished by passages from Small where he suggests that the “starting point, the foundation, the fulcrum of progress” is “the judgment that living men have accepted about what is desirable” (Small 1897: 169). He asserts that “[n]o effort for human improvement is rational which aims to effect improvement in human action of a sort not recognizable as good by the persons concerned” and that because “we regard human conditions as dependent upon the volitions of the persons within these conditions” it is necessary to give due consideration “to the judgments of those persons respecting desirable conditions” (1897: 169). When considered in light of ongoing popular debates regarding assimilation,



colonial expansion, the evils or benefits of slavery, we can only assume that people of African descent and the indigenous populations in the US were not among the “persons” whose “volitions” Small had in mind. If, as Small claimed, “[t]he necessary working basis of social improvement today is accordingly the body of judgments lodged in the minds of living men about the things that are essentially desirable” (1897: 169) then the only way such a statement could hold true at the time would be if Black, Native, and Chinese Americans had themselves been directly involved with the formation of Jim Crow segregation, forced assimilation through residential schools, or exclusionary immigration legislation (Glenn 2015). Or, those populations would have to be positioned outside of the category “living men” and thus be excluded from the category of “persons” whose desires were relevant to determining socially desirable conditions for living.

In the remaining part of this section I want to highlight examples of the contradictory and inconsistent ways that the authors of these papers would sometimes invoke slavery and colonialism. By inconsistent I mean that on occasion they would refer to US racial slavery as a specific historical phenomenon, but sometimes in the same paragraph switch to referring to slavery as an abstract relation of domination. Other times they might write about slavery in the abstract and then turn to references to slavery in ancient Rome by way of illustration. In this way many of the references to slavery made by Ross refer to the slave as conceived by Aristotle, or to gladiatorial slaves. In a previous section we considered a passage in which Ross implies that simply the increase of population could lead to the abolition of slavery, which seems hard to reconcile with the historical reality of civil war that preceded the eventual formal abolition of slavery in the US. Despite their awareness of slavery, submitting the validity of their abstract claims relative to slavery and domination to concrete comparison to the historical reality of US chattel slavery was conspicuously absent

from their writings. For example, in a previous section we discussed an instance in which Small suggested that enslaved Africans had a comparable relationship to their colonial enslavers as their enslavers had to their home countries. In another place, Small compares the denial of personhood to the enslaved in the US to the denial of the right to be a “self” in the case of the children used as scapegoats to receive bodily punishment for the misdeeds of the children of “royal and noble families” (Small 1900: 192). While Small suggests that there is something similarly dehumanizing about how a child subjected to that custom was “turned into a wolf or a sheep” (1900: 192), he then appears to diminish the brutality of it in the case of “American slavery” by suggesting that when history takes account of its injustices, it would have to do so in a way that “recognizes that the slaves as a rule had ampler security of their standard of physical welfare than many free populations enjoy...[e]xclusion from the franchise of personal integrity condemned the system which so liberally guaranteed bodily integrity” (1900: 192). Small’s assertion here that slaves enjoyed a guarantee of “bodily integrity” and had “security of their standard of physical welfare” verges on the absurd. Some instances involved outright erasure, like one example from Branford’s writing on the origins of the term sociology. He takes pains to discuss all the relevant uses of the term sociology from Comte’s coining of it in 1839, through its popularization by Spencer in the 1870’s, but he never mentions its use in the 1850s by “pro-slavery imperialists” (Magubane 2016) Fitzhugh and Hughes (Branford 1903).

In terms of colonialism, the papers are full of references to colonies, colonists, colonial policy, and so on. But there is practically no mention of indigenous peoples unless being used to exemplify the “primitive,” “savage,” or “barbarian.” Indigenous populations are thus represented as “groups” or “hordes” but never “civilizations.” Again, the persistence of the lack of analytical rigor applied to colonialism during this period of US

sociology is stark when juxtaposed with the simultaneous overseas expansion of US colonial power after the Spanish-American War 1898. Similarly to people of African descent, none of the claims being presented by these authors seems to consider the subjectivity of indigenous populations. For the early sociologists, they were either savages to be assimilated, or doomed to perish for their inability to change, and in either case their rise or fall was little more to them than data. Shades of this are detectable from multiple passages which offer accounts of US history in which questions of domination and oppression are central themes, but which give no mention of Native Americans (Small 1902; 1904). On one occasion Small's gives description of how the "intolerable" "tyranny of Great Britain" led American colonists to find themselves seeking independence as the only effective way to "resist oppression," yet makes no mention even by implication of the situation of the indigenous or the enslaved whose circumstances were in no particular way improved by American independence from Britain (Small 1904: 34).

## **VI. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION**

In the preceding sections I examined the presence/absence of slavery and colonialism in the papers published in the first ten volumes of *AJS* in both quantitative and qualitative terms. I presented an analysis of how little attention they received as the primary topics of research articles at the time, and also offered a more in depth analysis of the way they were erased or distorted in the conceptions of sociology's objects and methods by some of the most influential American sociologists at the turn of the twentieth century. The content analysis covered in the previous section demonstrates how early constructions of sociology in the US were built upon certain assumptions about fundamental racial distinctions, violence and domination as simply natural, and the superiority of Americans and Europeans as the highest expressions of human evolution, culture, and civilization. In

addition, the examples considered also showed the negative construction of people of African descent and indigenous people as the foil against which white superiority was imagined. Given their marginalization in such terms, it is clear that their exclusion was theoretically necessary to the successful construction of the sort of evolutionary narrative the early sociologists had dedicated themselves to vindicate. Finally, the way that the assumptions and fictions analyzed above haunted early sociological thinking in the US is evidence of a racialized process of knowledge production in which even in its most general terms, sociology relied upon certain taken for granted notions about race and by extension its uses for legitimating colonial domination.

It seems fair to ask if the erasures of slavery and settler colonialism are adequately explained by the racial ontology and imperial unconscious as outlined above. Might there be other reasons for the exclusion of any reflexive analysis of that violence in the opening decade of professional sociology publications in the US? Some historical sociologists argue that much that is considered historical by a given generation of sociologists, is typically ignored because of a systemic bias towards presentist methodologies. Longtime practitioners such as Calhoun, Steinmetz, and Sewell have all criticized mainstream sociology for its presentist methodology and the connected assumptions that sociology (and social science more broadly) is capable, if done properly, of producing universal transhistorical laws of social reality in a manner analogous to the laws generated in the natural sciences. The presentist approach further rests on the notion that such laws can be discovered solely on the basis of analyzing and interpreting empirically quantifiable social phenomena (Calhoun 1998; Steinmetz 2005; Sewell 1996). In his recent piece on the denial of slavery in contemporary American sociology, Patterson levies the same critique. He suggests that because slavery is considered history, and history is not necessary (or perhaps not of interest)

to contemporary American sociologists, it remains peripheral to analysis and the pursuit of knowledge that purports to transcend historical (and social) context (2019).

In light of the discussion and evidence above, such explanations seem inadequate to explain the erasure of slavery and settler colonialism by American sociologists at the turn of the twentieth century. Not only were they much closer to the convulsions and transitions between the rapidly expanding settler state and the turbulent period following the formal ending of legalized chattel slavery, but they were exceedingly historically conscious. Though we might say that they had a similar desire to discover transhistorical laws, their approach to their discovery was decidedly more historically minded. In fact, an overwhelming majority of the papers published during the first ten years of *AJS* firmly situated the validity of their claims as deriving from a particular conception of history, its flow and direction. More than a hundred papers dealt explicitly with notions of social evolution, and many more contained at least implicit gestures towards the concept. In addition, their theories of social evolution, without exception, relied on the assertion of an overarching evolutionary process—that included biological evolution—of which social evolution was just a part. They drew frequent analogies between the development of various biological characteristics to different animal species, to notions of distinct characteristics of human “races,” linking physical traits to ideas about social hierarchy and rank. It simply cannot be that they failed to adequately problematize chattel slavery and indigenous genocide for lack of historical consciousness. The only reasonable explanation is that their deeply held assumptions about race and cultural superiority precluded the possibility of their recognition of that violence as injustice, and as a problem requiring explanation to arrive at any meaningful notion of modernity and the forces (social and otherwise) shaping a world in transition. But if we, in retrospect, are able to perceive the causes of their non-recognition, by what justification can we allow ourselves

to continually reproduce it? It would seem that as a discipline we need a more systematic reckoning with the historical and conceptual foundations of our intellectual project, lest sociology ever remain a technology of racial and cultural genocide.

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