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# The Clinical Sociology of George Edmund Haynes (1880–1960)

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the career and approach to clinical sociology adopted by George Edmund Haynes in the first half of the 20th century. The presentation focuses on Haynes' career as a sociologist, in which he taught and promoted the social sciences at Fisk University, his work in the federal government as a special assistant to the Secretary of Labor and Director of Economics, and his tenure as Executive Secretary of the Commission on Race Relations at the Federal Council of Churches in America, where he conducted an active research program of applying his sociological skills to concrete problems within the context of the religious ideals of the church. Also described are various strategies and programs Haynes advocated in his clinical approach to reforming interracial relations.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the sociological work of the Black sociologist George Edmund Haynes was not far removed from the social setting which shaped, in part, the thinking of many early White sociologists (cf. Hinkle and Hinkle, 1954:1–17). Inspired by his own religious upbringing and training in sociology and social work, Haynes was a firm believer that both science and social reform, working together, were necessary to ameliorate social problems in the society.

Haynes differed from his White contemporaries, however, to the extent that few pioneer American sociologists devoted serious attention to the empirical study of the conditions of Afro-Americans. This neglect was a factor in the slow development of empirical research in the field of race relations in the latter 19th and early 20th century (Pettigrew, 1980:47).

Many early White sociologists also did not apply their training to directly combat racial injustices as Haynes or advocate an alliance between sociology

and religion as a viable mechanism for improving race relations.<sup>1</sup> Poverty, crime, juvenile delinquency, family instability and other social disorders accompanying industrial capitalism were certainly concerns of the early reform oriented sociologists, but racial issues, though not totally ignored, were not central to their work.

Thus, the work of George Edmund Haynes deserves our special attention. Haynes' attempt to come to grips with one of the most prevalent issues of the day and his lifetime commitment to using the tools of sociology to achieve practical objectives confirms his legacy to clinical and applied sociology and places him in a unique position among American sociologists of his generation.

### **Haynes' Biography**

George Edmund Haynes was born May 11, 1880 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He was the son of an unskilled father who had great difficulty securing stable employment and a hard working mother who gradually became a dominant influence in his life.<sup>2</sup> Her "literal teachings of the Bible" and "optimistic ideals of Christianity which sustained her" were not ignored by the young Haynes. According to Perlman (1972:7), "She demanded and received strict obedience from her son and daughter whom she drove to escape from the life of deprivation she had endured." This was not an easy task given the Jim Crow racial climate and the disadvantages of attending poorly equipped segregated schools in the American South.

The limited educational opportunities Haynes endured during the primary and secondary years seldom matched his own aspirations to succeed. However, in 1889, at the age of 19 years, he entered Fisk University. Completing a number of courses in the classics and the sciences, he graduated with his B.A. degree in 1903. A year later, Haynes received a M.A. degree from Yale University, where he was introduced to the science of sociology by the eminent American Sociologist William Graham Sumner. Sumner's own racist views and opposition to economic reformers (cf. Gossett, 1975:153-54) seemed to have little effect on Haynes. He participated fully in Sumner's seminars and visited his home occasionally with other students to discuss more intimately their teacher's ideas. Sumner's concepts of folkways and mores would later exert an influence on Haynes' interpretations of race relations but, all the same, his teacher's laissez-faire views of the world proved to be too inimical to Haynes' religiously inspired social reforms.<sup>3</sup>

With his training in sociology at Yale University and the practical field experience gained working with the YMCA during the period 1905-1908, Haynes entered the New School of Philanthropy at Columbia University (later named the New York School of Social Work) in the fall of 1908, and, in 1912, was the first Black to take a Ph.D. at Columbia University. He majored in

sociology and social administration and minored in social work. Haynes' background matched well the progressive "New Philanthropy" then taking hold in the emerging profession of social work, which stressed a case study approach to social problems and the employment of both scientific principles and practical concerns as the *modus operandi* for adequately dealing with the problems of the poor.

As a fellow in the Bureau of Social Research, a research institute established at Columbia to train students in the "New Philanthropy," Haynes received the skills that were necessary to undertake several studies on the northern migration of Blacks and the social conditions they experienced in urban areas. One such study, *THE NEGRO AT WORK IN NEW YORK CITY: A STUDY IN ECONOMIC PROGRESS* (1912), became Haynes' doctoral dissertation. This work, along with W. E. B. Du Bois' *THE PHILADELPHIA NEGRO: A SOCIAL STUDY* (1899) and R. R. Wright's *THE NEGRO IN PENNSYLVANIA: A STUDY IN ECONOMIC HISTORY* (1912) represent the few empirical studies done on Blacks living in northern cities at the turn of the century. Also, during this time (1911) Haynes, along with Ruth Standish Baldwin, co-founded the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (later named the National Urban League), an organization established to assist Black migrants in adjusting to urban life, and to provide, according to Haynes' plan, practical training "to a cadre of Negro social workers supported by Urban League grants . . . at Negro colleges affiliated with the Urban League program" (Perlman, 1972:83).

Haynes' vision of providing theoretical and applied research skills to Negro social workers and other professionals became a reality with his appointment as professor of sociology and economics at his alma mater, Fisk University, in 1910. While building a social science department at Fisk, Haynes organized a training center there, as well as at five other Urban League-affiliated Negro colleges. One such center, the Bethlehem House in Nashville, Tennessee, included twenty students on the staff who were required "to spend four hours each week in field work, one half the time to be spent at the House and one half in visiting the homes in the neighborhood, a city-block being assigned to each student . . ." (Perlman, 1972:96). By the time Haynes left Fisk University in 1918, Bethlehem House had 115 Fisk students participating in the program.

The period 1910-1921 was very productive for Haynes. He taught and promoted the social sciences at Fisk and amassed a collection of materials on the social conditions of Blacks in the United States. He also undertook a series of preliminary studies in several cities and, in 1918, published a short book, *NEGRO NEW-COMERS IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN*, which assessed the employment and housing problems of recently arrived southern Black migrants in the racially segregated sections of the city.

While on leave from Fisk University, starting in 1918, he worked for the

federal government as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Labor and as the Director of Negro Economics, positions created to mediate labor problems resulting from the large influx of Black workers to northern industrial cities during World War I. In these capacities, it was necessary for Haynes to organize and attend numerous conferences, design and support educational campaigns, establish local advisory committees and appoint and train Black staff workers in various states. Following his tenure with the U.S. government, he published another study, *NEGROES AT WORK DURING WORLD WAR I AND RECONSTRUCTION* (1921), which, as Jones notes (1974:143), was "the first comprehensive government report on economic conditions among Negroes."

In the early 1900s, there were few Black or White social scientists with the training and knowledge of the social conditions of Black Americans in urban areas. Thus, Haynes often was sought after as a consultant by religious, social service, business, and government groups on matters relating to race relations.

Haynes' last major appointment occurred in 1921, when he became the Executive Secretary of the Commission on Race Relations (later named the Department of Race Relations) of the Federal Council of Churches in America, a position he held until his retirement in 1946. During a twenty-five year period Haynes promoted more directly his beliefs in the church's obligation to be socially active in influencing changes in the society, and the idea that successful interracial adjustments and community improvements were best achieved by the church providing the guiding ideals (cf. Haynes, 1969:36-38). Haynes also was able to put into practice his doctrine of interracial cooperation—the belief that satisfying face to face contacts between Blacks and Whites would "produce the desired personal and social changes in harmony with the ideals of justice and goodwill for which the churches should stand" (Perlman, 1972:287-88 citing Haynes). Consequently, Haynes' work with the Federal Council involved him in many diverse activities that were forged within the framework of the church.

### **Strategies and Programs of Intervention**

Haynes was the principal architect and promotor of Race Relations Sunday, a religious program that received national attention in the 1920s. Designed to produce goodwill and cooperation between Blacks and Whites and other ethnic minorities within the religious community, this "experiment in persuasion" included among its program elements the exchange of White and Black ministers, joint interracial services, formal presentations on the church and its relation to social action and open discussions on current racial problems. As Roberts (1974:131) observes, the program expanded impressively between the years 1936-1940, and "attempts were also made to put Race Relations Sunday on an international basis."

During a period when many states and the Congress of the United States

found it difficult to pass an anti-lynching law, Haynes and the Commission established the Honor Roll of States Free From Lynching. Used in conjunction with lobbying efforts, statistics were routinely compiled to publically use the media to praise those states where lynchings were not occurring.

These programs, and ones such as the Harmon Award To Distinguished Negroes, were quite moderate; they did not antagonize the status quo or place demands on the White power structure. They were consistent with Haynes' philosophy of utilizing public education, moral persuasion, and positive images of racial progress and amity to advance racial tolerance (cf. Haynes, 1945:105-110).

Similarly, to meet the challenge of the unprecedented migration of Blacks from the South to northern cities in the 1910s and 1920s and the attendant racial hostilities they experienced, the concept of the interracial committee was brought into service. Consisting of representatives from local churches, public officials, civic leaders, businessmen and other concerned citizens, interracial committees were organized for the purpose of improving many of the social ills of urban communities, and again providing a forum for interracial cooperation. One key strategy contributing to their success was the use of the "conference method," in which members of the Commission on Race Relations had the responsibility of initiating interracial committees in their respective localities by organizing conferences to discuss common problems. The formation of local interracial committees also was enhanced by state-appointed interracial commissions which existed in a number of states. In this way Haynes attempted to build links between local and state interracial organizations and the Federal Council's Commission on Race Relations.

The Depression and New Deal recovery periods were busy times for Haynes and the Commission on Race Relations. Racial discrimination in the administration of New Deal programs, the lack of education and geographic isolation among rural Blacks, inadequate research on the unique status of Black sharecroppers, all meant there were real possibilities for exclusion from government recovery efforts. Thus a major aim of the Commission was defending the economic rights of Black agricultural workers in the rural South. As the chairman of the Joint Committee On National Recovery, which expanded into an organization with representation from 24 national organizations, Haynes and the Joint Committee became a significant lobby which monitored the activities of the National Recovery Administration (Perlman, 1972:264). Always wary of how unfair labor practices might adversely affect Black workers, Haynes was sometimes needed to visit farm or urban factory areas to investigate a problem and draw up a report, operate as a lobbyist or give testimony at public hearings.

In the wake of a relatively large number of racially motivated and violent riots in northern cities in the mid-1940s, many public and private agencies subscribed to a variety of remedies for easing racial tensions. Haynes and the

Department of Race Relations (earlier referred to as the Commission on Race Relations) offered as a national strategy the interracial clinic for treating the social ills of racism and changing public attitudes. This strategy is probably best outlined in the 1946 article, "Clinical Methods in Interracial and Intercultural Relations," which is reprinted in this issue of the *Clinical Sociology Review*. It exemplifies Haynes' advocacy of a religiously oriented social reform, and offers the kind of prescriptions which guided much of his work of applying sociology to concrete social problems. Many of the strategies included in Haynes' proposed clinical method, moreover, are quite relevant to clinical sociology today.

Haynes' stress on the church initiating interracial clinics in local communities and the reliance of empirical data to make informed decisions reflects further his attempt to deal with community problems within a religious and scientific framework. Haynes' clinical approach considers social phenomena not simply in economic and political terms, but also at higher levels. Spiritual and ethical values are important considerations (Haynes, 1946a:319).

The success of the interracial clinic is dependent on investigating problems related to the day-to-day encounters of individuals and groups in local communities, organizing group discussions and enabling participants to reach a consensus on a course of action. This does not prohibit comparisons with other communities having similar or different problems, or prevent the treatment of "concrete local problems in light of broadly scientific backgrounds" (Haynes, 1946a:318). Of critical importance is Haynes' judgment that community people should make their own decisions on local concerns, unencumbered by the consultant, whose role is mainly to provide counsel and advice. To be sure, Haynes was a strong proponent of dealing with community problems from the bottom up, although he was not unmindful of the larger responsibilities of the states and federal government.

## Conclusion

Haynes' approach to solving the race problem appealed mainly to religiously oriented, educated, middle-class Blacks and liberal Whites who already had acquired a level of racial tolerance. To the Black masses and more militant Black leaders, Haynes' attempt to incorporate a spiritual solution in dealing with the race problem was too visionary, conciliatory, and lacking the kind of direct action that was necessary to stir the consciousness of Whites in a substantive way.

Black Americans continued to be denied their civil rights as citizens. There was rampant racial discrimination in almost all sectors of the society, including the church. It was very unlikely that a strategy to enhance interracial cooperation such as the one proposed by Haynes would do much to alter these conditions.

On the other hand, as limited as Haynes' programs were, he offered what he believed was an effective approach to achieving mutual respect and equal citizenship rights for Afro-Americans, during a period when there were few options open to refute the notion of Black inferiority. Haynes did not see his programs as geared to fundamental change in the society. Each program was one step in a long journey toward dealing with a very deeply rooted problem in the society. If nothing more, as Perlman (1972:177) observed:

Haynes felt that his programs were important in and by themselves as educational experiences. For the whites there was the discovery of the Negro as a human being. For the depressed Negro there was the opportunity to learn a new sense of his own worth, while for the militant Negro there was the demonstration of a possible technique for interracial adjustment.

All in all, perhaps Haynes' legacy in American sociology should not be judged by his scholarly success alone, though he published five books, numerous articles, reports and pamphlets during a career spanning nearly fifty years. He used his sociological training and skills to challenge the racial status quo in the United States in ways that were compatible with his own convictions. Haynes' career was exemplary of an earlier generation of professionally trained sociologists who contributed to the discipline by applying their expertise rather than simply pursuing academic goals.

## NOTES

1. Haynes, like many early American sociologists, came from a rural and religious background and was imbued with strong ethical concerns (cf. Hinkle and Hinkle, 1954:3). Haynes strongly endorsed the idea that institutionalized religion, in combination with a scientific sociology, could effectively combat the ills of urbanization and industrialization, particularly the conditions of Afro-Americans migrating to northern industrial areas.

2. The historical material for this article is indebted to two comprehensive studies of the life and work of George Edmund Haynes: Daniel Perlman's (1972) *STIRRING THE WHITE CONSCIENCE: THE LIFE OF GEORGE EDMUND HAYNES*, and Samuel Kelton Roberts' (1979) *CRUCIBLE FOR A VISION: THE WORK OF GEORGE EDMUND HAYNES AND THE COMMISSION ON RACE RELATIONS, 1922-1947*. Subsequent to preparing this article, Jan Fritz brought to the author's attention a recent dissertation on Haynes by Iris Belinda Carlton (1974) *A PIONEER SOCIAL WORK EDUCATOR: GEORGE EDMUND HAYNES*. The author also wishes to thank Mrs. Olyve Jeter Haynes for written and oral material provided during an interview in Mount Vernon, New York and Jan Fritz for helpful suggestions and editorial assistance.

3. For a more extended discussion of Sumner's influence on Haynes, see Roberts (1974: 56-58 and 260-262).



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