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Two Tales of a City: Nineteenth-Century Black Philadelphia

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Two Tales of a City: Nineteenth-Century Black Philadelphia

Abstract

[Excerpt] In the tension between *Forging Freedom* and *Roots of Violence* certain themes present themselves for further research and thought. Neither volume successfully analyzes the historical roots of the African-American class structure. This is especially evident in each book's treatment of the black middling orders. While neither defines the category with clarity, their basic assumption that small shopkeepers and regularly employed workers were critical to the community's ability to withstand some of the worst shocks of racism is important. The clash between these books also raises questions concerning the role of pre-industrial cultural values in the transition to industrial capitalism. Nash notes, and then fails to explore, the significance of black exclusion from industrial life; Lane, however, is quite clear that to be excluded from that transition, despite the pains inclusion brought, is to remain in a position of profound disadvantage. The work of Lane and William Julius Wilson suggests avenues for both historical and contemporary exploration of the economic and cultural effects of this exclusion. In addition, Lane's argument has a particular implication for the writing of nineteenth-century white working-class history as well. It would lend support to the suggestions of Richard Stott and others that we need to be more rigorous in appreciating both the cultural and social values of the pre-industrial world and the specific relevance of those values to industrial society.

Finally, there is the central tension between these two books, one that revolves around their respective visions of nineteenth-century African-American urban culture. While neither argument is fully convincing, the structure of Roger Lane's analysis, if not always its development, suggests an important direction for future work. Not to explore these issues historically is to continue the timidity Wilson so sharply criticized in contemporary policy debates. As in so many other areas, it was W.E.B. DuBois who pointed the way when he wrote, in 1899, that "we must study, we must investigate, we must attempt to solve; and the utmost that the world can demand is, not lack of human interest and moral conviction, but rather the heart-quality of fairness, and an earnest desire for the truth despite its possible unpleasantness."

Keywords

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TWO TALES OF A CITY

Nineteenth-Century Black Philadelphia

During the last thirty years the perspective on the African-American urban experience has changed dramatically. Gone, to a large extent, is an interpretive model that stressed the social pathology of black life. Attributed, in its nonracist forms, to the destructive effects of slavery and postemancipation discrimination, this model emphasized the weakness of the black family and stressed the effects of a high crime rate, broad underemployment, and the effect of single-female-headed family units upon African-American familial and community life. Although important differences existed within this scholarly tradition, the premise that significant portions of the black community had, to some degree, been unable to withstand the pressures exerted by a hostile and powerful white world informed the work of such diverse scholars as W.E.B. DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier, Stanley Elkins, Kenneth B. Clark, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Amid appreciations of the complexity of African-American life, for example, DuBois wrote in his 1899 classic, *The Philadelphia Negro*, that "the great weakness of the Negro family is still the lack of respect for the marriage bond, inconsiderate entrance into it, and bad household economy and family management." Since the 1960s, however, a new vision has emerged, one that might view DuBois's perceptions as the musings of a brilliant if flawed Victorian moralist.¹

While the best of this new work acknowledges the severe burdens imposed upon black people by white hostility, its primary message emphasizes the ability of African Americans to adapt creatively to the racist environment. African Americans were no passive ciphers to

be analyzed only by examining the forces that swirl around and through the community. Rather, in slavery as after emancipation, in the nineteenth-century South as in the twentieth-century North, a rich repository of social and cultural resources nurtured black life and buoyed individuals, the extended families that sustained them, and the institutions that would buffer the community as a whole in times of stress. "Are American Negroes simply the creation of white men," Ralph Ellison asked more than forty years ago, "or have they at least helped to create themselves out of what they found around them?" Among historians, the late Herbert Gutman developed this point more vividly than most in his frequent insistence that the central issue was "the Sartre question": "The essential question for study . . . is not what has been done to men and women but what men and women do with what has been done to themselves." Earlier scholars had simply misunderstood the evidence, Gutman and others argued, a result of racist assumptions or an insensitivity to the varieties of historical evidence. If understood correctly, this evidence would reveal both the complexity of black cultural life and the functional importance of behavior patterns frequently deemed disruptive. Rather than emphasizing social pathology, most scholarship of the past thirty years has celebrated, with varying degrees of sophistication and exactitude, the cultural manifestations of peoplehood in African-American life.²

A number of influences contributed to this historiographical development. The civil rights movement and the resurgence of nationalist sentiment within the African-American com-

munity had a powerful influence upon scholars, both white and black, in the reshaping of questions and the dismantling of earlier assumptions. In an ironic way this process was urged forward by the publication, in 1965, of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family*. Moynihan argued that slavery and postemancipation history resulted in a black family structure that facilitated the transmission of social pathologies. At their gentlest, the attacks on Moynihan dismissed him as one who, through historical ignorance, would blame the victim for the crime. In the wake of this reaction, a profound chill descended over much of the intellectual world that inhibited further explorations in directions held to be demeaning or racist. Separate yet simultaneous was the influence of the then "new" social history. In E. P. Thompson's avowed intent "to rescue [the common person] . . . from the enormous condescension of posterity" lay a disposition, on the part of some who followed, to celebrate uncritically the lives of those who were thus discovered. From all of this emerged a new historiography of first the slave and, in time, the free urban African American, North and South.³

Valuable as much of this work has been, cautions have recently been raised about these new directions. Just as the enthusiastic adoption of Thompson by his American followers has recently been questioned in the writing of working-class history, so too has the reactive nature of much research following the Moynihan debate been reevaluated. William Julius Wilson, for instance, has insisted that researchers "can no longer afford to be timid" in exploring "the relationships between joblessness and family structure, joblessness and other social dislocations (crime, teenage pregnancy, welfare dependency, and so on), and joblessness and social orientation among different age groups" within the contemporary African-American community. Wilson's analysis stresses unemployment as the root cause of the profound problems of "the truly disadvantaged." Yet he explicitly applauds Moynihan, Clark, Lee Rainwater, and others and does not cringe from the recognition that destructive social pathologies, whatever the cause, afflict contemporary urban ghetto life.⁴ Yet, precisely

because Wilson is not a historian, his analysis leaves critical points unaddressed. Wilson assumes, for example, that the crisis within the African-American community is of relatively recent vintage. Given his strong interest in public policy, this belief permits Wilson to applaud equally both Moynihan and Gutman but it also leaves unexamined the broader conceptual issues at stake in Gutman's radical criticism of Moynihan. In creating a kind of intellectual odd couple, Wilson skirts a historical problem of some importance.

The two books under discussion here help explore this problem. Gary B. Nash's *Forging Freedom* and Roger Lane's *The Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia* are sensitive and sophisticated in both conception and method.* Both examine African-American life in Philadelphia and, together, analyze almost two centuries of that community's history. But they do so from such profoundly different perspectives that, on first reflection, one might wonder whether in fact they studied the same city. The oddness of this juxtaposition, not unlike Wilson's, may help to reveal further areas for research and discussion.

Community Building

Nash describes his work as a study of "the dialectic between oppression and achievement, racism and race consciousness, external structures of power and internal consciousness and experience" within Philadelphia's African-American community. Over more than a century, Nash explains, Philadelphia blacks moved from slavery to freedom; exploited contradictions between the rhetoric of freedom and actual experience during the Revolutionary era; established a network of churches, benevolent organizations, and fraternal societies that gave definition to the community; and, most critically, created the nucleus of a middle class providing economic and political direction for the majority. Moreover, this community-

* Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 354 pp.; and Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860-1900* (Harvard University Press, 1986), 213 pp.

building proceeded despite the constant remaking of the African-American community during these years, a result of the continued migration of blacks, free and fugitive slaves, into the city. Between 1820 and 1840 black Philadelphia grew by one-third; and, despite race riots, demands for colonization, and near daily antiblack violence, the community grew in strength as well as size. "Consequently," Nash writes, "the quarter-century after 1815 became an era of unprecedented institution building that demonstrated the resilience of those regarded increasingly by whites as incapable pariahs." Nash skillfully develops the tension between white expectations and black reality. *Forging Freedom* is intended in part as a study of leaders, "some inspired, others frail"; but it is also intended as "a reckoning of ordinary people making choices, searching for solutions to their own problems, and determining the course of their lives as best they could." There are three related concepts here that deserve notice.

The first concerns Nash's argument that the black community sought to create for itself an area of independent, even autonomous, existence. As early as 1782, when the free African-American population was still under one thousand, six of the city's free blacks petitioned to have the government recognize a section of Potters Field as a distinctly African-American burial ground. This turning of their exclusion from white church-related cemeteries into a more positive group identity, Nash argues, suggests "a rising consciousness among recent freedpersons that they were a distinct people who must work collectively to secure a place of dignity and security in white American society." Nash points to further evidence in discussing the emergence of independent black churches and in the naming pattern adopted by freed men and women that differentiated them both from the slave past and the white present. This Thompsonian argument is quite attractive and follows from Nash's explicit intent to write not only of oppression but also of "the internal history of a people striving to live life as fully, as freely, as creatively, and as spiritually rich as their inner

resources and external circumstances allowed." Attractive as it is, this argument is not fully convincing. One wants to delve deeper into the tension evident between descriptions of the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a "fully autonomous black center of strength" and Nash's frank acknowledgment that, even before the Revolution, Philadelphia's slaves adapted "to the culture of the master class." The point becomes even sharper when, in a discussion of black religion, Nash suggests that through the African-American minister black Philadelphians "imbibed the same moral calculus that white churchgoers did." So there is an attractive but elusive argument here concerning the development of an autonomous black culture that never quite confronts its own contradictions. Assertions for autonomy recede in places, the extent of this autonomous influence across all class groupings within the black community is never clear, and the fact that the "limits of the possible" for black Philadelphians "were always dictated to some extent by the white majority around them" is never fully integrated into the larger conceptual framework.

Nash recognizes that employment constituted "the foundation of an independent existence":

Artisan, service, and proprietorial work roles by no means guaranteed success, but enough blacks established themselves by the early nineteenth century to create the nucleus of a black middle class. Though many were frozen in unskilled jobs at the bottom of the urban workforce largely controlled by white Philadelphians, scores of free blacks created their own work roles, and thus provided themselves with decent material rewards, and equally important, space to operate autonomously. . . . Even the ragman made daily decisions with existential meaning that we can only guess at—which streets to walk, when to set out, when to quit work. Though he had to endure poverty, the ragman did not have to withstand the insulting comments of a boss, maintain a schedule set by somebody else, and face layoffs during an economic downturn.

Nash is right in identifying as centrally important the emergence of a black middle class, given its ability to provide employment to other blacks, a leadership familiar with the

ways of the white world, and concrete support for the community's religious and fraternal institutions. But it is less clear from Nash's book how cohesive this group was and how effective it could or wished to be in addressing the needs of the entire black community. One would want to know, for example, whether the class categories referred to in this study remained firm over generations. As is well known, James Forten became an independent entrepreneur (a sail maker), employed white and black artisans, and transmitted to his children both wealth and status. But we know almost nothing about those artisans, especially the African-American ones, and their subsequent history.

This is a particularly important point for Nash's discussion in light of an 1838 report of the trades followed by black Philadelphians. Not only were they overwhelmingly in service positions that were the least remunerative and most dependent upon whites (dressmakers, hairdressers, milliners); the vast majority had achieved anything but that idealized entrepreneurial independence. Some were journeymen, working largely in small shops for others, in conditions we know little about; while most, due to racial exclusion, were unable to find work in their trade in any capacity. It remains unclear to what extent, if any, possessing a skill protected these men and women from cyclical bouts of severe under- or unemployment.⁵

The size and internal strength of this middle-class nucleus needs further examination in light of the external changes in Philadelphia as a whole. Industrialization and a dramatically increased immigration altered the social, cultural, and spatial framework of the city. If, as Nash acknowledges, the white industrial elite relied primarily on white workers, thus effectively "freezing the city's free blacks out of the emerging industrial economy," who then constituted this black middle class? Black elites were economically unable and increasingly unwilling to bear communal responsibilities, partly because they differentiated themselves from an African-American population continually remaking itself through the absorption of rural immigrants possessing few urban skills.⁶ The term middle class (which might include small businesspeople, artisans, and those,

whatever their level of skill, who possessed relatively steady employment) remains poorly defined in Nash's study. It is unclear whether the middle-class nucleus identified by Nash either preceded or survived the formation of industrial Philadelphia in numbers sufficient to the serious economic and cultural tasks he assigns it. Perhaps, in the context of the vicious racism of the 1830s and 1840s, the meaning attributed to the daily choices a ragman might make were to him less compelling than to later observers.

This is not to suggest that African Americans lacked social or cultural resources. It is to question whether, in the face of profound difficulties, there were enough individual and community resources in nineteenth-century Philadelphia to maintain an internal cohesiveness for the majority within the black community.

These questions come to a head in what Nash terms, alternately, "the passage," "the crucial psychological passage," or "the crucial psychological middle passage by which those who gained freedom in a legal sense procured as well the emotional autonomy that enabled them to overcome their dependence upon whites." How freed slaves become free men and women is a complex social and psychological process. Nash recognizes the continued power of the "many scars of oppression" and notes, following Edward Turner, "the course of this slow rise from complete servitude to complete freedom."⁷ Central to this rise, of course, is the black church. For "ordinary men and women," he writes with passion and insight, these churches "provided the key to their individual and collective security" in that these black institutions allowed them to form "a kind of subcommunity civic existence that operated outside the formal political life of the city."

As important as the church was in helping individuals navigate that "middle passage," the extent of its influence remains unclear. There is relatively little discussion of the churches' collective ability to adopt to the constant migration, a point of some importance given the rising proportion of African Americans who were not church members.⁸ Concurrent with

the growth of the churches, moreover, Nash points to a persistent rise in the crime rate and to the emergence, by the 1820s, of a subculture among youths and recent migrants to the city. This subculture possessed "a penchant for conviviality, an unrestrained display of emotions, and a desire to present oneself as individualistically as possible, as if to obliterate the drudgery and submission required under slavery or, later, in the cities, the poverty and blasted ambitions of many free blacks."

How this subculture affected that "middle passage," related to the black church, and influenced the crime rate are points that remain unexplored. In what ways, for example, did this subculture affect the black urban family? Did its presence quicken the elite's distancing from the community? Did churches reach out to these youth or did they focus primarily on those already within the flock? Was there movement back and forth between the African-American worker, perched so precariously in the economy, and this subculture? Did it grow over time and offer, in light of the systematic exclusion from industry in all but the most menial positions, a seeming alternative culture built on conspicuous consumption and immersion, for some at least, in the world of the demimonde?

The point here is not, of course, to judge Philadelphia's nineteenth-century African-American citizens. Rather, it is to argue that the complex evidence Nash has accumulated itself demands a broader framework than he provides. His argument that the black community carved for itself an autonomous existence falters on closer examination of the economic and psychological support for that claim. Further, his recognition of crime, poverty, economic exclusion, and the subculture remains curiously unintegrated with his larger emphasis on African-American effort and ambition. It is as if a particular moral imperative drives the Thompsonian charge to study the people's culture in one direction only—while evidence that may cloud the picture remains visible but out of focus. My criticisms notwithstanding, Nash's *Forging Freedom* is a powerful and important book but not the complete story of Philadelphia's black community during these years.

Broken Apart

Roger Lane's *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia* is starkly different from *Forging Freedom*. Lane's account of the same city, which begins but two decades following the close of Nash's study, recognizes neither a dialectic between "oppression and achievement" nor the existence of an autonomous black culture. Rather, Lane portrays the African-American world of Philadelphia as fragmented, in serious internal tension, and generally far too weak to sustain a collective autonomous existence. While he acknowledges certain important contributions in recent scholarship, Lane consciously situates himself in "an old tradition going back to W.E.B. DuBois." He stresses the systematic exclusion of African Americans from the "urban-industrial revolution" and argues that "this exclusion had important effects not only on criminal behavior but also, through criminal behavior, on family life, racial leadership, and urban culture in general." The book has won prestigious awards even as it has been dismissed as a volume that teems with such "numerous distortions and inaccurate statements" that it can be considered as merely "a new restatement of an old racism."⁹ Such unfounded charges are a serious obstacle to understanding the critical issues in the book.

Lane centers attention on two related issues: a rising crime rate from mid-century on and the emergence of a criminal subculture of great influence within the community. He situates this analysis within a framework that would attribute to the "urban industrial revolution" a powerful sociopsychological impetus encouraging rational and sober attitudes at odds with such criminal behavior. Lane explains this juxtaposition by noting that blacks were largely excluded from that revolution. The Philadelphia African-American community, says Lane, suffered so profoundly because of its systematic exclusion from the central economic experience of the era that its economic, social, and cultural life weakened, indeed fractured, in the process.

Examination of the city's overall crime statistics suggests to the author that a graph of the crime rate for the decades following 1860

would resemble a "long U-curve": a downward trend in all categories lasting until approximately 1960, when the crime rate began to rise precipitously. Lane argues that the urban industrial revolution actually fostered this decline by introducing both a rising standard of living and the imperative, for workers as for others, to heed the strictures of a bureaucratic disciplinary system in school and factory as a precondition for economic advancement. Among the Irish, for example, these influences coalesced over time, and, as a broader recognition of the benefits available from industrial development grew, the Irish crime rate dropped. The Irish had had the worst rate of homicide indictments among whites in 1860 (4.7 per 100,000, where the citywide average was 2.9); by 1901, those figures had dropped dramatically (1.8, against a citywide average of 2.1 per 100,000). This change Lane attributes in large measure to "the new industrial order" that fostered among urbanites here and elsewhere "more sober and rational lives than they had earlier in the century."

But such developments were dependent upon inclusion in the economic expansion—and Philadelphia's African Americans clearly were not included. This led to destructive consequences. Black homicide indictments, already quite high in 1860 at 8.7 per 100,000, grew by century's end to 9.5 per 100,000. Other categories of crime—prostitution, gambling, robbery, and assault—increased as well. These realities are central to Lane's broader analysis. He argues that this criminal activity led to the creation of an "active criminal subculture" extending throughout the African-American community regardless of economic standing.

This subculture may have had its roots in the reality of exclusion—Lane suggests that criminal activity was a rational economic choice for many, given the absence of more attractive choices, and not simply a failure to adjust to the city. But economically, with few exceptions, these activities constituted a net transfer of wealth out of the black community. Even more searing in its effect was the social and cultural pattern this subculture encouraged. Essentially it is Lane's argument that, in its exclusion from the "urban industrial revolution," a critical segment of Philadelphia's

black community was also excluded from a modern industrial consciousness, at least until more recently. Instead, this critical segment of Philadelphia blacks rejected the bourgeois values of hard work and discipline, for they understood that they would benefit little from their application. In their place developed a value system that emphasized an ostentatious individualism, conspicuous consumption, and the illicit activities supporting such a lifestyle. That the racial reality of Philadelphia's economic development allowed few other choices did not soften the profound effect such exclusion had upon the inner life of the city's black community.

Lane's argument is powerful and, in many aspects, quite compelling. His "sober and rational" view allows him to ask questions of the evidence that most social historians have passed over. *Roots of Violence* neither blames the victim nor demeans African Americans—but it does insist, in common with William Julius Wilson, that there are indeed consequences, individual and social, to such extensive patterns of discrimination. Certain questions, nonetheless, remain.

Lane's use of the term culture (or, alternatively, subculture) is highly particularistic. As he has suggested, "[A]s an historian of crime, I approach black culture from a grotesque angle, and do not pretend to describe it whole."¹⁰ In *Roots of Violence*, however, this admonition is less than clear. It is not just that his account is unbalanced but rather that he tells us little about the interaction between the subculture of crime and other segments of the community. How churches, social and fraternal clubs, and the more informal familial neighborhood networks (especially among the newer residents) interacted with this subculture is never examined in depth.¹¹ Neither the black middle class nor the black elite appear in the book in substance: usually they are mentioned because of their inability to redirect that subculture or as evidence of that subculture's ability to undermine their stability. This interaction within the African-American community needs a more sustained analysis, especially if Lane's argument is to be convincing. But Lane's historical

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discussion of Philadelphia's African-American culture remains underdeveloped and driven, perhaps more than he recognizes, by a one-dimensional emphasis on criminal statistics.

The need for a more complex analysis is also evident in Lane's discussion of the black family, a matter he does explore in some detail. Lane accepts the argument, advanced by Gutman and others, that "a workable sexual morality and family life had in fact flourished in the slave South." The black family's structural divergence from the "Victorian ideal," moreover, was a positive creative adaptation to a particular set of harsh circumstances. Turning his attention to the urban family in Philadelphia, Lane argues that neither a debilitating legacy of slavery nor "female-headedness" of family units is a viable category for evaluating the stability of the black family: "permissive" sexual mores were neither indiscriminate in practice nor unique to African Americans among the world's rural people; while the prevalence of single females as heads of families was neither as widespread nor as destructive as is often assumed. How, then, to account for the dismal picture presented of the black family? Lane writes:

The real measure [of the strength of the family] is how well parents are able to raise children, to maintain good relations within the network of kin, and to transmit useful cultural values across the generations. On this point, all of the evidence from nineteenth century Philadelphia points in one direction. The conditions of urban living were deeply subversive of black family life.

As evidence Lane points to the extent of intrafamily violence, as measured by the murder rate within families; the high incidence of delinquency among black children, as reflected in the admissions to Philadelphia's youth detention home, the House of Refuge; and the prevalence of prostitution, estimated at perhaps as much as one-eighth of the black female population in 1895. "It was impossible, then," Lane concludes, "to mount any collective resistance to a system that trapped all blacks together."

While it is refreshing to see the supposed

white middle-class family structure rejected as a model, other elements of Lane's analysis remain troublesome. How, for example, did that viable southern family become the fractured urban unit of Lane's analysis? From *Roots of Violence* we know that black delinquent youth were largely Philadelphia-born, but beyond that we have little hard evidence concerning the relative importance of northern or southern origins in creating the criminal subculture; nor do we have a sense of how the African-American family may have been changed over the course of forty years. It may be, as others have suggested, that "a workable sexual morality and family life" viable for a rural world, pre- or post-Emancipation, proved to be particularly weak when transported to the city, North or South.¹² But for the argument that this "active criminal subculture" was centrally important, we need to examine the interaction between the southern migrants and the city from at least the following perspectives: the composition of the migratory pattern itself; the nature and meaning, for their urban life, of the recent migrants' continued contact with their southern "home" communities; the existence, and effectiveness in the urban context, of self-help networks of extended kin and neighbors; and the relationship between these migrants and the older, urban black residents. These questions, in turn, must be asked intergenerationally, as there is some evidence to suggest that the experience of the children of the migrants differed sharply from that of their parents.¹³

Finally, Lane's evidence for family disruption is not entirely convincing. Intrafamily violence is ugly, to be sure, but between 1860 and 1900, as the city's black population grew by more than forty thousand people, Lane found (by a generous standard) only sixty-two cases of familial homicide. While this was proportionally above the white rate, the sixty-two cases—in a population that would reach over sixty-two thousand—is hardly evidence of a fractured family structure. Similar criticism might be made of Lane's evidence on delinquency, although he is on firmer ground in his discussion of prostitution. In short, the detailed research that would link these crime statistics to, at a minimum, church and associational

membership rolls, relief agency records, and the city's marital records is sorely lacking. Nor is it evident that such research would disprove Lane's argument: his own work has considerable strengths and it calls upon the extensive research of W.E.B. DuBois as well. But to move the discussion of African-American urban culture from an emphasis on either its social pathology or its autonomous presence to a stress on the ability of racism to overwhelm African-American collective resources demands a more sustained historical examination if it is to be more than suggestive.

Common Themes

In the tension between *Forging Freedom* and *Roots of Violence* certain themes present themselves for further research and thought. Neither volume successfully analyzes the historical roots of the African-American class structure. This is especially evident in each book's treatment of the black middling orders. While neither defines the category with clarity, their basic assumption that small shopkeepers and regularly employed workers were critical to the community's ability to withstand some of the worst shocks of racism is important. The clash between these books also raises questions concerning the role of pre-industrial cultural values in the transition to industrial capitalism. Nash notes, and then fails to explore, the significance of black exclusion from industrial life; Lane, however, is quite clear that to be

excluded from that transition, despite the pains inclusion brought, is to remain in a position of profound disadvantage. The work of Lane and William Julius Wilson suggests avenues for both historical and contemporary exploration of the economic and cultural effects of this exclusion. In addition, Lane's argument has a particular implication for the writing of nineteenth-century white working-class history as well. It would lend support to the suggestions of Richard Stott and others that we need to be more rigorous in appreciating both the cultural and social values of the pre-industrial world and the specific relevance of those values to industrial society.¹⁴

Finally, there is the central tension between these two books, one that revolves around their respective visions of nineteenth-century African-American urban culture. While neither argument is fully convincing, the structure of Roger Lane's analysis, if not always its development, suggests an important direction for future work. Not to explore these issues historically is to continue the timidity Wilson so sharply criticized in contemporary policy debates. As in so many other areas, it was W.E.B. DuBois who pointed the way when he wrote, in 1899, that "we must study, we must investigate, we must attempt to solve; and the utmost that the world can demand is, not lack of human interest and moral conviction, but rather the heart-quality of fairness, and an earnest desire for the truth despite its possible unpleasantness."¹⁵ □

Notes

¹ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York, 1967), p. 72. See also E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago, 1939); Stanley Elkins, *Slavery* (Chicago, 1959); Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghettos: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York, 1965); and U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C., 1965).

² Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York, 1964), pp. 315-16; and Herbert G. Gutman, *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class* (New York, 1987), p. 346. The literature referred to here is simply too large to note, but for an insightful analysis of twentieth-century African-American urban historiography, see Kenneth Kusmer, "The Black Urban Experience in American History," in Darlene

Clark Hine, ed., *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present and Future* (Baton Rouge, 1986), pp. 91-122.

³ William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago, 1987), pp. 3-5; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963), p. 12. For a discussion of the reaction to the Moynihan report, see Lee Rainwater and W.C. Yancey, eds., *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967). Herbert G. Gutman's massive study, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York, 1976), is perhaps the most famous work of history that has its origins in the reaction to Moynihan's report.

⁴ See David Brody, "The Old History and the New: In Search of an American Working Class," *Labor History*, 20: 1 (Winter 1979): 111-126; Nick Salvatore and David

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Lewin. "Notes on the Roundtable: Theories of Labor History and Industrial Relations," *Proceedings*, 38th Annual Meeting, Industrial Relations Research Association (1986), pp. 384-390; Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, pp. 18-19, 73, 126-29, 149-57.

⁵ See *Register of Trades of the Colored People in the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1838). Fourteen years later, a canvass of black Philadelphia suggested little change in this condition: few blacks were entrepreneurial tradesmen while nearly half were "compelled to abandon their trades on account of the unrelenting prejudice against their color." See Benjamin C. Bacon, *Statistics of the Colored People of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1859), p. 15.

⁶ On this differentiation see Nash, *Forging Freedom*, pp. 173, 248; Emma Jones Lapansky, "Friends, Wives, and Strivings: Networks and Community Values Among Nineteenth-Century Philadelphian Afro-American Elite," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* CVIII, 1 (January 1984): 23-24; and Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia, 1988), pp. 151-169.

⁷ Edward Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery-Servitude-Freedom, 1639-1861* (Washington, D.C.,

1911), p. 89; see also Nash's discussion in *Forging Freedom*, p. 78.

⁸ See the figures on black church membership collected by Reverend William T. Catto, *A Semi-Centenary Discourse*. (Philadelphia, 1857) and compare with Nash's estimates for twenty years earlier in *Forging Freedom*, pp. 259-60.

⁹ See the letter of V.P. Franklin (with responses by Lane and Emma Jones Lapansky) in *Journal of American History*, 75: 1 (June 1988): 328.

¹⁰ Roger Lane, "To the Editor," *Journal of American History*, *op. cit.*

¹¹ For an informative analysis of this process in Chicago, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago, 1989).

¹² Clyde Vernon Kiser, *Sea Island to City: A Study of St. Helena Islanders in Harlem and Other Urban Centers* (New York, 1967), pp. 201-06; and Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty: Boston, 1865-1900* (New York, 1979), pp. 194-95.

¹³ Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, p. 166.

¹⁴ See Richard Stott, "British Immigrants and the American 'Work Ethic' in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Labor History*, 26: 1 (Winter 1985): 86-102.

¹⁵ DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, p. 3.