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ARTICLE

Foreshadowing Du Bois

James McCune Smith and the Shaping of Nineteenth Century Black Social Scientists

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Abstract

W. E. B. Du Bois is widely regarded as the foundational Black social scientist in the United States. He lived during a historical period when social science was predominantly considered the creation and domain of White scholars. In primary sociology texts, Du Bois is typically mentioned in passing, often as the sole Black social scientist acknowledged in social science historiography. At the other end of the spectrum, many Black social scientists today begin their exploration with Du Bois, recognizing his brilliant and groundbreaking contributions. However, both of these approaches seemingly imply that there were no notable Black social scientists before Du Bois. This paper aims to challenge that assumption by examining early nineteenth-century Black social science through the lens of James McCune Smith. Despite being a close friend to prominent figures like Frederick Douglass, Gerrit Smith, John Brown, and Alexander Crummell, McCune Smith has been relegated to a historical footnote in most accounts, except in a few recent notable works.

Keywords: Social Science; Black Social Scientists; Africana Studies; James McCune Smith; W. E. B. Du Bois; Black Intellectual Historiography

Introduction

> *Dr. J. McCune Smith delivered an address to the members of the legislature of New York, on the subject of removing the property qualifications, which applied to colored persons. So great was the array of statistics and facts, so conclusive were his arguments and deductions, and so successfully were they presented, that at the close, the meeting unanimously adopted four resolutions…*
>
> —Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865 Volume I* (1979, p. 254)

The captivating opening quote hails from a letter presented by Justin Holland, a musician and abolitionist, at the 1850 State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio. This letter captures an important aspect of the unique life of James McCune Smith, a renowned medical doctor and abolitionist. Beyond his medical and abolitionist endeavors, McCune Smith was celebrated by his contemporaries as a brilliant intellect, a prolific writer, and, by today's standards, a social scientist.

In the brief excerpt from Holland's letter, we unearth a fascinating aspect of McCune Smith's work—his adept use of statistical research to assess the condition of Black individuals in New York. What sets McCune Smith apart from many of his contemporaries is that he engaged in this groundbreaking research for over a decade, a practice now commonplace but revolutionary in his time. It was not until W. E. B. Du Bois (1995) established the "Laboratory in Sociology at Atlanta University" that the study of the Black condition, from a Black perspective, was institutionalized.

Regrettably, McCune Smith's pioneering role as an early social scientist often takes a back seat to his legacy as an abolitionist and medical doctor. This article endeavors to shed light on his overlooked contributions, aiming to redefine his intellectual legacy and emphasize the significance of his social scientific analyses.

In his magisterial *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1994) dedicated a chapter to Alexander Crummell. Crummell, at the time an aging dean of Black intellectuals, who served as a mentor to Du Bois during the formation of the American Negro Academy in 1897. As Du Bois reflected on his encounter with Crummell, he vividly recounts: "Instinctively I bowed before this man, as one bows before the prophets of the world. Some seer he seemed… Four-score years he had wandered in this same world of mine, within the Veil" (Du Bois 1994, pp. 133-134). This moment encapsulates the reverence that Du Bois reserved for Crummell. Aldon Morris (2015) notes that as "Du Bois's first mentor…Crummell, encouraged him to think along sociological lines as he explored race" (p. 60). Morris continues that "Du Bois was not the first to advocate the necessity of collecting and marshaling empirical data to disprove claims of inferiority promoted by white social scientists. Pioneering Black intellectuals had believed that empirical data could sustain a counterargument" against racist scholarship (Morris 2015, p. 60). Accepting this premise, what does this say about intellectual or academic precursors to Du Bois? It is this principal factor that becomes the focus of Morris' *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*.

In illuminating the landscape of early Black social scientists, it becomes imperative to focus on James McCune Smith, a prominent but often overlooked figure in the intersection of Black intellectualism and the burgeoning social scientific approach to the Black freedom struggle. Well-known in the nineteenth century for his roles as an abolitionist, medical doctor, and writer, McCune Smith's absence from historical discussions of early Black social scientists is a notable gap that warrants exploration. While Du Bois, in his biography of John Brown, mentions McCune Smith throughout the text, the constraints of his focus on Brown and his allies limit a thorough examination of McCune Smith's intellectual contributions in the broader context of early Black social science. In his work, Morris emphasizes the development of American sociology during a critical moment in American history, as sociologists confronted capitalist expansion in the form of industrialization and were grappling with the challenges of integrating immigrant labor and toxic race relations and how best to ensure a steady, docile Black labor force. Even prior to the Chicago School in the twentieth century, the discipline of sociology began with ignoble intentions. Auguste Comte (1988) is credited as introducing the term "sociology" during the 1830s and pioneering the use of statistics in social science research. Following Comte, and inspired by his work, Henry Hughes published *Treatise on Sociology: Theoretical and Practical* (1968) and George Fitzhugh authored *Sociology for the South* (2009). Both of these works were foundational to the development of American sociology and shared a fervent support of American slavery and a belief in the inherent inferiority of people of African descent (Magubane 2020).[1]

Morris argues, to the contrary, that it was Du Bois's efforts at Atlanta University at the turn of the twentieth century that introduced "the first scientific school of sociology at Atlanta University," and his pioneering efforts to challenge agreed upon assumptions of

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White social scientists (Morris 2015, p. 2)—namely, that Black people were inferior and therefore, justifiably relegated to second-class citizenship. Notably, the social sciences that Du Bois stepped into were essential to defending the racist social order.

While Morris underscores Du Bois's pivotal role in challenging the racial assumptions embedded in early sociology, Francille Rusan Wilson (2006) extends our exploration to scholars preceding Du Bois. Highlighting figures such as Alexander Crummell, Edward Wilmont Blyden, and Frederick Douglass, Wilson contends that these intellectual forerunners, though not explicitly within the realm of sociology, share a commitment to empirical research. An illuminating example is Ida B. Wells-Barnett, whose studies on the determinants of White lynching exhibit a social scientific framework distinct from investigative journalism (Henderson 2019). Together, these perspectives offer a nuanced view of the intellectual lineage that shaped early social science efforts among Black scholars. The most unheralded and insufficiently recognized precursor of Du Bois's sociological imagination and scholarly praxis is James McCune Smith. James McCune Smith "was a pioneer in the use of statistics to combat pseudoscientific theories of racial inferiority," even becoming a member of the American Geographical Society (Stauffer 2006, p. xv). He was a noted polymath and considered by Frederick Douglass as the greatest intellect of the nineteenth century, even writing the introduction to Douglass's second autobiography. McCune Smith, however, was not alone in championing the use of statistics. In fact, Richard R. Wright Sr., also a member of the American Negro Academy, inaugurated the Atlanta University studies in 1896 and was important in bringing Du Bois to Atlanta to conduct his studies. Prior to Du Bois, Wright Sr. was attempting to build an institution to challenge White social scientists' racist renderings:

> In 1893, Richard R. Wright of Savannah suggested to his friend William Crogman… that they take the lead in bringing together a group of Black scholars and thinkers to establish a national society whose main work would be to formulate strategies for solving the problems of their people and to respond to the attacks of white intellectual (Moss 1981, p. 18).

Additionally, Black leaders of the National Equal Rights League (NERL) passed a resolution to conduct empirical research in the study of the Black experience. The delegates resolved "to create a national historical and statistical association for the purpose… [of gathering] all such facts…in relation to the Negro race in America" (Crouchet 1971, p. 193). Henry Highland Garnet, John Mercer Langston, and Frederick Douglass led this effort in 1873. At the first Colored state convention in New York (1840), Alexander Crummell and the other delegates resolved to "collect from the delegates statistics of our people" (Foner and Walker, 1979, p. 9). These examples speak to Black intellectuals engaging the empirical aspects of the nascent professional social science. Crummell, who influenced Du Bois and Garnet as a leader of the NERL in 1873, shared a lifelong friendship with James McCune Smith, who articulated the need to use empirical research in challenging the institution of slavery and all its attendant ills. This article will interrogate his work as early contributions to social science research.

Why Focus on Social Science?

The early nineteenth century marked a period of profound social, economic, and political transformation across the Western world. As societies wrestled with the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and political upheavals, intellectuals turned their attention to understanding the dynamics of human societies through a scientific lens,

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seeking to apply systematic methods to social phenomena. Unfortunately, these approaches often amounted to pseudoscientific claims to support beliefs of racial hierarchy.

It is in this context that applying statistical methods to the study of social behavior developed in America during the 1830s and impacted the study of sociology and criminology in general, and the social sciences more broadly. Importantly, James McCune Smith was the preeminent Black scholar to utilize these methods simultaneously with his White counterparts. Our focus on McCune Smith is important for two reasons. First, the social sciences are supposed to be grounded in rigorous and careful observation and the non-subjective weighing of evidence. However, early practitioners of social science were imbued with racist renderings of non-White people, which effectively undermined their claim as "scientists." Secondly, performed properly, social science is cumulative, with each passing generation building on past research and putting forth generalizations about how societies, people, groups, and organization's function. In this manner, uncovering McCune Smith's function as a social scientist fills in a significant gap in Black social science historiography that often begins with Du Bois.

In our attempt to reclaim McCune Smith's importance as a social science scholar, it is critical to point out McCune Smith "authored the first case report ever to be written by a black physician in America," (Lujan and DiCarlo 2019, p. 135) and another report, published in the *New York Journal of Medicine*, would become "the first medical scientific paper published by a African-American physician in America" (Lujan and DiCarlo 2019, p. 135). His article "A Dissertation on the Influence of Climate on Longevity" that was published in 1845, was presented to the Boylston Medical Committee of Harvard University in the awarding of the Boylston Prize. The prize was awarded to Edward Jarvis whose statistical computations contributed to the data McCune Smith used in his research. These examples highlight McCune Smith's role as a pioneer in the use of statistics in his research.

Important Precursors to McCune Smith

> *…though we are looked upon as things, yet we sprang from a scientific people.*
> —Maria Stewart, *Classical Black Nationalism* (Moses 1996, pp. 95-96)

Prior to James McCune Smith, a tradition had already emerged among Blacks in America that encompassed abolitionism, literary achievements, protest literature, and scientific accomplishments. Challenging the institution of slavery and refuting the labeling of Black people as inherently inferior became recurring themes for Black intellectuals. Figures such as Benjamin Banneker, Richard Allen, and James Forten exemplified the intellectual vibrancy of this era. While it would be inaccurate to categorize them as social scientists, their lives were widely recognized among free Blacks, undoubtedly serving as models and sources of inspiration for many. This section will briefly explore their significance and, in doing so, shed light on why James McCune Smith stands out as a true pioneer.

One of the more celebrated African Americans of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was Benjamin Banneker. Yet, we may overlook his significance to eighteenth century Black activist life and his function as a nascent social scientist. Banneker (1791), widely recognized as a scientist, functioned as a nascent social scientist in his rebuttal to Thomas Jefferson's infamous *Notes on the State of Virginia* (2006 [1785]). On the face of it, particularly during that time, Jefferson's *Notes* was an authoritative (i.e., scholarly) production that provided a rationale for the inferiority of Black people in nineteenth century America. While the term "social science" was not in use, Jefferson's

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work aspired to the status of "scientific."[2] Clearly at the time there were no Black "social scientists" per se to counter Jefferson's defense of White supremacy. Benjamin Banneker, widely celebrated for his almanac, is not viewed by scholars as functioning as a social scientist in his rebuttal, but his letter to Thomas Jefferson in 1791 should be read as an early attempt by a Black intellectual to respond to Jefferson as a scientific equal, which was quite radical for the time. The first clue is that Banneker wanted his letter to Jefferson printed to accompany his almanac (Bedini 1972). This is important because Banneker's almanac was recognized at that time as a scientific achievement. Importantly, Banneker had already gained fame for the almanac, and he wanted his rebuttal to Jefferson published in all future editions, showing he sought the widest audience possible and that he wanted to counter White supremacist norms. As important, Banneker intuitively understood the enduring impact that Jefferson's work could have on the American body politic.

In reading the letter to Jefferson, we should take note that Banneker was not simply appealing to the hearts and minds of people. He cites the Declaration of Independence, the Bible, and the justness of the American Revolution, pointing to the hypocrisy of America—a critique which would become common for later generations. His usage of the various texts represented a direct challenge to Jefferson, at one point writing "I apprehend you will readily embrace every opportunity to eradicate that train of absurd and false ideas and opinions which so generally prevail with respect to us" (Bedini 1972, p. 153). The point here is not to turn Banneker into a radical Black nationalist, but to highlight the significance of challenging Jefferson at this moment, which, I argue, was a key point in the development of a Black civic life that would provide the foundation for early Black social scientists.

As crucial as Benjamin Banneker's rebuttal to Jefferson was, David Walker's (1848) critique in his *Appeal* added another layer of significance. Walker directly confronted Jefferson for the racist statements made in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. While there is no explicit mention of David Walker in McCune Smith's works, it is reasonable to assume that he was acquainted with Walker and his *Appeal*. One can easily envision Walker's contention that "Jefferson's remarks respecting us have sunk deep into the hearts of millions of the whites and never will be removed this side of eternity," coupled with "We, and the world wish to see the charges of Mr. Jefferson refuted by the blacks themselves (Walker 1848, p. 27)" to have had a lasting impact on McCune Smith.

Benjamin Banneker was not a lone voice in the eighteenth century. Richard Allen who co-founded the Free African Society in Philadelphia, published an assortment of political pamphlets, one which also challenged Jefferson. In 1794 Allen and Absalom Jones published a pamphlet that challenged a defamatory accusation of Matthew Carey about the Philadelphia Black community and their action during the yellow fever outbreak of 1793. Carey, an editor, wrote a scathing criticism of the Black community, accusing them of taking advantage of the pandemic to pillage White homes. Although Carey complimented Allen and Jones, they understood the larger implications since they were engaged in the struggle for equality. Writings such as the one by Carey had the potential to influence public thinking concerning the anti-slavery movement. It is in this context that Allen and Jones published a pamphlet to refute the accusations of Carey.

Richard Newman and colleagues (2000) assert that Allen and other eighteenth century Black leaders utilized pamphlets as a means of political protest. These pamphlets were "more explicitly political than antebellum slave narratives" (Newman et al., 2000, p. 79). The step to moving beyond personal remembrances is a large one. Newman took a moment to describe Allen's library and the scholarly works he consumed: *The Whole, Genuine, and Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*; *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* by Thomas Scott; and *Expository Notes, with Practical Observations upon the New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* by Thomas Burkitt were all a part of his library. More importantly Allen "read not only Josephus but also works by contemporary American

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statesman, including both Benjamin Franklin and George Washington" (Newman 2009, p. 114). Newman adds that Black pamphleteers also read one another which, I assert, resulted in the development of a vibrant civic life. Allen and Jones used the pamphlet as a broadside against race prejudice and unabashedly presented themselves as representing the Black community of Philadelphia. This point should be underscored. Banneker, Allen, and Jones were writing to counter White supremacist thinking about Black people—thinking that impacted public policy. Their intent was certainly to change not only public perceptions, but policy as well, evident by the addendum "An Address to Those Who Keep Slaves and Uphold the Practice." Newman (2009) argues that Allen and Jones were among a group of what he calls "Black Founders," who established Black institutions, "a black abolitionist tradition," and "inaugurated transatlantic debates over the meaning of black identity that transformed the way people of color pictured themselves and, in turn, were perceived by others" (p. 4). James Forten, Daniel Coker, James Dexter, and Prince Hall are the others Newman cites as among the Black Founders.

One of the more underdiscussed and fascinating contributions is from James Forten. Forten was born in 1766 and was the fourth generation of Fortens in North America. His biographer, Julie Winch (1988), hypothesized that a young Forten heard the Declaration of Independence read the first time in public and that he also would have heard stories of Black people valiantly fighting in the revolutionary war.

In 1813 the Pennsylvania legislature had designs on curbing the influx of Black migrants into the state. Black Philadelphians were aghast, and James Forten wrote a series of letters challenging the proposed legislation. These letters would be referred to as "Letters from a Man of Colour on a Late Bill Before the Senate of Pa." First published in 1813, they were reprinted in the Freedom's Journal in 1828. The letters do not exhibit markings of what would be considered social science, however, their function to challenge proposed policy typifies a key outgrowth of social science. We can assume that McCune Smith was well aware of Forten's example since Forten's son, James Forten Jr., was very close to McCune Smith. Most importantly, Forten, by the time of his death in 1842, was one of the most well-known African Americans in the country. We can only surmise that the reprinting of "letters…" in 1828 in Freedom's Journal reflects the pride that many free Blacks took from his writing. One could also surmise that such an example may have had a profound impact on a young James McCune Smith.

James McCune Smith

> *He was a pioneer in the use of statistics to combat pseudo-scientific theories of racial inferiority…he used statistical methods as a way to analyze society.*
>
> —John Stauffer, *The Works of James McCune Smith* (2006, p. xv).

As James Forten was penning his letters in 1813, James McCune Smith was born enslaved in New York. From an early age he attended the African Free School in New York, founded in 1787 by the Manumission Society of New York. Either Following New York's 1827 abolition of slavery or shortly before, McCune Smith became legally free. By the age of nineteen, McCune Smith went to study in Glasgow, Scotland and earned his BA, MA, and MD, returning to America in 1837 to become the first practicing Black physician with a medical degree in the country. Moreover, he grew into a leading abolitionist, journalist, geographer, creative writer, and social scientist.

As a standout student at the African Free School #2 in New York led by Charles Andrews, we get a sense of his precociousness as he was selected to welcome Marquis de Lafayette when he was eleven years old with a speech. African Free Schools began in 1787

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with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay among its founders—all who opposed slavery. Andrews, in his history of the NY African Free Schools, lists three objectives: 1) the abolition of slavery; 2) to protect liberated Africans from future slavery; and 3) to provide education (Andrews 1830, pp. 30-31). The African Free Schools counted Alexander Crummell, Charles Reason, Peter Vogleslang, George T. Downing, and Henry Highland Garnet as students, and all, apart from Garnet, attended St. Episcopal' s African Church under the leadership of Peter Williams Jr. Williams was also a founder of Freedom's Journal (as was Boston Crummell, Alexander's father), opposed the American Colonization Society, and had traveled to Haiti to assist repatriated Blacks (Logan and Winston, 1983). One can easily imagine how these connections helped shape James McCune Smith's focus in his public life.[3]

I will examine six essays by McCune Smith that demonstrate his function as an early social scientist. These essays, along with McCune Smith joining the American Geographical and Statistical Society in 1853, suggest an attempt at institutionalizing social science research for free Black communities:

- Lecture on the Haitian Revolution (1841)
- Destiny of the People of Color (1843)
- Freedom and Slavery for Afric-Americans (1844)
- The Influence of Climate on Longevity (1846)
- American Geographical and Statistical Society (1853)
- Civilization: Its Dependence on Physical Circumstances (1859)
- On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* (1859)

Lecture on the Haitian Revolution (1841)

Upon McCune Smith's return from Scotland in 1837, he entered an intellectual milieu where the social sciences in America were in their formative stages. McCune Smith, one of a number of African Americans to earn a medical degree in the early nineteenth century, became the first Black physician to practice medicine with a medical degree. In his youth, Black historical and literary societies began in the 1820s in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston and Black newspapers, beginning with Freedom's Journal in 1827, were creating the foundations for a literate and engaged Black public. In addition to the obvious concerns about slavery, the Black intelligentsia was primarily concerned with emigration, challenging racist assumptions about Black people, and the political and economic development of Haiti. McCune Smith was influenced by this intelligentsia, as Carla Peterson (2011a) notes "Peter Williams Jr., Boston Crummell, and Samuel Cornish" all supported emigration to Haiti while simultaneously opposing the American Colonization Society's machination in Liberia (pp. 122-123).

It is essential to acknowledge a fundamental aspect of the scientific process, which involves identifying a problem. The way a researcher identifies a problem significantly influences how they interpret potential solutions. In this context, McCune Smith's examination of the Haitian Revolution reflects his attempt to grapple with an issue that resonated deeply with many Black individuals. Since the end of the Haitian revolution Black writers celebrated its myth and meaning and discussed ways Black people in America could lend their support. Notably, one of McCune Smith's initial public remarks upon returning to America occurred during an 1838 lecture to the American Anti-Slavery Society, a theme that extended into his later lecture on the Haitian Revolution in 1841. In his 1838 speech he "preceded Gerrit [Smith], and their different emphases reveal their different self-conceptions and approaches to abolitionism…[McCune Smith] analyzed

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slavery from a global perspective" (Stauffer 2002, p. 125). McCune Smith's presentation is an uncommon (for its time), detailed analysis of the Haitian Revolution that placed the Haitians on a similar historical terrain as the French and American revolutionaries. The fact that he selected the Haitian Revolution as a topic is important as we consider the role and functions of social scientists. Carla Peterson (2011b) asserts that "in his essay on Haiti, Smith is working in the Du Boisian tradition of protest and prophecy." McCune Smith, on the face of it, recognized two focal points: 1) Black people in the United States were proud of Haiti and were willing to defend Haitian sovereignty, and 2) The United States did not respect Haitian sovereignty or their humanity. These are important points as we consider how McCune Smith viewed his role and responsibility as a scholar. As Du Bois would later personify, McCune Smith attempted to assay his scholarly training—as a scientist—to not only study the Black condition, but to offer systematic research that would counter racist scholarship.

McCune Smith begins his lecture by pointing to the United States failure to acknowledge Haitian sovereignty, although France and Britain already accepted it. He also makes plain his intentions "to a calm and careful examination into the causes which gave rise to the revolution," (McCune Smith 2006, p. 26) clearly challenging interpretations of the Haitians as nothing more than savages unleashed. From this point of departure, he traces the causes of the Haitian Revolution. Importantly, McCune Smith's lecture utilizes statistics and a copious citing of sources. In this manner, McCune Smith contributed to the Black historical tradition as noted by Stephen Hall (2009), which developed in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, where Black "writers engaged the intellectual trends then current in the American and European mainstream. These trends offered Black intellectuals the means for creating discursive spaces for a critical examination of the past" (p. 5). Hall locates the early Black authors and vindicationists concerned with ancient Egypt and Haiti. They viewed both as important cultural sites and as illustrations to counter White supremacist distortions of Black life and people.

In this work, McCune Smith departs from other early Black authors by not couching his argument merely in a biblical context. He attempts to demonstrate that Haitian revolutionaries had their own beliefs about what freedom entailed. By extension, African Americans also had ideas about freedom which were coterminous to the American revolutionaries. As Dickson Bruce (1995) argues, "a distinctive view of emerging African American issues and aspirations" emerged during the revolutionary era (p. 15). Peter Wood (1993) contends that "it may well be that during the generations preceding 1776, African Americans thought longer and harder than any other sector of the colonial population about the concept of liberty, both as an abstract ideal and as a tangible reality" (p. 152). By taking seriously the Haitians' agency, McCune Smith utilized narratives from Haitians, as well as engaging eighteenth century sources, and demonstrating his literacy of multiple languages by citing (and translating) French and other sources. He analyzed the Haitian Revolution on their terms and not the by the colonizers' model.

Insightfully, McCune Smith not only discusses the history of slavery in Haiti but also topography and caste, making known "there is gradually creeping into our otherwise prosperous state, the incongruous and undermining influence of caste" (Stauffer 2002, pp. 46-47)—an assessment unique for that era and more than 100 years before Oliver Cromwell Cox's massive *Caste, Class, & Race* (1948). Whereas Cox would reject any notions of caste in America, McCune Smith locates the caste system as being comprised of four groups: White planters, free people of color, "petit blancs" (or slums of European society), and slaves (McCune Smith 2006 [1841], p. 28). McCune Smith does not settle for simplistic

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demarcations, demonstrating the preciseness and nuance that would come to be expected of social scientists:

> When I inform you, ladies and gentlemen, that the free colored population, at the period of the revolution, held nearly one fourth of the slaves with one third of the soil of the colony; and they equaled the whites in numbers and intelligence, and were trained to arms, you will readily grant that the odium of caste under which they writhed was an efficient cause for the revolution (McCune Smith 2006 [1841], p. 30).

Not content to simply explain caste, McCune Smith turned his attention to the topography of Haiti—again a unique analysis for the time.

McCune Smith, before getting to Toussaint L'Ouverture, spends some time on the story of Vincent Ogé, a free man of mixed African and French Heritage and leader of the Mulatto revolt. Here is an example of how McCune Smith (2006 [1841]) is using Haiti to critique slavery in the United States by noting that Ogé was executed "for the simple reason that he demanded the rights which had been granted to him by the home government" (p. 34). He continued to unpack how voting rights granted to free people of color in the French colonies and then resoundingly rejected by Whites was a key factor in leading to the Haitian revolution. McCune Smith plainly states that "this decree, had it been adopted in the colony, would have terminated all its intestine commotions, and even the slaves would have continued quiet" (p. 41). McCune Smith's discussion of Ogé is another example of how he set out to use his research to dismantle the logics of slavery.

While McCune Smith obviously uses this lecture to attack the institution of slavery, it is also a clear challenge to the idea that Black people could not govern themselves—explicitly stating:

> It was the glory and the warrantable boast of Toussaint that he had been the instrument of demonstrating that, even with the worst odds against them, this race is entirely capable of achieving liberty and of self-government. He did more; by abolishing caste he proved the artificial nature of such distinctions, and further demonstrated that even slavery cannot unfit men for the full exercise of all the functions which belong to free citizens (McCune Smith 2006 [1841], p. 44).

In giving this lecture on Haiti, McCune Smith demonstrates his understanding (and belief) that public policy can be impacted by scholarly writing. He was attempting to counter the stereotypes of Black savages running amok in Haiti, and by extension, potentially emerging in U.S. plantations. Proponents of slavery were assiduously using the Haitian Revolution to put fear in Americans about a free Black population that would wantonly kill Whites. Thus, the import of this lecture signals how McCune Smith will attempt to use social science research to challenge racist history and the institution of slavery. His intention is to institutionalize this type of research from a Black perspective (though this should not be interpreted as a Black nationalist perspective). McCune Smith was complex, as he at various times argued for and against Black particularity.

In sum, McCune Smith's methodical examination of the Haitian Revolution stands as a pivotal moment in early social science research. By delving into Haiti's history, topography, and societal structures, he not only undermined prevailing stereotypes about the capabilities of Black people but also laid the groundwork for a systematic, scholarly approach to counteracting racist narratives. His commitment to utilizing social science as a tool for liberation and challenging the distorted logics of slavery underscores the transformative potential of rigorous research.

Destiny of the People of Color (1843)

> *Should this pamphlet meet with a sufficient degree of success, the author will, in a future publication, enter more fully into the above question.*
>
> —James McCune Smith (2006 [1843], p. 60).

This paper by McCune Smith can be likened to the unveiling of a comprehensive research agenda. In discussing themes that echo throughout his later work, McCune Smith not only outlines his scholarly trajectory but also reveals his profound convictions. He asserts that the highest purpose lies in "investigating the laws" that shape destiny, aligning himself unmistakably with voices against emigration and proudly declaring that Black people in America can combat slavery "by the resistless evidence of facts" (McCune Smith 2006 [1843], p. 51). In this way, McCune Smith foreshadows Du Bois's later emphasis on social scientific research as a primary tool in the struggle for liberation.

In drawing parallels between McCune Smith's early pronouncements and Du Bois's later contributions, one finds a compelling thread of shared ideology. Both scholars, albeit in different eras, emphasized the transformative power of empirical evidence in challenging prevailing societal norms. Du Bois, inspired by the conviction that rigorous social scientific research could be a potent weapon in the fight against oppression, echoed McCune Smith's proclamation that "the resistless evidence of facts" could dismantle institutions of injustice. This shared belief in the emancipatory potential of research not only underscores the continuity of thought across generations but also sheds light on the enduring influence of McCune Smith's groundwork on the trajectory of sociological inquiry, notably in Du Bois's seminal contributions to the field.

"Destiny" was penned in 1841 but remained unpublished until 1843. During this period, the discourse surrounding emigration was highly contentious, accompanied by fervent debates on the most effective strategies to dismantle the slave system. In 1842 Gerrit Smith had called for rebellion, specifically naming escape, at the National Abolitionist Convention. The following year, Henry Highland Garnet would call for a massive slave strike. Both of these speeches were in response to the Supreme Court Decision in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* which fortified the fugitive slave law.

However, in "Destiny" McCune Smith does not discuss *Prigg* nor does he discuss the speeches of Garnet or Gerrit Smith. Instead, he constructs a case against emigration, placing a particular emphasis on the role of art in the struggle for freedom. Remarkably, McCune Smith anticipates Du Bois's sentiments in *The Souls of Black Folk*. While Du Bois delves into the sorrow songs, McCune Smith argues that the enslaved "are destined to write the literature…write the poetry…[and] to produce the oratory of the Republic" (McCune Smith 2006 [1843], p. 59).

Freedom and Slavery for Afric-Americans (1844)

> *Figures cannot be charged with fanaticism, like the everlasting hills, they give cold, silent, evidence, unmoved by the clouds and shadows of whatever present may surround them.*
>
> —James McCune Smith (2006 [1844], p. 62).

As McCune Smith initiated his series of letters to Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, his opening quote, "Figures cannot be charged with fanaticism, like the everlasting hills," sets the tone for his methodical approach. In these letters, he aimed to refute pro-slavery claims using empirical evidence drawn from the 1840 Census. Framing his

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argument in the language of contemporary statisticians, he addressed 'disturbing influences' multiple times. The first letter took on racist justifications for increasing the population of enslaved Africans in the southern United States.

Not only does he dismiss these claims by examining census data, he not so subtly acknowledges how the phenomenon of "passing" could also contribute to unsound analysis by observing "northern and southern states have nearly an equal percentage above 36 years of age…but this small percentage is more than balanced by the facility with which colored men and women turn white at the North" (McCune Smith 2006 [1844], p. 430).[4] He interrogates the belief that Anglo-Saxons are physically stronger and endowed with longevity, asserting "longevity is an admitted test of relative condition. Take two classes of persons, equal in other respects, and place them in like condition. Their longevity will be equal" (McCune Smith 2006 [1844], p. 431). He continues to use the 1840 census to illustrate the free Black population's longevity in outlasting the slave population by mincing no words: "what mockery it is for men to talk with kindness of masters in taking care of aged slaves, when death has relieved them of so large a share of the burden!" (McCune Smith 2006 [1844], p. 432). McCune Smith is not content to simply examine the 1840 census, he cites George Tucker's *Progress of the United States in Population and Wealth in Fifty Years* (2006 [1843]), which pro-Slavery advocates utilized to buttress their argument. They exploited Tucker's "observation" of insanity rates amongst free Blacks in the North (Ripley 1991). This fact cannot be underestimated as it highlights the importance of the work of McCune Smith.

The coup de grâce of the first letter arrives at the closing when he references a letter to the *Southern Literary Messenger* purporting to document the prevalence of insanity for free Blacks. According to the author, 1840 census data confirmed the prevalence of insanity amongst free Blacks. This is where McCune Smith's function is critical. One must be mindful that he was leading Black intellectuals to examine statistics as a matter of course. According to David Blight (1985), McCune Smith founded a Statistics Institute to combat racist interpretations of Black life. However, a closer look at the evidence reveals that he was a member of the American Geographical and Statistical Society, which was founded in 1852. McCune Smith joined in 1853 and is listed as a member as late as 1860. In 1853 he was very active, having been singled out to head a committee to report on Ethnology and reading a committee report on Micronesia at another meeting (*Bulletin* 2018 [1856], p. 6). It is clear that McCune Smith was a pioneer in using statistics with a high degree of sophistication during his lifetime, to combat pseudoscientific claims of racial hierarchy. To be clear, in this example, McCune Smith did not spot the error on his own, but cited the work of Edward Jarvis, "founder and longtime president of the American Statistical Association. Between 1842–1850 he campaigned to correct errors and contradictions in the census of 1840. Jarvis's findings reached a large audience when he published "Insanity among the Coloured Population" in the *American Journal of Medical Sciences* (Ripley 1991, p. 439). McCune Smith's familiarity with contemporary research aligns with the social sciences of his time, as illustrated by his collaboration with Edward Jarvis. While he did not single-handedly spot errors, his amplification of Jarvis's work underscores the importance of McCune Smith's role in the intellectual landscape of the nineteenth century.

In his second letter to Greeley, he discusses education and the Black church. Here, McCune Smith demonstrates that his work is an important precursor to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Black social science. For example, Richard R. Wright Sr. wanted to use Atlanta University to study Black life and began the Atlanta Conferences in 1896 and Du Bois would expand his vision while continuing the conferences. McCune Smith's focus on Black life and his Statistical Institute preceded the Atlanta University Conferences by fifty-two years and was also on display in the 1851 Convention of Colored People in New York where he authored a report, "The Social Condition of the Negro

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Race." In his second letter, he also anticipates later arguments by suggesting that African Americans were better off in their own churches rather than following the "passive obedience" counseled in the White churches.

McCune Smith uses statistics to analyze the education of free Blacks in the North, which is the subject of many of his writings. His research continuously challenges pro-slavery arguments that Black people are unfit for freedom. In this letter, he demonstrates that schooling for Blacks and Whites is similar but slightly in the favor of Whites. He mentions the number of "colored" literary societies, libraries, benevolent societies, and Black newspapers, ostensibly in an effort to describe a burgeoning Black civic life. While McCune Smith does not explicitly argue that educational opportunities for Blacks and Whites are equal; he does imply that free Blacks are not far behind in their educational pursuits, sans university training: "If it be true that we have not yet produced any literature worthy the name, it is because we are waiting for Anglo-Americans to lead the way" (McCune Smith 2006 [1844], p. 434).

The Influence of Climate on Longevity: with special reference to Life Insurance (1846)

> *The statements in this essay are entirely based upon statistical data, from the conviction on the part of the writer, that no other data should be admitted as evidence on the 'influence of climate on longevity.'*
>
> —James McCune Smith, *Hunt's Merchant Magazine* (1846, p. 418).

In this piece McCune Smith displays his adeptness in statistical analysis, a consistent feature in his body of work. Notably, he engages in a subtle critique of racist scientific notions, cleverly concealed under alternative themes. One could look at the title of this essay and assume that it has nothing to do with race. However, McCune Smith is subtly challenging ideas about the fitness of people of African descent and he does this in an outlet that was widely read by merchants. The founder of *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, Freeman Hunt, was an abolitionist and this may be why McCune Smith was able to publish in this outlet.

Systematically, McCune Smith examines various variables that influence climate on longevity: emigration, mortality, nature of work, racial differences (in terms of work, emigration, and the like). What ensues is a careful analysis of "disturbing influences" to assess the viability of utilizing the United States as a case study. To dispel any uncertainty about whether McCune Smith perceives his work through the disposition of a social scientist, he unequivocally asserts: "in regard to the historian, his views on the question before us are the result of inferences drawn from sources other than calculations based on statistics" (McCune Smith 1846, p. 418). This statement firmly establishes his commitment to approaching the subject with the rigor and methodology characteristic of a social scientist.

The importance of this statement by McCune Smith should be underscored. Social sciences are not simply the details of systematic research. It is also a frame of mind and a belief in the transforming power of social scientific research. C. Wright Mills would famously call it "the sociological imagination"—an appropriate term to describe McCune Smith's approach. Importantly, no matter the subject, McCune Smith would interrogate information through the lens of Black experiences. On its face, "climate and longevity" could be regarded as a topic tangential to the struggle for freedom in the nineteenth century. But we see McCune Smith, a leader in the abolitionist movement, connecting this

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study to his abolitionist work. He was able to identify the racist undertones inherent in discussions on climate and longevity and believed it was his responsibility to challenge it.

Civilization: Its Dependence on Physical Circumstances (1859)

This was one of McCune Smith's more technical essays and was also written in 1844 but not published until 1859. Seeing that much of what passed as social science in the 1840s located people of African descent as savages and their plight as resulting from the innate superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, McCune Smith meticulously dismantles racist arguments on human advancement. As important, he makes the case for diversity, equality, and integration. To accomplish his task, he engages the work of Adolphe Quetelet, "one of the most influential social scientists of the nineteenth century, [who] used statistical reasoning to determine average human traits" (Stauffer 2006, p. 290).

McCune Smith puts his scientific chops on full display as he discusses the role of climate and geography on civilizations. He makes a remarkably interesting and creative argument against the idea of innate superiority or inferiority by locating the "common people [as the] source of intellectual as well as of political power…not only [in the] bones and sinew, but also the heart and brain of a nation" (McCune Smith 2006 [1859], p. 261). Here he is proposing that civilizations advance based on the work, talent, and abilities of a diverse population. Hence, "the only drawback in our prosperity is the caste which slavery has thrown in our midst, and which is chief minister to the continuance of slavery (McCune Smith 2006 [1859], p. 262)." To come to his conclusion, McCune Smith interrogates literature on thermodynamics, history, geography, ethnology, while using statistical data to drive home his points.

On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia (1859)

> *We will not confine ourselves to the views announced by Thomas Jefferson, but we will examine all the views and statements which have been used since his work appeared, and which support his views.*
>
> —James McCune Smith, *The Works of James McCune Smith* (2006 [1859], p. 267)

Thomas Jefferson's (2006 [1785]) *Notes*, in general and the "Fourteenth Query" in particular, because of his stature, had an overarching influence on nineteenth century thought. Jefferson's work was very much in line with eighteenth and nineteenth century European and American literature that passed as social science. Ronald Meek (1976) points out that "after the American Revolution of 1776 several white Americans began to embark on serious studies of their own 'savages', thereby supplying the 'moral philosopher' with information" (p. 218). McCune Smith viewed his critique of Jefferson as an extension of his essay on civilization and he intended to follow this essay with another on "mental and moral differences." Importantly, he viewed his work as a systematic critique of racist social science by not appealing to logic or a higher power but science. The essay takes on Jefferson since in the Fourteenth Query, wherein Jefferson weaves an argument for Black inferiority and the inability for Black and White to live peacefully together.

The idea that there is only one human race, and that differences between people are a result of factors other than biological, is now accepted as a scientific fact. It is important to remember that McCune Smith was writing at a time when scientists and social scientists used pseudoscientific arguments to claim racial inferiority of dark-skinned people of African descent. In this manner, he critiqued Orville Dewey, Josiah Nott, Johann Friedrich

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Blumenbach, and Alexis de Tocqueville as representative examples of faulty scientific research. As in all his writings, McCune Smith's analysis is rooted in the belief that the problem in the United States is the rejection of democratic institutions based on the equality of man.

Conclusion

Black social scientists have historically challenged racist social science. Nevertheless, it was not until the Black Power zeitgeist of the 1960s that Black social scientists collectively were challenging the utility of American social science to the Black experience. Most memorably, debates concerning a Black Social Science were captured in Joyce Ladner's *Death of White Sociology* (1998) where the traditional descriptions of social science as objective and empirical were taken to task. Two of the essays in Ladner's volume, Abdul Alkalimat (1998) in "The Ideology of Black Social Science" and Ronald Walters (1998) in "Toward a Definition of Black Social Science," point to the ideological basis of social science in America. Kenneth Clark (1998) also dispelled any notions of objectivity by stating:

> An important part of my creed as a social scientist is that on the grounds of absolute objectivity or on a posture of scientific detachment and indifference, a truly relevant and serious social science cannot ask to be taken seriously by a society desperately in need of moral and empirical guidance in human affairs. Nor can it support its claims to scientific purity or relevance by a preoccupation with methodology as an end by innumerable articles in scientific journals devoted to escapist, even though quantifiable, trivia…The appropriate technology of serious and relevant social science would have as its prime goal helping society move toward humanity and justice with minimum irrationality, instability, and cruelty (p. 409).

However, although these discussions shed light on the contributions of other Black social scientists, they fell short in historicizing the roots of Black social science by portraying Du Bois as its sole progenitor. While Du Bois was undoubtedly a transformative scholar, neglecting nineteenth century precursors like James McCune Smith obscures an essential legacy. McCune Smith blazed a trail for Du Bois of which he was unaware. As Carla Peterson (2011a) argues, "Smith evinced an amazing ability to manipulate different kinds of discourses, ranging from religious paths to historical example to statistical analysis," an intellectual characteristic that DuBois would later master (p. 130). McCune Smith's pioneering use of statistics and empirical research helped build a foundation for what was to come later in the works of T. Thomas Fortune, Ida B. Wells, and Anna Julia Cooper. Rethinking McCune Smith challenges scholars to reassess the historiography of Black social science, recognizing Du Bois as a central figure but not the sole forebearer. Although Du Bois acknowledges this by expressing gratitude to Alexander Crummell, he overlooks the contributions of Crummell's classmate and lifelong friend, James McCune Smith.

As Black social science historiography continues to expand, it is crucial not only to contextualize nineteenth century antecedents properly but also to appreciate figures from that era beyond their journalistic and abolitionist roles. McCune Smith was a towering figure who reshaped early nineteenth century Black intellectual work. He was attempting to institutionalize social science from a Black perspective and challenge eighteenth and nineteenth century theories of how societies developed, which expectedly were rooted in racist notions of noble and ignoble savages. The examples of his work highlighted in this

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article, along with his participation in the American Geographical and Statistical Society, point to an intentional agenda to utilize social science research in the struggle for liberation. Given the historical period, this was a heroic effort and indicative of the type of social scientist Du Bois would later exemplify.

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Notes

[1] The Chicago School of Sociology was led by Robert Park, who was influenced by Booker T. Washington. Morris discusses the origins of the Chicago School in *The Scholar Denied*. The Chicago school became known for their work on the urban environment and on deviance and crime. Morris is intentional about demonstrating how Du Bois and the Atlanta school of sociology operated from a framework that countered the racist assumptions in Sociology.

[2] Wilson J. Moses in his work *Thomas Jefferson: A Modern Prometheus* (2019), points out that "by the time of Jefferson's death in 1826, *Notes on Virginia* was a work behind its times…" (p. 240).

[3] Carla L. Peterson (2011a) provides a detailed accounting of the network of McCune Smith—many of whom would become significant race leaders in the nineteenth century. Henry Highland Garnet and Alexander Crummell are the most widely recognized now, but George T. Downing, Peter Williams Sr., Peter Williams Jr., Ira Aldridge, Theodore Wright, Charles Reason, James Forten Sr., Peter Vogleslang, and others are just a sample of the talented and committed network.

[4] Ripley (1991) also added that McCune Smith "petitioned the U.S. Senate to review the census and correct the erroneous statistics on free blacks in the North" (p. 430).

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