

Finding One's Place: Creating a New Eden for the "New Negro"
An Analysis of the American Negro Exhibit's Photography at the Paris Exposition of 1900

Shannon Grevious

Communication, Culture and Technology Program
Georgetown University

I. Introduction

In 1899, Thomas Calloway, a scholar and lawyer, persuaded a group of fellow African-Americans¹ to support an endeavor he believed was certain to change mainstream perceptions of Black Americans. Calloway, who had held the position of state commissioner for the 1895 Atlanta Exposition, realized the great potential for Black participation in the upcoming Paris Exposition of 1900.² He enlisted the help of the last Black Congressman of the Reconstruction era, George Henry White, to try and secure funding for a “Negro Exhibit” that would accompany America’s entry into the exposition.³ White succeeded in attaining financial backing from the federal government; Congress allotted \$15,000 to fund the American Negro Exhibit.

Calloway undertook his mission with a sense of urgency, as conditions for African-Americans were rapidly deteriorating. Due to the growing racial tensions across the country, especially in the South, African-Americans lost many of the political, social and economic gains they had made during Reconstruction. Fueled in part by the increased presence of negative commentary, racist scientific theories and stereotypical images of African-Americans disseminated through mainstream media sources, the White population mistrusted and scorned Blacks during this time.

In addition to the symbolic violence of visual misrepresentation perpetrated against Blacks, there was the actual physical violence committed against Black bodies – violence often manifested in the form of lynching. The threat of lynching devastated Black morale and terrorized Black communities. Coupled with this unfettered violence came the understanding that Blacks were not to be treated equally under the law. Whites controlled Black behavior through physical and symbolic violence and as a result African-Americans lost control of their own bodies.⁴

After receiving Congressional funding, Calloway assembled a group of African-American scholars - led by W.E.B. Du Bois, a rising star in the field of sociology, himself aided by Daniel Alexander Payne Murray, the Assistant Librarian of Congress – to create an exhibition

¹ For this paper, the terms, “African-American” and “Black” will be used interchangeably.

² Linda Barrett Osborne, “Introduction” in A Small Nation of People: W.E.B. Du Bois and Black Americans at the Turn of the Century, eds. David Levering Lewis and Deborah Willis (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2003) 16.

³ David Levering Lewis and Deborah Willis, A Small Nation of People: W.E.B. Du Bois and Black Americans at the Turn of the Century (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2003) 26.

⁴ Shawn Michelle Smith, Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) 117, 121.

that would counteract popular misconceptions of Blacks. The purpose of the exhibit was to present the varied physiques, lifestyles, progress and contributions of African-American people that were unknown to White Europeans, and, more importantly, to White Americans.⁵ Success in this endeavor was paramount, for the exhibit's creators believed that the significance of the event might have an effect on White minds and change attitudes towards Black Americans – and, in turn, improve the African-American position within the American social structure.

This paper will examine the desire to elevate the social status of African-Americans, the prestige of participating in a World's Fair, the unswerving confidence in science and technology and the call to join the Progressive movement that pursued social and economic advancement for the disenfranchised masses in order to understand the visual content of the American Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1900. In addition, this discussion will address all of these elements in an effort to analyze the choices made by W.E.B. Du Bois in assembling the photography for an exhibit to counter the misconceptions of White supremacy and Black inferiority.

This paper also will discuss the Exhibit within the framework of the debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois regarding African-American advancement in the United States at that time. Washington and Du Bois both had their own ideas as to which methods were superior for creating and sustaining success for Black people in an America that was becoming progressively more hostile to the Black citizenry. Washington favored a gradual approach towards achieving civil rights whereas Du Bois preferred more assertive measures.⁶ However, Washington and Du Bois ultimately desired a similar outcome: the triumph of living in an America that respected and appreciated its African-American citizens for their contributions to the country. Finally, this paper will review the state of America during the period leading up to the turn of the century and use that backdrop to develop an understanding of the American Negro Exhibit's utilization of images by analyzing the photographic content in terms of the Washington and Du Bois debate.

II. America at the Turn of the Century

a. Conditions of African-Americans at the Turn of the Century

⁵ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 26.

⁶ Thomas Harris, Analysis of the Clash Over the Issues Between Booker T. Washington and WEB Du Bois (New York: Garland Pub., 1993) ix.

The end of the Civil War brought forth an end to slavery and created a sense of hope among the newly freed slaves. They hoped to find a new place within the social structure of America, to become fully enveloped into society and to be recognized as citizens with full and equal civil rights. African-Americans sought equality through social, economic and political gains and reached some of their goals during Reconstruction. During this era, many Blacks gained access to rights and privileges unknown to them while enslaved. African-Americans had the right to vote, to hold political office, to become educated, to own property and to freely associate with White citizens.⁷

This short-lived era of social change for African-Americans gradually began slipping away in the 1870s. White Southerners rejected the new policies that allowed equal participation in political and economic activities by Blacks. The reasons for the South's refusal to accept Reconstruction mandates varied. Some Southerners could not stomach the inclusion of African-Americans in the newly formed governments, for their presence challenged White rule in the South.⁸ Nor could White Southerners bear to live under governmental rule that would remind them of their defeat by the Union Army and the North's federal government. Moreover, corruption became a widespread problem within the recently elected state and local governments causing further Southern rebellion against Reconstruction.⁹

Consequently, many White Southerners refused to remain under the political control of the Reconstructionists or to permit the continuation of civil rights laws for African-Americans. Therefore, Whites rolled back gains made by the Black community by, in one example, winning back elected offices. They also turned to violence as a method of reclaiming power over Blacks through a constant campaign of intimidation. Southerners sought a return to a government controlled by Whites and, in this endeavor, were aided by an apathetic North. It also became clear that Northerners were no longer willing to support African-American interests in the South. Reports of political corruption within the integrated governments changed Northern perceptions

⁷ Steven Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998) 127.

⁸ Smith cites the words of Southern lynch perpetrators who stated reasons for their violence against Blacks. "Some said it was because the young 'niggers' didn't know their places, others were getting too much education, while others declared it was all due to the affluence of the Northern 'niggers.'" Smith also includes the beliefs of author Hazel Carby who suggested, "through lynching white men attempted to reassert power and control over the Black male body in the post-emancipation and Post-Reconstruction period." (Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 115).

⁹ "America's Reconstruction: People and Politics After the Civil War." *Digital History*. Site created and designed by S.Mintz, 2003 <<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu> <http://digitalhistory.uh.edu/reconstruction/introduction.html> >

of the Black population, leading Northerners to believe that racial equality had been a mistake.¹⁰ As a result, Northern support for African-American causes in the South dwindled, leaving Blacks to navigate through an America marked by strictly confined existences and to defend themselves against ever-more-violent circumstances.

Soon, African-Americans faced local and state governments determined to regain White control and return Blacks to an inferior social status. In the political arena, the return of White rule meant destroying the paths that facilitated Black suffrage. Pro-separatist officials established policies to hinder Blacks from casting votes. The requirement of literacy tests, the change or closure of poll locations and the instatement of property requirements were measures employed by government functionaries to complicate the voting process for Black Southerners.¹¹

White contempt for Black equality within the social arena remained constant as societal pressures and a fear of violence forced Blacks to show deference to all Whites during any social contact. Separatist efforts included barring Blacks from public places frequented by Whites. Blacks often faced physical violence if they attempted to overcome these racial barriers.¹² In addition, separatists made use of mainstream media to spread damaging propaganda. Thomas Harris notes, “The White separatist movement, in justifying the new disenfranchisement, also campaigned to lower the social image of the African-American ”¹³ Harris further quotes Southern historian, C. Vann Woodward, who states:

It became standard practice to support disenfranchisement campaigns with White-supremacy propaganda in which race hatred, suspicion, and jealousy were whipped up to a dangerous pitch. Politicians and newspapers cooperated in circulating Negro atrocity propaganda in the form of feature stories, cartoons, photographs, and posters.¹⁴

In the financial arena, White discriminatory practices excluded African-Americans from most job opportunities that could lead to economic stability for their communities. These practices restricted Blacks in the jobs they could pursue such as agricultural labor, domestic work or menial tasks. For many Blacks, saving money to build wealth became difficult due to discriminatory business practices. White landlords charged Black tenants high rents and White

¹⁰ “Ibid.”

¹¹ Harris, 15.

¹² Harris, 16.

¹³ Ibid, 16.

¹⁴ Ibid, 16.

business owners forced their Black customers to pay for goods on credit, practices that did not allow for significant savings to buy property, to cover their expenses or to accumulate personal wealth.¹⁵

Northern Blacks faced discrimination, though not to the same degree as those who lived in the South. Blacks in the North did encounter similar challenges in regards to the kind of opportunities that were available to them. Racist attitudes and prejudiced practices still prevailed in the North. In northern states, Blacks moved away from farms and found employment in factories, and in some cases they found work breaking strikes. Sometimes, however, Blacks found themselves losing job opportunities to oft-favored immigrant populations. Additionally, discriminatory practices limited Northern Blacks in their housing options, restricting them to specific neighborhoods, which often became stigmatized communities.¹⁶

Though a hostile America slowed their efforts, African-Americans did not abandon their pursuit of civil rights. In some cases, Blacks resisted the oppressive rule of White separatists by vigorously defending their families and property against violence while continuing the search for better work and living conditions. These African-Americans overtly opposed social injustice and demanded their civil rights from those in power. Furthermore, some of these individuals formed alliances with other Americans who were participants in the Progressive Movement.

b. The Progressive Movement

African-Americans were in a battle to gain civil rights and, as such, shared similar goals with other groups in searching for economic security and social stability. The Progressive Movement emerged from an environment characterized by a growing industrialist and capitalist society. Advances in technology facilitated the rapid pace of manufacturing. As industry spread, the need for workers expanded, changing the economic landscape of the country as well as family life; work moved from the home to factories.¹⁷ The growth of capitalism created a wealthy and influential business class that persuaded state and local governments to favor their interests when making policy decisions.

¹⁵ Harris, 17.

¹⁶ Diner, 129.

¹⁷ Diner, 3.

Consequently, workers from the lower and middle classes faced an environment where those in power did not take their needs into account. As a result, a struggle between the powerful and the powerless emerged. African-American history scholar Steve Diner quotes Benjamin Parke DeWitt, a political specialist of the late 19th century, who stated, “The individual could not hope to compete with the wealthy corporation which employed him ... Men became economic slaves ... Slowly, Americans realized they were not free.”¹⁸ Those employed by these corporations felt confined and limited in the choices they had to control their lives. In this respect, their situations mirrored the lives of African-Americans at the turn of the century.

The Progressives sought to limit the control that corporations had over the worker and to force the government to take a more equitable approach to municipal decisions with regard to all of its citizens’ needs. Their tactics included organizing workers into unions and solidifying those members into a cohesive unit with one prominent voice for workers’ rights. These groups also entered into bargaining agreements with employers to demand fair treatment for workers. In situations where employers failed to consider their demands, workers initiated strikes to air their grievances.¹⁹ Not all strikes were successful, yet Black workers did benefit from some of them. Diner cites several cases both involving dockworkers where Black and White laborers cooperated to successfully negotiate their demands with employers.²⁰

Others within the Progressive movement used technology, more specifically communications technology, to advance social change. Jacob Riis, author of, “How the Other Half Lives,” documented the lives of impoverished persons living in urban ghettos. Riis punctuated his stories with images of the faces, bodies and dwellings of people who lived in desperate conditions. These images were instrumental in changing mainstream America’s negative attitudes towards the poor.²¹

Riis’ stories and photographs of New York’s Lower East Side fueled social reform initiatives led by the local government to improve urban living conditions.²² Riis’ photography

¹⁸ Diner, 7.

¹⁹ Diner, 4.

²⁰ Diner, 135.

²¹ Gandal writes, “Riis [has a] reputation ... as crusader ... for social justice and as fearlessly honest writer ... [he is] credited with overturning harsh, moralistic conventions in the depiction of the poor low life, coming to grips with uncomfortable realities and contribution to a fundamental discovery of the Progressive Era, namely, the importance of environmental or social factors in individual behavior.” 8.

²² “Photography and Social Reform,” Documenting ‘The Other Half.’ Site created and designed by Kay Davis, 2003 <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA01/Davis/photography/home/home.html>>.

opened a window into a world unknown to middle- and upper-class citizens, allowing them to be voyeurs of impoverished areas, while still maintaining a safe distance.²³ Moreover, the news media's incorporation of photography in their stories created a spectacle that attracted the upper-class gaze, which in turn sparked social reform.²⁴

Black inclusion within the Progressive Movement was limited. Although African-Americans and Progressives shared similar ideologies and approaches towards fighting social injustice, racist attitudes within the movement's ranks still remained.²⁵ For example, certain labor organizations (e.g. steel, railroad and teamsters) refused to admit Black members.²⁶ However, discriminatory practices within this group did not dampen African-American strides in the Progressive movement. Du Bois diligently worked for social equality and urged Blacks to fight the status quo by forming alliances to increase social and economic power.²⁷ In addition, he also used contemporary science to support his ideology. He employed scientific research to investigate and understand the "race problem," and to explain social, political and economic inequities of Blacks within the American society. Du Bois believed the Black race could be judged fairly through science.²⁸

c. Photography and the Philosophy of Realism/Naturalism

Advances in technology fed the speedy pace of production during the Industrial Age. Technological innovations were the product of scientists whose work characterized the intense pursuit of greater knowledge and understanding of the world through scientific means. Scientific work generally represented a belief in realism and naturalism, new philosophies that emerged during this time period. Intellectuals cast off traditional beliefs in superstition and religion, used

²³ Davis, "Photography."

²⁴ Undoubtedly, the popularity of Riis' book and his newspaper accounts of appalling social conditions had more to do with an attraction to the elements of spectacle created by a previously forbidden entry into the ghettos of New York, rather than solely by people's interest in social reform. Gandal argues that the large daily newspapers of the time were interested in pursuing human-interest stories that captured the attention of readers, and they, therefore, encouraged their reporters to find stories that were "original, distinctive, dramatic, romantic [and] ... odd." He adds, "Riis ... often present[ed] the slums in a different, more exciting tenor: as a fascinating entertainment to be consumed. Riis' photographs and his depiction of exotic sights and strange habits would have been a scandal before the 1880s and the development of the large newspaper." (Gandal 15, 16)

²⁵ Carl Resek, *The Progressives* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967) xiv.

²⁶ Resek, 47.

²⁷ Harris, 58.

²⁸ Resek, 53.

previously to explain both physical and natural phenomena, and instead turned to man and science for answers.²⁹

The philosophy of realism concerned “the view that scientific knowledge is the only valid kind, and can solve all human problems.”³⁰ Similarly, naturalism dealt with science but also included the “belief that man is a creature determined by physical laws and is subject to scientific investigation.”³¹ These ideas permeated the thoughts and practices of intellectuals involved in science, industry, education and also in the social movements of the day. The fundamental belief was that man, through the use of machine, could create a new Eden, and, furthermore, that man would be able to correct past mistakes and “eliminate social ills and injustices through scientific systems, mass production, free enterprise and hard work.”³²

The camera was one such machine employed to usher in this new paradise. As a mechanical apparatus, the camera functioned through scientific processes that enabled its ability to *see* the world. The photograph appeared unmediated and untouched by human hands and was, therefore, void of subjectivity.³³ Subsequently, the prevailing opinion was that the image depicted in the photograph was absolute truth, an accurate depiction of reality.

As such, the image recorded by the camera became a verifiable and undisputed account of events that occurred in history. It is no surprise that photography, used as evidence to ‘explain’ human existence, promoted business, science and political interests. The very nature of the photograph, as scientific wonder and proof of reality, commanded great authority.³⁴ Therefore, these stakeholders utilized their photographic subjects to convey their varied ideologies.

These cases demonstrate that photographs, like those by Jacob Riis, were used to convey a variety of overt and subtle messages to viewers. These messages could lure viewers to action, make them question their value systems, and convince them to alter their beliefs or confirm an already established worldview. For instance, some industrialists at the turn of the century used

²⁹ Roland Stromberg (Ed.), Realism, Naturalism and Symbolism: Modes of Thought and Expression in Europe, 1848-1914 (New York: Walker, 1968) xi, xxi.

³⁰ Stromberg, xi.

³¹ Ibid, xi.

³² Andy Grundberg, Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography, 1974-1989 (New York, NY: Aperture Foundation, 1990) 50-51.

³³ Graham Clarke, The Photograph (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 45.

³⁴ Clarke, 145.

the camera to document their business endeavors and to promote the efficiency of their labor and production practices.³⁵ Panoramic photography, used in advertisements for products or in promotional material for the tourist industry, helped attract customers to businesses. The work of Eadweard Muybridge, the photographer who first recorded the human body in motion, was initially perceived to be an accurate scientific study of human movement.³⁶ As Clarke suggests, upon further analysis, the representations of male and female models used in Muybridge's photographs only serve to reinforce ideas of gender-specific roles. For example, the images portrayed men in active stances and women in more traditional and passive poses.³⁷

In addition to reinforcing cultural perceptions of men and women, anthropologists of the 19th century used photography to document racial characteristics. Their photographs, often frontal and profile shots, included grids and measuring rulers to determine the distinctive racial traits and features of people of color. Smith contends that these scientists (of White American and European background) used photography to support pre-existing notions of racial and cultural differences: White physical superiority and civilized behavior as compared to the racial/ethnic inferiority and savagery of people of color.³⁸

Given these ideas, photography was used by multiple stakeholders to further their own agendas. The Progressives saw photography as a way to stimulate social, political and economic reforms. The media, generally prominent newspapers, used photography to increase readership and, therefore, profits. Photography effectively supported and preserved the social structure and prevailing attitudes about gender and racial differences within American society.

Photography's ability to draw large audiences toward the issue of social reform, illustrates a great understanding of its influential power. It is not surprising that Calloway and Du Bois chose photography as part of their American Negro Exhibit at the World's Fair in Paris.

III. Analysis of the W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington Debate

Although the Paris Exposition of 1900 occurred prior to the most intense period of the debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, it is interesting to analyze how the various components of the American Negro Exhibit appeared through the lens of their dialogue.

³⁵ Grundberg, 51.

³⁶ Clarke, 129-130.

³⁷ Ibid, 129-130.

³⁸ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 49.

Harris believes that many of the issues that Washington and Du Bois discussed reflected the societal activity during the turn of the century. He suggests, “In many arenas, people argued the basic issues of conciliation and confrontation – earning one’s way versus demanding one’s rights. The debate over unionization, over the anti-trust laws . . . over the women’s right to vote – all of these in one way or another echo the debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois.”³⁹

By the time Washington gave his speech at the Atlantic Exposition of 1895, his position on Black progress was already established. He proposed the exact course of action the “New Negro” – a term that characterized a new identity for Blacks – should take in order to advance in society.⁴⁰ Du Bois, on the other hand, was just beginning to lay the groundwork for his sociological theories about Black advancement. His understanding of the deteriorating social conditions for Blacks and his sociological pursuits shaped his viewpoints. Therefore, his handling of the American Negro Exhibit project provides clues into his thought process and the goals he wished to accomplish at the Paris venue. Examining the background of both men provides insight into their differing opinions relating to African-American progress.

a. Booker T. Washington

Born a slave, and therefore accustomed to overt discrimination, Washington maneuvered through a restricted world defined by White authority.⁴¹ In that environment, Blacks relied upon themselves and their own communities for support. Washington became a prominent leader of Tuskegee University and achieved success in a world defined by political, social and economic limitations for Blacks. He saw no reason why other Blacks could not achieve similar goals and theorized that Blacks could succeed only through self-sufficiency, using technical knowledge and skills to create a place for themselves in America.⁴²

Washington was much more concerned with attacking the economic woes of African-Americans, than with the need to demand political and social equality from Whites. He proposed a compromise, advocating that Blacks not seek social or political rights from Whites if allowed

³⁹ Harris 4, 5.

⁴⁰ Deborah Willis, “The Sociologist’s Eye: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Paris Exposition” in A Small Nation of People (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2003) 52.

⁴¹ Harris, 26.

⁴² Lewis, 34.

the opportunity to advance economically. Washington called for a gradual gain in civil rights, since he believed that Blacks would reach a more respected social status if they reached a higher footing financially.⁴³

In order to reach the goal of a higher social status, Washington believed African-Americans would have to take a pragmatic approach to education. He valued vocational education for Blacks to build technical skills rather than pursuing a liberal arts education. He opined, “When a Black man received an education he looks for a position ready-made for him. I want to see him make his own position.”⁴⁴ Washington called for African-Americans to utilize their technical skills to create spaces for themselves within the marketplace. He also asked Blacks to forgo any desire or movement towards civil rights; those privileges would come once Blacks had earned the right to receive them.

Washington’s proposal encouraged White America. His “Great Compromise” laid to rest (at least temporarily) fears that Blacks would press the civil rights issue, demanding social and political equality.⁴⁵ Some Whites showed their support of Washington’s opinions by making financial donations to vocational colleges for African-Americans. Yet Washington did not consider whether Whites would willingly share the marketplace with Blacks. In the South, for example, there were cases where Whites sabotaged or threatened to close Black businesses because the Whites claimed that they lost revenue to Black entrepreneurs.⁴⁶

Washington believed that during Reconstruction Blacks had earned equal status much too soon. In Washington’s view, Blacks should have first established themselves economically. Yet Washington never explained who would decide when Blacks would be ready to receive civil rights in America. Alternatively, W.E.B. Du Bois thought the fight for equality rested in the hands of Blacks and was determined to prove his viewpoint in the work he produced for the Paris Exposition.

b. W.E.B. Du Bois

Du Bois was born free in the Northern United States. He had access to a good education, lived in a racially integrated neighborhood and therefore was not subjected to the same

⁴³ Lewis, 46, 47.

⁴⁴ Lewis, 46.

⁴⁵ Willis, 66.

⁴⁶ Diner, 134,144.

restrictions Washington experienced in the South. Du Bois advocated challenging racial barriers because, as a scholar of the social sciences, he believed restrictions on racial grounds lacked any scientific or intellectual merit.⁴⁷

He strived for African-Americans to be on equal footing with Whites in all political, social and economic arenas. Du Bois believed that any problems or issues that existed in the African-American community – and also in its relation to the larger population – should be examined through scientific study. He was of the opinion that society could solve its problems through adherence to scientific principles and research.⁴⁸

For this reason, Du Bois was a champion of higher education for Blacks. He believed that liberal education was the means by which Blacks could achieve a higher social status. Du Bois envisioned a leadership class – the “Talented Tenth.” The “Talented Tenth” would be a highly educated and cultured ten percent of the Black population that would guide the rest of the Black community toward its goals.⁴⁹ In order to cultivate growth of the “Talented Tenth,” Blacks had to be free of the restrictions that Whites imposed on them and lead their race unimpeded by discrimination.

Du Bois visualized an African-American Academy consisting of Black organizations such as colleges, newspapers, businesses, literature and art, that would positively reinforce the Black community and bolster it against discriminatory practices and behaviors.⁵⁰ These organizations would foster Black intellectual and scientific thought and promote social reform within the community. Du Bois also believed in White awareness of the African-American condition in the United States. He wrote articles and produced research documents with audiences from both the Black and White communities in mind. His hope was that his opinions and ideas would be read and acknowledged by White readers.⁵¹

Du Bois’ hopes and aspirations for Black advancement were admirable, yet elitist. The idea of a tenth of the Black population leading the remaining population supported a social hierarchy. It is unclear whether Blacks outside of the “Talented Tenth” would have had the opportunity to take leadership positions as well. In addition, Du Bois did not take into account

⁴⁷ Harris, 26.

⁴⁸ Harris, 37.

⁴⁹ Harris, 47.

⁵⁰ Harris, 53.

⁵¹ Harris, 67.

whether Whites were ready to hear his message about the Black condition during the era. Perhaps some Whites were willing to accept the ideas of a Black intellectual but the idea did not translate to the larger White population.⁵²

IV. The World Fairs

The world fairs of the late 19th century were a product of the industrial boom in the West. The fast-paced development of industry and the rising prominence of science and technological innovation and socio-political movements all defined this period. As such, the expositions were grandiose spectacles that attracted millions of visitors primarily from the western world.⁵³ Nation-competitors and spectators alike converged to celebrate Western civilization and modern achievements. Each participating country competed in venues that allowed them to display their scientific inventions, commercial ventures, colonial endeavors, military power and artistic accomplishments.⁵⁴ Countries that successfully impressed visitors and judges received awards for their displays. The choice of artifacts displayed at the venues often determined the images that nations wanted to convey to the world. The expositions, however, were more than just competitions; a world fair also provided a forum for each country to project a desired impression to the rest of the world.

Countries chose exhibits that allowed them opportunities to boast about their intellectual know-how, economic prowess and military power. Nations demonstrated their understanding of current scientific knowledge, contemporary use of commerce and trade practices, experience with foreign cultures and an awareness of their ability to manipulate and utilize these resources for their own national interests. Reid Badger states:

The emergence of the world's fair as a symbolic cultural expression during this period is but one of several developments that testify to the self-consciousness of the age. Like the tortured intellectual and literary experiments, the political, theological, and economic debates, and the social and educational movements of the late nineteenth, the great world's fairs in the broadest sense represente[d]

⁵² Harris notes that Du Bois was widely published in popular magazines, like *Atlantic Monthly*; however there is little evidence (from his research) to suggest that his readership was large among whites or had great impact on their beliefs or behavior. 67.

⁵³ Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition and American Culture* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979) xv.

⁵⁴ Badger, xvi.

Victorian era's attempt to both acknowledge the reality of rapid change and to understand and control its direction.⁵⁵

Americans realized the potential benefits of participating in world fairs only after the United States' prestige as a commercially productive and influential nation began to rise. Initially, Americans viewed these fairs with skepticism. Their fears stemmed from worries that foreigners might steal industrial secrets and agricultural practices presented to them at the fairs. However, after increased participation in the expositions quelled initial anxieties, America, like other prominent western countries, wished to establish itself as a world leader in multiple arenas. World fairs became an acceptable venue in which to do so. As Badger contends, "The United States ... captured the imagination and the future of the political world ... In technology and consumer goods, the American displays impressed many Europeans with their 'originality, inventiveness, peculiarity and novelty.'"⁵⁶ Through exhibition, America gained the attention and respect of other western nations.

Technical knowledge and consumer goods were not the only cargo America was concerned with displaying at the expositions or exporting overseas. Some Americans believed that these events also could export American political ideology. Badger quotes a United States Congressman from New York, Henry Raymond, who stated, "[World fairs] were a contest between the producers of labor under democratic liberty, and those under monarchical despotism."⁵⁷ The world's fair also became a showcase for the world to see the advantages of living in a democracy and most importantly to regard the United States as a model for other nations to admire and emulate.

V. The American Negro Exhibit: Analysis of Photography from the Exhibit

Just as the United States wished to use world fairs to celebrate its accomplishments, to display its cultural artifacts and impart a specific ideology to a global audience through a carefully constructed image, so, too, did African-Americans. Calloway understood that African-American inclusion in the Paris Exposition was essential to the struggle for civil rights in the United States. He noted in a letter to Black leaders, "To the Paris Exposition ... thousands upon

⁵⁵ Ibid, xvi.

⁵⁶ Reid, 15.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 15.

thousands will go ... and a well-selected and prepared exhibit, representing the Negro's development ... his professions and pursuits in general will attract attention."⁵⁸

Calloway's words indicate a deep comprehension of the prestige world fairs garnered for countries in the 19th century, and consequently, Paris was the perfect venue for African-Americans to both demonstrate pride in their achievements and lay the groundwork for the civil rights debate in the United States and abroad. African-Americans wished to raise their socio-economic and political status within the states in the same way the United States desired to raise its status within the world. To accomplish this goal, Calloway's team created an inspiring exhibit whose content would both counter the negative portrayals of African-Americans and begin to calm the discrimination and violence directed towards them.⁵⁹

Calloway and Du Bois devised a plan to ensure that their exhibit would contain the necessary elements pertaining to African-American life, literature, photographs, scientific research and inventions created by Blacks, as well as information to support their intended agendas.⁶⁰ The two included Black history, the effects of education, Black contributions to literature, science and commercial activities, participation in social organizations and a sociological study of African-Americans conducted by Du Bois.⁶¹

Of special interest to this discussion are the photographs that Du Bois, as curator of the exhibit, selected for the presentation. The exhibit contained 363 images showing a variety of characters: students, business owners, family members and community leaders. The subjects of these images fell precisely into the team's intended plan to photograph the "New Negro."⁶² The "New Negro" was a term coined soon after Booker T. Washington's speech at the Atlanta Exposition. His vision of the "New Negro" was a Black American who, "represent[ed] a spirit of

⁵⁸ Osborne, 16.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 16.

⁶⁰ Smith argues that Calloway and Du Bois had distinct agendas. Smith places Calloway firmly in the B.T. Washington camp. Washington's photo is prominently displayed in the exhibit. For Calloway, the American Negro Exhibit would be an example for demonstrating how a nation could "civilize and Christianize" a conquered race. The exhibit would support imperialism by documenting how well Blacks have progressed under the guidance of the US government. In contrast Smith argues that Du Bois used the exhibit to display and promote his vision of the "Talented Tenth." Smith, Photography on the Color Line 20-21.

⁶¹ Osborne, 16.

⁶² Willis, 58.

self-awareness, artistic consciousness, and racial pride ... [which] was reflected in different media, including art, print, artifacts, photography and film.”⁶³

Du Bois’ role in creating the exhibit was important because he was entrusted with the authority and power to recreate the self-images of African-Americans through his selection of material. The photographs, which were primarily taken by Black photographers across the country, challenged demeaning representations of African-Americans that circulated within mainstream media. African-Americans had virtually no control over the creation or distribution of these images.

Black photographers possessed the ability to transform Black identity through representations of the Black body and Black agency. Through their choice of subjects and settings, Black photographers created a sense of empowerment for the Black community. They often displayed within their photographs various views of the “New Negro.” Willis states, “Through the photographers’ lenses, we can see the embodiment of racial pride and the beginnings of the notion of a “New Negro” visual aesthetic. Black photographers created transformative photographs of “New Negroes” – beautiful, educated, employed and exploring their dreams.”⁶⁴

The images included in the American Negro Exhibit countered existing opinions of Black life in America as they showed Black communities that mirrored the White population. The various views of Black life are shown through examination of the photographic subjects’ physical appearance, attire, social activities, commercial activities, family life and tangible possessions.⁶⁵ These photographs seem to imply, “My race and your race are similar, or dare I say, just alike; we possess the same material goods, share similar interests and aspirations, conduct ourselves in a similar manner, own property and some of us may even have blond hair and blue eyes. How then can you look upon me with disdain and consider me inferior?”⁶⁶

⁶³ Willis, 52.

⁶⁴ Willis, 53.

⁶⁵ Willis, 67.

⁶⁶ Smith contends that Du Bois’ use of photography works on many levels both by refuting the misrepresentation of the Black body and lifestyle and also by constructing a civilized, middle class American Negro. The inclusion of portraits directly challenges the anthropological visual studies and criminal mug shots used to determine a racial or immoral “type.” The exhibit’s portraits and views of family life relocate African-Americans within a different social context. These Blacks are to be honored and revered for their refined looks, dress and adherence to family life and values. Smith, Photography on the Color Line 68-70.

Du Bois understood that photography provided evidence to promote the truth about Black life – that it was extremely diverse and, in many cases, similar to White culture. He believed in communicating this information to a larger audience.⁶⁷ These representations had the power to change the opinions of the White majority about the Black race, both in Europe and also in the United States. In addition, seeing new representations of themselves would encourage Blacks to reassess their sense of identity and thus, become more powerful. As Willis contends, “Photography played a role in shaping people’s ideas about identity and sense of self; it informed African-American social consciousness and motivated Black people by offering an ‘other’ view of the Black subject. In a sense, photography was used as ... subversive resistance.”⁶⁸

The depictions of the “New Negro” utilized by Du Bois point to his calculated construction of the ideology he wished to convey to attendees of the Paris World’s Fair. For this reason, the majority of images he chose were from the African-American middle class community. Du Bois’ concern for this issue is very clear upon analysis of the photography’s content. Du Bois made a concerted effort to include positive images of Black life. There are very few photographs of Blacks living in impoverished conditions and none of Blacks that appeared to be the victims of violence. Furthermore, the photographs on display attempted to negate “exoticized displays” of Black Americans – cast as Africans – often displayed by other countries (participating in the World Fairs) in order to demonstrate their conquest of African nations.⁶⁹

Du Bois created the exhibit with the idea that the world would look at African-Americans as the “New Negro” in the ‘flesh’ – people who were educated, cultured and contributors, not only to their own communities but also to the nation at large. Du Bois hoped that his use of photography would serve as scientific evidence of African-Americans’ contributions and that this version of reality would become true in the eyes of the viewer.

c. Photographs Displayed within the Exhibit

Photographs speak to audiences through their content, as well as their historical context. This paper will analyze the following photographs from the American Negro Exhibit according to their relationship to the identity of the “New Negro” and also with regard to their place in

⁶⁷ Willis, 55.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 55.

⁶⁹ Willis, 59.

time. Willis argues that to understand photographs of Black subjects from the era, gaining knowledge about the “New Negro” is required. She quotes cultural historian Alan Trachtenberg:

American photographs are not simple depictions but constructions ... that the history they show is inseparable from the history they enact: a history of photographers employing their medium to make sense of their society ... requiring that photographers invent new forms of presentation of collaboration between images and text, between artist and audience.⁷⁰

Clarke also suggests that portraiture photography “is the site of a complex series of interactions – aesthetic, cultural, ideological, sociological, and psychological ... a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity.”⁷¹ Keeping these ideas in mind, the paper will examine the content of the photographs based specifically on an individual’s dress, pose, gender and the picture’s setting. These photographs are a small but representative sample of the photography in the American Negro Exhibit. In addition to showing a variety of Black bodies, the photographs show leisure, commercial and educational activities within the Black community at the turn of the twentieth century. The images encompass the idea of the “New Negro” ideal Du Bois constructed in the exhibit.

1. *Photograph #1 — Musicians*⁷²

⁷⁰ Willis, 77.

⁷¹ Clarke, 102.

⁷² Smith notes that musical instruments played an interesting role in the B.T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois debates. Washington believed that, for Blacks, the study of leisure and entertainment activities took their focus off the primary goal of attaining social equality and economic success. In contrast, Du Bois believed that study of music and use of musical instruments are incorporated within the middle-class lifestyle. Therefore, demonstrating their place in Black households would prove that African-Americans achieved that status. (Smith, Photography on the Color Line 110-112).



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This photograph of five young musicians directly challenges popular cartoon images such as those found in *Harper's Weekly* at the turn of the 20th century, for it displays African-Americans in a refined and cultured manner unlike the caricatures found in most cartoons. Racist political cartoons by caricaturist Thomas Nast and the *Blackville* cartoon series by Sol Eytinge Jun published by *Harper's*, ridiculed African-Americans' aspirations of reaching middle-class status.⁷⁴ For example, in one *Harper's* cartoon, a Black customer and his wife want to buy a chignon, the joke being that neither one understands that the hairstyle could not be bought, rather worn by a woman who possessed long, straight 'European' hair. For the reader, however, it was a sign of the physical and cultural differences between the races – White superiority and Black inferiority based upon physical limitations. Jun's image also demonstrated the perceived foolishness of people wanting something they could not possibly hope to attain.⁷⁵

The middle-class Black characters depicted in cartoons are never quite as 'good' at, or as 'authentic,' in living the middle-class Victorian lifestyle as their White counterparts. Those comics imply that in spite of their efforts, Blacks would never truly reach a higher social status

⁷³ Library of Congress, Photo#23.

⁷⁴ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 82.

⁷⁵ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 80-81.

because of intellectual, cultural and physical differences.⁷⁶ Smith suggests that *Harper's* cartoons and others like them, sought to ease the concern of many Whites who felt that middle-class, educated Blacks challenged Whites' beliefs of cultural and racial superiority.⁷⁷

In addition to the negative visual representations of Blacks published in the media during the turn of the 20th century, debates about the criminal nature and behavior of the "New Negro" emerged. Much of the discourse, generally promoted and disseminated by White supremacists, focused on a belief that criminality and aggression were inherent traits of the Black race, manifested in crimes against the White population – the most frightening of these crimes being the rape of White women by Black men.⁷⁸ Whites who held this belief argued that Black criminality had increased without the watchful eye of the slave master and that the way to contain Black misbehavior was through "social surveillance, segregation and lynching."⁷⁹

The photograph above portrays a group of male musicians posing for the camera in what may be the parlor of a house. Their tailored suits are clean, formal and refined. The style of dress fits into the prim and proper style of Victorian times and the inclusion of the boutonniere further shows that they are 'gentlemen.' They are neither idle young men chasing women, nor 'up to no good.' Rather the subjects appear to be highly cultured, intelligent, young musicians, whose reserved facial expressions and poses display a sophisticated demeanor. The string instruments, which demonstrate their knowledge of and interest in classical music and composers, accompany them.⁸⁰ The parlor contains carved wooden furniture, lace curtains and a painting above the fireplace, all goods that any middle-class Victorian family would own and display in their house.

Finally, the photograph depicts five brothers and a neighbor, yet to visitors of the American Negro Exhibit, he might appear as a White person standing with a group of Black men, instead of part of a musical group. This image illustrates the similarities in lifestyle

⁷⁶ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 83.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 83.

⁷⁸ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 87.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 87.

⁸⁰ This photograph depicts Thomas Askew's (a Black photographer) sons with a neighborhood friend. Smith compares this photograph to one Askew took years earlier of his boys in a "By Jingo" style when they were younger. The "By Jingo" style refers to the unrefined and mischievous manner of the subject. The "By Jingo" photograph was taken in jest to appeal to the viewer's comic sensibilities. However, it is in direct contrast to the musical group photo. The musical group photo demonstrates African-American elegance and sophistication Smith, Photography on the Color Line 74-75.

between Blacks and Whites of the Victorian Age. It also demonstrates equality in social activities between Blacks and Whites.

In this image, Du Bois challenges notions of White cultural and intellectual superiority and Black criminality. Unlike the illustrated characters from the cartoons seen in *Harper's Weekly*, the Blacks in the image are “real” and represent the truth as documented through photography, rather than from an illustrator’s biased imagination. The “New Negro” symbolizes middle class aspirations and ideals.

For Du Bois, those young men were products of their middle-class surroundings. According to Smith, Du Bois saw criminal activity in the Black community as a result of living in impoverished conditions and believed that unlawful acts stemmed from learned behavior.⁸¹ Conversely, displaying African-Americans in richer surroundings – a well-to-do Victorian household – would prove that these were young men raised to be respected members of society. Their middle-class upbringing ensured that they were well-mannered, moral citizens who possessed the cultural and intellectual know-how associated with that social class; they had the intellectual capacity to learn classical music, and perhaps also pursue higher education. Their social status indicated a cultural awareness to not only participate in social activities but to appreciate aesthetic beauty.

2. Photograph #2 and #3 — Dr. McDougald's Drug Store

The American Negro Exhibit also highlighted African-American achievements in business. The exhibit included a statistical record of Black businesses in the South that counted 20,000 Black-owned establishments within various industries.⁸² Although the numbers recording Black economic achievement are impressive, the majority of African-Americans at the turn of the 20th century worked as farmers or day laborers. While the exhibit features some photographs depicting Blacks farming or living in rural areas, Du Bois’s focus is on the life of the middle-class “New Negro;” for the ideological drive behind the exhibit was to show Black intellectual and economic progress.⁸³

⁸¹ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 87.

⁸² Lewis, 27.

⁸³ Smith explains that Du Bois was reluctant to show Blacks living in impoverished conditions in order to avoid White stereotypes of African-American life. The images of the American Negro Exhibit were included to enlighten



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the audience to a Black lifestyle that was, heretofore, unknown to them. (Smith, Photography on the Color Line 96-98).

⁸⁴ Library of Congress, Photo #88.

⁸⁵ Library of Congress, Photo #89.

The photographs displayed above show the exterior and interior views of a Black-owned drugstore. In the exterior shot, the store sits on an isolated yet calm street presumably within a business district. In front of the store is a prominent signpost displaying the name of the business. The proprietor is not only a businessman, but also a doctor. Parked outside is a horse and carriage that could belong to the store's owner or a well-to-do customer who could afford the luxury of that type of transportation. In view of the exterior shot are two figures in the store's doorway. They might be the proprietors welcoming customers to the store.

From the interior shot, one can see two male employees who stand among well-stocked shelves, waiting to offer assistance to customers. The store is immaculate, and the employees, one who is most likely the proprietor, are formally dressed. The other figures in the photograph, a well-dressed woman and man, appear to be customers. This representation is an example of a successful commercial enterprise in the African-American community. The depiction of a drugstore within the photographs exemplifies the scientific knowledge and business capability of its African-American proprietor.

The photography exhibit also features examples of the economic purchasing power of the "New Negro." There are numerous images of single-family homes surrounded by well-groomed lawns, with the owners and their family members standing proudly in front of the properties. The exhibit also contains a variety of interior shots of these homes, prominently displaying the owner's interior design knowledge and the furnishings a middle-class Victorian family could afford to buy: multiple pieces of furniture, pianos, chandeliers, framed photographs and artwork.

Du Bois chose images that best demonstrated Black economic progress. He selected images of various businesses that catered to the African-American community. There are photographs of pharmacies, retail shops and wagons, watch repair and jewelry shops, publishing houses, the only Black-owned electrical shop and the only Black-operated cotton mill in the United States. These images portray African-Americans at work, tending to their commercial pursuits. Du Bois responded visually to negative, stereotypical perceptions of lazy, idle or criminal Blacks. Participation in commercial ventures created healthy, successful African-American communities. The photographs illustrate that, in the face of racism, discrimination and

lynching, Blacks became successful proprietors, property owners and, as taxpayers, contributors to the local and national economies.⁸⁶

3. *Photographs #4, #5 — Portraits of an African-American Woman and Man*

Francis Galton, the creator of eugenics – “a science of heredity and race,” utilized photography to support his research of biological generalities among racial and ethnic groups.⁸⁷ In Galton’s view, the White race was physically and psychologically superior and believed it biologically impossible for Blacks or other minority groups to achieve the same level of superiority.⁸⁸ Galton’s images showed the frontal and profile views of his subjects similar to criminal mug shots. By combining multiple photos of various subjects from one group together, he created an imagined, yet representative, face of a racial “type” for that particular group.⁸⁹ Eugenics armed White society with the scientific tool of knowledge and physical evidence to protect its racial integrity through controlled reproduction.⁹⁰

Just as popular cartoons at the turn of the 20th century invented and reinforced misconceptions of African-Americans, eugenics served as another visual tool to define Black bodies. However, instead of springing from the cartoonist’s imagination, eugenics was supported by the legitimacy of scientific investigation and photography as visual evidence to confirm racial difference and standards. As such, eugenics became the basis of support for many of the restrictive social policies of the day.⁹¹ These ideas confined Blacks into a specific “Negro type,” another limitation to reaching equality and gaining civil rights.

⁸⁶ Ida B. Wells, a journalist who investigated and reported on violence perpetrated against African-Americans, believed lynching (often instigated by a charge of rape) to be a form of economic terrorism. Black businesses threatened white economic power. According to Smith, Wells’ theory was based upon an incident in which three Black grocers were accused of raping a white woman and subsequently lynched for the crime. These men were in direct competition with a white grocer from the same neighborhood. Smith states, “Du Bois’ photographs of well-to-do African-American men and women signified against a backdrop of racial terror that sought to obliterate the African-American man’s economic power and class standing and deem him a criminal.” Smith, Photography on the Color Line 78-79.

⁸⁷ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 52.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 52.

⁸⁹ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 53.

⁹⁰ Smith, Photography on the Color Line 52.

⁹¹ Smith states, “Eugenics was called on to naturalize many forms of social oppression, suggesting that an individual’s capacity for social progress was biologically determined, rather than the effect of positive or adverse environmental conditions.” Smith, Photography on the Color Line 54.

Through photography, Du Bois refuted the “Negro type” by showing the physical variation and the diversity of progress within the African-American community.⁹² He gathered evidence of the “New Negro” type, one that defied the exaggerated physical features and buffoonery of Black caricatures and rejected scientific theories of Black inferiority. He contested the physical attributes (skin color, hair type, etc.) used to determine conventional ‘Blackness’ during the Victorian period. As such, the exhibit contains images of Blacks who range in complexion from fair- to dark-skinned and have a variety of hair types, eye colors and other facial features. In this context, Du Bois showed the exhibit’s audience that there is no one African-American type, only individuals belonging to this particular racial group.⁹³



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The images above replicate Galton’s visual form and composition. Both photos are framed with an oval shape. Photo #4 is a frontal view of a dark-skinned, young man positioned in front of a light background. The man has closely cropped hair, a long broad nose, full lips and a cleft chin. He is dressed formally in a white dress shirt, a dark bowtie and a jacket. He projects the image of the “New Negro” – a man possessing a refined demeanor, cultured and prepared to

⁹² Smith, Photography on the Color Line 61.

⁹³ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁴ Library of Congress, Photo #147.

⁹⁵ Library of Congress, Photo #103.

meet the challenges of work or school – characteristics far from those of a criminal or inferior human being.

Photograph #5 is a profile view of a light-skinned, young woman, positioned in front of a grayish background. She has wavy hair pulled back into a bun and adorned with a ribbon. Her nose is long and pointed with broad nostrils. She has thin lips that hint of a smile. The woman wears a white, high-collared blouse, possibly the bodice of a full-skirted dress. Attached to the left side of her collar is a brooch that appears to be a photographed cameo of a man. Perhaps this is a photo of her husband, sweet-heart or father. This woman also represents Du Bois's "New Negro" – a sophisticated, Victorian woman. Her facial features, light skin and wavy hair contrast with a specific "Negro type." Furthermore, her style of dress indicates her middle-class status, and her brooch suggests familial ties.

These photos provide a sample of the portraits found within the photography exhibit. On the surface, photographs #4 and #5 resemble Galton's eugenics subjects. The photographs and others included in the exhibit capture the head and shoulders of each person. The men and women are positioned to face or turn away from the camera. The lens is close enough to the individuals for the viewer to see their facial features and attire. Du Bois wrapped the images in the cloak of eugenics, but only showcases their use of photography to investigate the African-American. He invited the viewer to scrutinize each person and to question whether these individuals compare to conventional perceptions or representations of African-Americans.

Moreover, unlike the subjects exploited by anthropologists and scientists, Du Bois's "New Negroes" are infused with life. Given their varied physical features, attire and environments, it is evident that they exist outside of the picture frame as individuals of mixed heritage, family and community members, students and business owners and, most importantly, American citizens.⁹⁶

4. *Photograph #6 — Press Room, The Planet Newspaper*

The Assistant Librarian of Congress, Daniel A.P. Murray, put together an extensive collection of written materials produced by African-American authors. Murray's bibliography

⁹⁶ Smith suggests that the exhibit's portraiture photography changes gradually from a scientific study into a quasi-family album; subjects representing the African-American type slowly become individuals of American middle-class society. Smith, Photography on the Color Line 63.

contained approximately 1,800 publications, which included pamphlets, books and periodicals.⁹⁷ The list included work from both prominent figures in African-American history, like Frederick Douglass, Phillis Wheatley, Paul Laurence Dunbar and lesser-known authors. Most importantly, the publications listed in the bibliography are a record of the African-American experience and provide insight into the African-American cultural, social and political thought of the time. For example, titles included: *Future of the American Negro*, *Lynchings in the South* and *Struggles for Freedom*.⁹⁸

Du Bois advocated the creation and support of African-American institutions that cultivated “products of the Negro mind,” for they were vital to black progress and opposed racial discrimination.⁹⁹ Having the right to think, write and publish were key elements to advancing the civil rights causes of the “New Negro.”¹⁰⁰ Many authors used the press to document and report on tough realities faced by the black community, especially those issues not covered by the mainstream press. This medium was a forum to openly discuss and share opinions of the state of the African-Americans within the world.

Ida B. Wells, an investigative reporter, used her newspaper, *Free Speech*, to promote her anti-lynching campaign and to question the motivation of violent mobs for lynching Black men. Wells believed that White mobs justified lynching by overusing the rape of White women by Black men.¹⁰¹ She contended that the real motivation behind lynching had more to do with protecting the White patriarchal system and hiding the sexual dalliances of White women than Black sexual predatory behavior.¹⁰² Wells’ writing, while controversial, gave her an opportunity to freely express her views, unfettered by White censorship.

⁹⁷ Willis, 17.

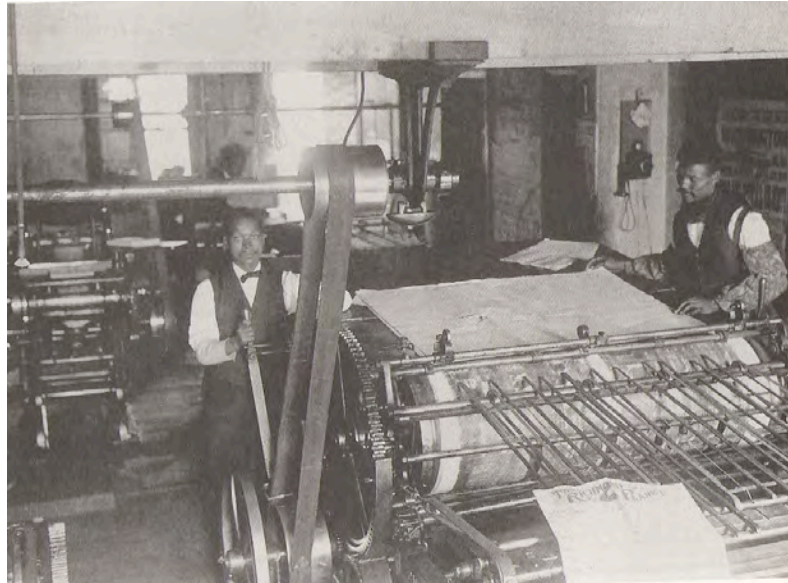
⁹⁸ “Preliminary List of Books and Pamphlets by Black Authors Sent to the Exhibit of the American Negroes” The Exhibit of American Negroes World’s Fair, Paris 1900, Site created and designed by Facts On File, Inc., and Eugene Provenzo, 2005 <http://www.fofweb.com/Onfiles/Afhc/afparis1900/lexhibit_lit_intro.htm>.

⁹⁹ Harris, 53.

¹⁰⁰ Education was central to Du Bois’s vision for African-American progress and the attainment of middle-class status. For Du Bois, the pursuit of higher education was a means to self-reliance and self-empowerment for the Black community. Therefore the American Negro Exhibit includes examples of African-American progress in education, featuring images of students working in the classroom on various subjects: blacksmithing, pharmacy, biology and dentistry. Images of Black universities and students countered existing misrepresentations of Blacks as intellectually inferior, culturally uncivilized and in need of proper guidance by the white paternalism of slavery. Rather, these photographs showed African-Americans preparing themselves to take their places as educated and culturally sophisticated citizens living the American dream.

¹⁰¹ Shawn Michelle Smith, American Archives: Gender, Race and Class in Visual Culture (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999) 148, 149.

¹⁰² Smith, American Archives: Gender, Race and Class in Visual Culture 149.



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The image shown above depicts the production office of a newspaper, *The Planet*. This is another example of an African-American business venture, but one that forays into communications media. The two employees are dressed in traditional attire: white shirts, ties and vests with their jackets off, perhaps to allow for ease of movement. The printing press is featured prominently in the photograph. The employees are active and focused. The photograph indicates that both gentlemen possess the know-how to handle this mechanical apparatus.

This image relays the message that these men have acquired the necessary knowledge to master the technical aspects of printing and to therefore publish literary works. Furthermore, it speaks to the astuteness of the intelligentsia within the African-American community and their ability to produce and disseminate messages to a mass audience. This medium provided an opportunity for the Black press to state its desires and opinions, to stimulate dialogue within the members of various Black communities, as well as share this information with a larger audience – the White population.

In a historical context, the photographs selected for this paper from the American Negro Exhibit exemplified the times in which they were produced, situated within the context of the prospering Industrial Age, the social reform movement and the quest for scientific and technological knowledge. For example, each picture depicted an aspect of industry and cultural production – entertainment, trade, science and communications. The subjects had knowledge of, or were learning, how to handle commercial enterprise. Moreover, these individuals also

¹⁰³ Library of Congress, Photo #80.

represent cultural reproduction. They reinforced existing American ideals of work, family life, leisure activities and gender roles. However, the images also created cultural work because they resituated Black Americans in a new cultural context. As Americans, they were striving for the American dream of reaching success by capitalizing on their skills and labor. Also illustrated within the photographs was the steadfast belief that each individual had to be trained in a technical skill in order to work in industry and to achieve a higher social status.

The photographs used in the American Negro Exhibit illustrate the “New Negro.” As a result, Washington and Du Bois’ theories converge within these photographs, since the images display elements of socio-economic progress, as well as intellectual capabilities and pursuits. The people captured on film epitomized the type of African-American that both Washington and Du Bois believed should gain social equality. It is for their technical skills, their cultured appearances and their ability to speak through photographic visages for the Black race at the Parisian venue that they deserved to be admired, respected and accepted within American culture.

VI. Conclusion

The late 19th Century was a period of vast changes in industry, science and technology and social reform. During Reconstruction, the United States was rebuilding from the inside and the outside, attempting to find its footing within the global arena by learning to become an industrial and political power. In the United States, various groups tried to carve their own places within the social structure so as not be lost within a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape. For this reason, the social reform movement, initiated by the Progressive movement, became a prominent force in trying to help citizens find social and economic stability.

African-Americans, as part of the social reform movement, sought to hold onto the political and social gains they had made during Reconstruction. With their rights being trampled by Southern White separatists and Northern White apathy, they searched for other methods to gain social equality. In a time of escalating violence and hatred against their communities, Blacks chose to state their case for social inclusion in the American Dream within the global arena. This venue was the Paris Exposition of 1900. Du Bois envisioned that this exhibit would show the world the “New Negro” – a Black American worthy of equal treatment.

The Washington/Du Bois debates demonstrate that the Black population was a diverse group with varying opinions as to how to achieve social equality within the United States. The use of photography in the Paris exhibit illustrates that the ideas of the two leaders were closer and more similar than perhaps even they realized. Du Bois' use of photography shows his understanding of the impact that images had on the viewing audience – the ability to convince, to persuade or simply to show an alternative version of reality. The judges at the Paris World's Fair honored the American Negro Exhibit with the prestige Grand Prix award and bestowed both Calloway and Du Bois with gold medals for their work on the display.¹⁰⁴ Although the group earned honors, it is unclear whether Du Bois' wish for White American recognition of Black equality was realized immediately. However, it should be evident to anyone viewing those pictures that African-Americans in the United States have always had a prominent place in history as contributors both in the Black community and America at large. The exhibit demonstrates how Du Bois shrewdly used photography to refute racist representations of Blacks in mainstream media. The photographs also supported his ideological and scientific beliefs for reviving the damaged body of and inventing a renewed place for the “New Negro” within American society.

¹⁰⁴ Willis, 73.

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