



# Emancipatory Empiricism: The Rural Sociology of W.E.B. Du Bois

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## Abstract

In this article, the authors discuss W.E.B. Du Bois' contributions to rural sociology, focusing specifically on his discussions of rural communities and the structure of agriculture. The authors frame his research agenda as an *emancipatory empiricism* and discuss the ways his rural research is primarily focused on social justice and the social progress of Black communities in rural spaces. Du Bois' empirical research, funded by the Department of Labor from 1898 to 1905, provides evidence that Du Bois was among the first American sociologists to conduct empirical agrarian analyses and case studies of rural communities.

## Keywords

W.E.B. Du Bois, rural sociology, rural communities, sociology of agriculture, black intellectual tradition, social theory, intellectual history

Although rarely noted, W.E.B. Du Bois was among the first American sociologists to conduct empirical analyses of agrarian production and case studies of rural communities, core areas of the nearly 100-year-old field of rural sociology. Importantly, Du Bois focused much of his early empirical sociology on rural spaces during a period of massive transition from agrarian to industrial production. Rural populations, for Du Bois, offered a unique opportunity to observe social development within rural Black communities experiencing various economic, demographic, and social transitions accompanying industrialization and the onset of modernity. His earliest investigations, which we discuss at length in this article, were part of a focused, purposeful research agenda that would empirically inform policy and sociological theory about the real conditions of rural Black communities. Because of this focus, we refer to Du Bois' empirical rural sociology as an *emancipatory empiricism*, aimed at providing empirical foundations for more equitable social policy and improved lives for African Americans.

We recast W.E.B. Du Bois as one of the first American sociologists to use empirical sociological methods to observe rural people and places. We

first review the institutional history of early American rural sociology and its analytical foci. We then turn to a discussion of Du Bois' academic training, his exposure to empirical sociological methods, and his personal life experiences which directed his sociological work toward an emancipatory goal. In the bulk of this article we focus on Du Bois' empirical investigations of rural communities and the structure of agriculture that were funded by the Department of Labor. We then conclude by discussing his methodological and theoretical contributions to early rural sociology and how his use of sociological methods provided an evidence-based scientific grounding, or emancipatory empiricism, which aimed to inform social policy and improve the lives of African Americans.

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## EARLY AMERICAN RURAL SOCIOLOGY AND THE WORK OF W.E.B. DU BOIS

Systemic development of rural sociology is institutionally linked to land grant colleges and universities in the Midwest (Brunner 1957). In 1903, Michigan State University hired Kenyon Butterfield as likely the first official instructor in rural sociology in the country. Similarly employed by a midwestern land grant university, Charles Josiah Galpin, a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin, is frequently called the founding father of the field (Brunner 1957; Gillette 1922; Smith 2011). Galpin's (1915) "The Social Anatomy of an Agricultural Community" is often cited as the first rigorous case study of a rural community and stands as an early effort to analyze links between rural lifestyles and larger structural change (Brunner 1957; Larson and Zimmerman 2003; Smith 2011). This study is important for our purposes because it captures two large aspects of contemporary and classic rural sociology, namely, community case studies and the structure of agriculture (Lobao 2006). Although rural sociology has grown significantly and involves a much wider range of topics, including natural resources and environmental concerns, demographic and population studies, and human geography, analyses of the structure of agriculture and rural communities remain central to the field (Lobao 2006). Importantly, although no doubt significant, Galpin's work appeared nearly 20 years after Du Bois' earliest studies of rural areas.

Scholarly rural sociological work such as rural community case studies was also done outside the land grant system (Brunner 1957; Buttel, Larson, and Gillespie 1990; Gillette 1922; Sanderson 1917). C. R. Henderson is recognized as teaching the very first course on rural sociology in 1894 and 1895 at the University of Chicago (Gillette 1922; Sanderson 1917; Smith 2011). Three doctoral dissertations completed at Columbia University in 1906, 1907, and 1912 and conducted under the supervision of Franklin H. Giddings also stand as early examples of rural sociological analyses (Brunner 1957; Gillette 1922). These three studies all focused on the students' rural home town and were examples of Giddings's personal emphasis on robust research methodologies rather than distinctly rural issues (Buttel et al. 1990). Giddings had no significant interest in rural sociology, yet he desired better informed community studies and encouraged students to empirically observe familiar settings (Buttel et al. 1990). Very few robust

sociological analyses of rural communities were done by these sociologists prior to the early teens of the twentieth century, yet they are widely portrayed as the pioneers of the field of rural sociology. The important issue here is the complete omission of Du Bois, whose rural work is far more methodologically rigorous and predates this early wave of research by at least a decade.

Du Bois' prominence as a sociologist of urban communities largely overshadows his extraordinary rural work. Still, recognition of his early rural work exists but is often embedded in relation to his more popular urban studies (Lewis 1993; Rabaka 2010; Wright 2002a). Buttel et al. (1990) labeled him the first field investigator of rural life, but little else is found on Du Bois in the literature of rural sociology. This is important because Du Bois' extensively researched rural analyses are exemplary sociological studies that predate many canonized figures of rural sociology by almost 20 years. Specifically, he conducted numerous empirical studies on the structural changes affecting agrarian communities and social development that were pioneering. His early rural and urban empirical investigations shaped multiple facets of the emerging field of American sociology but his rural work continues to be overlooked. His community case studies and analyses of agricultural production anticipate many aspects of early institutionalized rural sociology and align the field's contemporary focus on community development and equitable policy. Moreover, Du Bois approached the study of Black rural spaces and people with an eye to challenging racial misconceptions and improving their quality of life. In this way, Du Bois pioneered a rural sociology that was characterized by the deployment of an emancipatory empiricism.

### *Empiricism with Purpose: Du Bois' Academic Training*

Du Bois' understanding of the links between empirical research and social policy is a direct development of his academic training (Barkin 2000; Broderick 1958; Du Bois 1968; Morris 2015; Outlaw 2000; Rudwick 1969; Wortham 2009). Du Bois earned two bachelor's degrees from Fisk University and Harvard University before continuing graduate education at Harvard and the University of Berlin. At Harvard, he completed courses in history, philosophy, and economics and studied under influential and prominent scholars, including William James and George Santayana, among others (Morris 2015). In Berlin, his primary mentor was Gustav Schmoller, but Du Bois was

also influenced by other notable faculty members, including Adolph Wagner, Heinrich von Treitschke, Max Lenz, and August Meitzen (Broderick 1958; Du Bois 1968; Wortham 2009). Schmoller and Meitzen both shaped Du Bois' approach to empiricism and instilled a sense of the importance of empirical research for informing equitable policy.

While his training in Berlin provided the foundation for his empirical agenda, his time at Harvard with James and Santayana also influenced his emancipatory empiricism. James's concept of a radical empiricism emphasizes values, social meanings, and intentionality in influencing social experience, academic observations, and empirical measurements (James [1912] 2008). Social science empiricism, for James, was inevitably shaped by the interpretations of social action by observers (James [1912] 2008). Measurements of social phenomena are therefore shaped by both their contents and their context, something that Du Bois insightfully connected to the lived experiences of racial inequality. Santayana's influence can be seen in the modernist orientation of Du Bois' work and his turn away from Victorian ideals and conceptions of social class and culture. Santayana was noted at the time for asking questions about the nature of man and society that opposed Victorian institutions and "puritanism" in intellectual discourse (Singal 1982:4). Many of these same tensions are echoed in Du Bois' sociological work.

Du Bois' exposure to the ideas of his mentors very likely aligned with his unique experiences of being an educated Black man. Du Bois' empiricism was, by its very nature, a radical and modernist empiricism as it was constructed from a primarily marginalized position, and it was largely aimed at clarifying the experience of marginalization itself. His empiricism was focused on combatting inaccurate and often racist depictions of African Americans that frequently found a home in the grand theory of academic thought. When he returned to the United States in 1896, Du Bois noted that much social policy surrounding racial inequality needed revision (Du Bois 1997). Consequently, he directed his first sociological inquiries toward the pursuit of social justice and more equitable social policy surrounding race (Du Bois 1968; Williams 2006; Wright and Calhoun 2006).

### ***American Sociology, Social Darwinism, and Racial Emancipation***

Embodying Marable's Black intellectual tradition, Du Bois understood the social construction of racial

categories by linking his academic training and lived experiences as a Black man (Du Bois 1968; Marable 1986, 2013; Morris 2015; Rabaka 2010; Williams 2006; Zuckerman 2004). Marable (1986) described this tradition as a link between the lived experiences of African American scholars and the foci and goals of their research. The emancipatory empiricism of Du Bois' sociology truly champions this framework. Raised in New England and living in the American South both before and after he lived in Germany, Du Bois' varying experiences of racial inequality directed his research toward the link between race and social development (Du Bois 1968; Williams 2006; Zuckerman 2004). Du Bois traveled extensively throughout Europe while living in Germany and described various social interactions as unencumbered by the weight of racial discrimination and prejudice he experienced in America (Du Bois 1968:160). Differences among his experiences in different regions of the United States and abroad helped Du Bois conceptualize racial categories as social constructions that are historically embedded within certain social institutions (Du Bois 1968; Lewis 2000).

Du Bois' emancipatory empiricism provided the professional justification to reject social Darwinism within academic thought. This also led him to critique tendencies within American sociology toward grand theories of social stratification that reified the social order (Du Bois [1904] 1978). Pushing instead for empirical methods and objective participant observation, Du Bois desired an accurate understanding of inequality that was far from the "prejudiced eyes" of racialized grand theory (Du Bois [1904–1905] 2000; Du Bois 1997:75; Rabaka 2010; Wright and Calhoun 2006). Du Bois wrote about the connections between his training and his desire for an emancipatory empiricism, "Above all I began to understand the real meaning of scientific research and the dim outline of methods of employing its technique and its results in the new social sciences for the settlement of the Negro problem in America" (Du Bois 1968:160). Inductive methods were also critically important for combatting the prevailing stereotypes found within American academic discourse as Du Bois set out "to study the facts, any and all facts, concerning the American Negro and his plight, and by measurement and comparison and research, work up to any valid generalization which I could" (Du Bois [1940] 2007:26).

Eager to establish an American sociology which would more accurately describe and theorize racial relations, Du Bois focused his empirical attention

on Black communities and their social development (Rabaka 2010; Wright 2002c; Wright and Calhoun 2006). Already teaching at both Wilberforce University and the University of Pennsylvania after returning to the United States, Du Bois accepted an invitation from Atlanta University's president, Horace Bumstead, for a professorship in history and economics in 1897 (Horne 2009; Lewis 2000; Wright 2002a). Atlanta University was just starting its research series, the Conference on Negro Problems, in which Du Bois directed 16 studies between 1897 and 1914 (Wright 2002a). While a faculty member at Atlanta University, Du Bois forged the first department of sociology in the country and spearheaded much of the groundbreaking work conducted by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory from 1896 to 1917 (Wright 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). Importantly, it was during the early years of this period that Du Bois completed his most rigorous rural studies discussed later in this article. Recent research has shed new light on the work of Du Bois and other scholars associated with the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory as pioneering in several areas, notably the sociology of the South and regionalism (Wright 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2009, 2016). We complement this expanded application of Du Bois' work by suggesting that some of these early studies also serve as pioneering works for the field of rural sociology.

## DU BOIS' EMANCIPATORY RURAL SOCIOLOGY

Du Bois' rural interests were evident while still a student in Berlin, where he conducted multiple political-economic analyses of American agrarian production. Most notably, he conducted a dissertation-level analysis written in 1893 focused on of the production differences between small and large farms in the American south. This study, "The Plantation and Peasant Proprietorship System of Agriculture in the Southern United States," was an in-depth statistical inquiry of farm tenure, size, and production rates in which Du Bois challenged popular theoretical assumptions within Western economics about larger farms' being more efficient and productive (Du Bois 1968, [1899] 1973; Rudwick 1974). As a professional sociologist, many of Du Bois' earliest empirical investigations took place in the American rural South, and it was there where he first used his methodological training to describe the social and economic conditions of rural Black communities (Lewis 1993; Rabaka 2010; Wright 2014). Rural spaces offered a unique

setting to observe the social and economic progress of Black communities in the years after the Civil War. The turn of the twentieth century was a time of great social change, and Du Bois knew the potential for social development that would accompany many of those changes. Recognizing this, he consciously focused his empirical research on the opportunities for progress that faced rural populations in the modernizing American South.

Du Bois' most elaborate investigations of rural spaces were funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, known then as the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In 1897, Du Bois requested funding from the commissioner of the bureau, Carroll Wright, to complete a two-tiered research plan to systematically determine the communal and economic progress of southern rural Black communities (Du Bois 1968:202). In the first tier, Du Bois would conduct several community case studies, collecting data on various topics such as geographic density of population, occupations, wages, home ownership, health and longevity, morals and manners, crime and law, labor opportunities, religion, education, literature, and art. This first set of studies would "locate and define difficulties" in sociological investigation of rural communities and "indicate lines upon which a larger investigation could be carried to success" (Du Bois 1997:41). The second tier consisted of larger regional and national studies and used census and archival data to develop more generalizable information. It was through the combination of local community studies and aggregate regional data that Du Bois wished to formulate a truly accurate depiction of Black communities in the American South (Morris 2015; Rabaka 2010). His methodological toolkit included household surveys, semistructured interviews, participant observation, ethnographic data collection, archival and census research, and statistical analysis (Morris 2015).

Such rigorous methods were required if objective and accurate scientific activity were to lead to the benefit of Black communities and the emancipation and growth of Black individuals (Du Bois 1968). Importantly, Du Bois noted in his request to Wright that these preliminary studies would provide a framework for a research agenda building off subsequent findings that would likely challenge racist and stereotypical images of Black people. The results from the Department of Labor studies "could be published and would by allaying false notions and prejudices prepare the public mind for the larger work" that would follow (Du Bois 1997:41). Du Bois received funding to conduct five studies for the Department of Labor lasting from

1898 to 1905. The five commissioned studies are "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study" (Du Bois 1898), "The Negro in the Black Belt: Some Social Sketches" (Du Bois 1899), "The Negro Landholder in Georgia" (Du Bois 1901b), "The Negro Farmer" (Du Bois 1904b), and "The Sharecropping System in Lowndes County, Alabama." Importantly, "The Sharecropping System in Lowndes County, Alabama" was censored by the Department of Labor and never published, because, Du Bois believed, it was too critical of the social sources of rural poverty and social inequality in its findings (Aptheker 1980; Rabaka 2010). These studies represent the pinnacle of Du Bois' rural sociology but are not exhaustive of his emancipatory interests in rural spaces and agrarian production. He also conducted other less empirical studies and wrote quite poetically about rural spaces in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois [1903] 1989) and other work.<sup>1</sup> We emphasize the studies funded by the Department of Labor as representing his pioneering work that still resonates with research in the broad field of rural sociology. The Department of Labor studies align with the historical emphasis on community and the structure of agriculture within rural sociology.

Below, we review Du Bois' emancipatory rural sociology by discussing the four published Department of Labor studies; we exclude the Lowndes County study. We separate discussion of Du Bois' rural empirical work into the two research tiers he provided, case studies of rural communities and regional and national studies of landownership and agricultural production.

### *Rural Community Case Studies*

Two of Du Bois' Department of Labor studies, "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study" (Du Bois 1898) and "The Negro in the Black Belt: Some Social Sketches" (Du Bois 1899), fully used the range of methodological tools that would come to characterize his rural case studies. Du Bois provided detailed demographic accounts of the entire population and relies on collecting original data on birth and death rates, marital conditions, education and literacy rates, occupations and wages, family economics, property ownership and value, civil society membership, housing segregation, religious affiliations, and general group life among small Black communities. Personally verifying and adding to census and county clerk data, Du Bois often separated county-level census data into local-level data categories, conducting descriptive analyses on

the current and potential future demographics of both White and Black rural communities during a time of rapid migration and social change.

"*The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study.*" "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia" (hereafter "Farmville") laid the methodological foundation for his rural case studies. To complete "Farmville," Du Bois spent July and August 1897 in Prince Edward County, Virginia, and its county seat, Farmville. Du Bois immersed himself in the community in a way many White researchers may have found challenging. He engaged in community life and visited the home of every Black family to conduct interviews and distribute surveys. In doing so, he updated the accuracy of 1890 census data and participated in many aspects of local social life to ascertain "with as near an approach to scientific accuracy as possible, the real condition of the [country] Negro" (Du Bois 1898:1). Du Bois chose both Prince Edward County and Farmville because they were important regional trading centers of the surrounding six counties, had large Black populations, and were situated deep in the Black belt (Du Bois 1898). For Du Bois these characteristics made Prince Edward County and Farmville prime candidates for generalizing about the larger situation of Black individuals in southern rural areas.

A large aspect of "Farmville" is Du Bois' attention to how population distributions changed after the Civil War and emancipation. Using census data from 1790 to 1890, Du Bois documented the changes in county and town populations across the nineteenth century, giving special attention to the decades after the Civil War. He noted that "less than one-third [of the residents] live in towns of twenty-five or more inhabitants, leaving the great mass of the people [in Prince Edward County] thoroughly rural and agricultural" (Du Bois 1898:2). Du Bois offered incredibly detailed charts and tables of population growth and decline in Prince Edward County from 1790 to 1890 that include age and racial categories to strengthen his demographic analyses. He also provided the same information for the town of Farmville, embedding it within the broader context of the county.

Du Bois similarly acknowledged the postemancipation reorganization of agrarian labor and changes in land tenure and farm size in the county. He documented that the average size of farms dropped by almost two-thirds, citing the growth of tenants and sharecroppers as the likely source (Du Bois 1898:3). Du Bois provided detailed tables of farm tenure, separated by renters, croppers, and

Size of farms.	1860.		1870.		1880.		1890.	
	Number.	Percent.	Number.	Percent.	Number.	Percent.	Number.	Percent.
Under 10 acres.....			23	3.75	34	3.23	65	5.93
10 or under 20 acres.....	6	1.23	49	7.99	152	14.44	118	10.77
20 or under 50 acres.....	45	9.24	164	26.75	161	15.29	150	14.51
50 or under 100 acres.....	70	14.37	120	19.58	147	13.96	171	15.60
100 or under 500 acres.....	318	65.30	232	37.85	472	44.82	505	46.08
500 or under 1,000 acres.....	46	9.45	23	3.75	73	6.93	67	6.11
1,000 acres or over.....	2	.41	2	.33	14	1.33	11	1.00
Total.....	487	100.00	613	100.00	1,053	100.00	1,096	100.00

Figure 1. Changes in farm size in Prince Edward County from 1860 to 1890.

Size of farms.	Cultivated by owners.		Rented for money.		Rented on shares.	
	1880.	1890.	1880.	1890.	1880.	1890.
Under 10 acres.....	13	35	3	11	16	19
10 or under 20 acres.....	47	76	40	12	65	30
20 or under 50 acres.....	68	103	33	19	60	37
50 or under 100 acres.....	80	127	29	30	38	14
100 or under 500 acres.....	332	366	70	68	70	71
500 or under 1,000 acres.....	56	60	8	1	9	6
1,000 acres or over.....	9	8	4	1	1	2
Total.....	607	775	187	142	250	179
Per cent.....	57.64	70.71	17.76	12.96	24.60	16.33

Figure 2. Farm size categorized by tenure.

Products.	1850.	1860.	1870.	1880.	1890.
Tobacco.....pounds..	2,571,850	4,231,797	960,700	2,462,326	1,633,830
Corn.....bushels..	214,350	233,833	87,440	192,462	106,911
Wheat.....bushels..	75,762	79,521	43,820	45,838	58,481
Oats.....bushels..	87,229	122,126	67,445	59,870	43,050
Hay.....tons.....	487	151	268	1,100	2,513
Irish potatoes.....bushels..	7,700	7,700	7,544	5,319	12,737
Sweet potatoes.....bushels..	12,454	8,772	4,484	6,323	12,871
Butter.....pounds..	47,932	67,288	51,791	56,350	133,511

Figure 3. Crops produced from 1850 to 1890 in Prince Edward County.

owners, and by decade. He recognized the importance of looking at longitudinal data for patterns within rural populations and agricultural production. Figures 1 through 3 illustrate how Du Bois documented changes in farms operated by Black farmers in the county according to farm size, tenure, and the principle products produced.

This approach allowed Du Bois to situate the community data into the larger countywide patterns of production, consistent with the methodological and analytical detail found throughout the community case studies. Du Bois' analysis of the

effects of farm size and patterns of agricultural production is a characteristic shared by contemporary rural sociologists.

Beyond analyzing county records and census data on population, farm size, and land tenure, Du Bois collected his own data while traveling around the county on foot. He included the surrounding smaller townships, villages, and unincorporated farmlands into his analysis of Farmville. This anticipates what was later referred to as "urban" communities by Galpin (1912) to describe a trading center and surrounding communities (Gilbert 2015). Du Bois

1. Number of persons in the family?
2. Relationship of this person to head of family?
3. Sex?
4. Age at nearest birthday?
5. Conjugal condition?
6. Place of birth?
7. Length of residence in Farmville?
8. Length of residence in this house?
9. Able to read?
10. Able to write?
11. Months in school during last year?
12. Usual occupations?
13. Usual wages per day, week, or month?
14. Weeks unemployed during year?
15. Mother of how many children (born living)?
16. Number of children now living?
17. Present whereabouts of such children?
18. Does the family own this home?
19. Do they own any land or houses?
20. Rent paid here per month?
21. Church attendance?

**Figure 4.** Interview schedule.

conducted his in-depth interviews in both Farmville and the immediately surrounding unincorporated communities. Impressively, Du Bois (1898:8) visited every Black home in the area, conducting semistructured interviews with both the male and female heads of house and collecting demographic data on more than 1,200 people. He also took detailed notes on the housing and environmental conditions he observed among rural Black residences. Figure 4 is an image of the interview schedule he used for the semistructured household interviews.

Du Bois was interested in documenting accurate age, sex, and birthplace for Farmville inhabitants, to establish data on labor emigration. He noted an “excess of children and old people” in rural areas due to migration of younger community members to urban areas (Du Bois 1898:9). He cleverly noted that this pattern “also accounts for the small proportion of colored children in a city like Philadelphia” as he observed when conducting research for *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1896 (Du Bois 1898:9; Morris 2015). Moreover, Du Bois recognized the negative effects of seasonal labor on child education generally in rural areas. However, in noting that the 40 percent literacy rate among Black adults in Farmville was higher than in other communities, he was able to identify dimensions of positive community development.

Du Bois also documented the rapid migration of agricultural populations into urban areas and industrial centers in “Farmville.” Citing increasing high

school dropout rates among young rural Black men who follow calls of urban industrial labor, Du Bois (1898) concluded that “Farmville acts as a sort of clearinghouse, taking the raw country lad from the farm to train in industrial life and sending north and east more or less well equipped recruits for metropolitan life” (p. 5). He observed that labor migration leads to the breaking down of extended local family groups and the delaying of marriage among young rural populations. These demographic shifts, Du Bois concluded, likely contribute to the economic stagnation or decline of rural spaces and act as a “check” against social development and “permanent prosperity” in rural communities (p. 5).

Du Bois understood that the connections between outmigration from rural areas and growth of urban labor markets in the 1890s must be put in the still broader context of social and economic changes taking place in the modernizing South. While remaining generally positive, he offered a critical discussion of rural social development that linked the well-being of individuals to land and markets. Importantly, many of his findings and observations anticipate the political economy studies in the sociology of agriculture of the late twentieth century. He wrote of the hardships faced by both rural communities and individuals in the

ensuing economic revolution brought about by impoverished lands, changes in the commercial demand for tobacco and the methods for

handling it, the competition of the West in cereals and meat, the growing importance of manufactures which call workers to cities, and the social weight of a mass of ignorant freedman. (Du Bois 1898:4).

In "Farmville," Du Bois (1898) also offered a comparative glimpse into Israel Hill, a small farming hamlet just outside of town, to offer parallel data on the "rapid growth and development of even the smallest [rural] communities" (p. 31). Israel Hill's population was predominantly Black and escaped two of the "disturbing factors" of rural development that Du Bois hypothesized existed in the poorest of rural districts, namely, racial prejudice and widespread tenancy. Du Bois noted that Israel Hill was practically free of reported racial prejudice and that all farmers owned their land. This hamlet, which Du Bois admitted was not necessarily analogous to many other rural spaces in the South, was demographically similar enough to Farmville that Du Bois innovatively compared the economic differences between a trading town and neighboring small hamlet (p. 34). What Israel Hill provided, noted Du Bois, was insight into the more promising aspects of social development among rural populations with access to land ownership and social integration. Du Bois recognized Israel Hill as a statistical outlier, but one that provided a glimpse into potential development paths for rural Black communities.

*"The Negro in the Black Belt."* In "The Negro in the Black Belt" (Du Bois 1899) (hereafter "Black Belt"), Du Bois and his students from Atlanta University observed the social conditions of six groups within isolated rural spaces, small communities near trading centers, and semiurban areas with a total study population of 920 individuals. Here Du Bois (1899) worked to generalize from "Farmville," selecting six communities which "differ greatly from one another" and were chosen to give a full glimpse of "the development of the Negro from country to city life" (p. 401). The communities were composed of 27 extended families found across two rural country districts in Georgia; 83 extended families found within two county seats, Marion, Alabama, and Covington, Georgia, both centers of local trade; and 85 extended families found in two cities in Georgia, Athens and Marietta (Du Bois 1899).

"Black Belt" is more of a snapshot of rural communities in a single moment of time, rather the longitudinal view provided in "Farmville. Here Du

Bois took an in-depth look at the occupations, incomes, and community organizations that structured the communities described in "Black Belt." The varying levels of social and economic development found within the six communities were theoretically linked to differing types of labor markets, unequal distribution of access to such markets, and the modes of production within different localities. Recognizing the relevance of social structures, Du Bois noted that the limited occupational opportunities are not so much chosen as they are presented to most members within the majority of small rural communities.

In Lithonia, a small village included as one of the six focal communities, Du Bois highlighted the experiences of skilled Black stonecutters. Even these skilled laborers, however, are not immune to the pressures of changing rural labor markets. He wrote that increasing numbers of Black stonecutters were working outside of the union, thereby depressing wages for union workers. He documented a decrease in income from \$10 to \$14 a week to \$5 to \$8.50 a week due to the increasing prevalence of nonunionized labor (Du Bois 1899:403). The increasing numbers of "scabbers" were described by Du Bois as having negative impacts on the social development happening within Lithonia, but he noted that many Black stonecutters had few alternatives for work (p. 403).

In "Black Belt," Du Bois also critiqued the promise of upward social mobility for rural Black migrants who pursue urban industrial labor. Critical of the promises of improved quality of living in urban areas, he documented how rural migrants often ended up homeless, unemployed, or working for lower than union wages in urban areas. Du Bois recognized that the influx of rural migrants willing to work below union wages lowers the quality of life for both newly urban migrants and the rural spaces they left behind (Du Bois 1899). Similar to "Farmville," Du Bois mentions in "Black Belt" a noticeable lack of young people within most of the smaller communities because of labor migration and concluded that this would continue to be a considerable hindrance to many forms of rural development.

Du Bois' most in-depth discussion of rural and urban social class is found in "Black Belt," in which he challenged the assumptions of mainstream American sociology. Specifically, Du Bois (1899:416) mentioned that his data did not support assumptions that portray Black individuals as members of the "vicious and criminal" classes. On the basis of his empirical research, Du Bois posited an alternative model in which very few Black



individuals were members of the criminal class despite the majority being poor, but hardworking and honest, agrarian laborers (p. 409). Noting that their homes and farms were heavily mortgaged and that labor opportunities were low, Du Bois drew linkages between the structural sources of labor markets and the isolation of many rural districts (pp. 402–403). “Black Belt” contains some of Du Bois’ most critical remarks on the processes of modernization in the rural south. The study offered Du Bois

a glimpse into the deepest of the Negro problems, that of the country Negro, where the mass of the race still lives in ignorance, poverty, and immorality, beyond the reach of the schools and other agents of civilization for the larger part of the time. (p. 417)

It was also in “Black Belt” that Du Bois first explicitly discussed the varying levels of economic opportunity facing rural populations across the American South and suggested structural sources of continued rural poverty. Importantly, “Black Belt” offers a clear glimpse into how Du Bois was training students to conduct sociological research in rural areas. Standardizing the type of empirical data that each research assistant was to collect, Du Bois then was able to combine, tabulate, and analyze dozens of tables of data about the six communities. The use of such methodological skills, for Du Bois, was central to the training of sociology students for the overall strength of the discipline. “Black Belt” is an excellent example of the deployment of Du Bois’ methodological toolkit across multiple rural communities to create more generalizable data.

*Du Bois’ Rural Community Case Studies Summary.* Du Bois’ empirical case studies of rural communities were groundbreaking social science at the time of their inception. These community case studies fully displayed the range of methodological tools Du Bois innovatively brought to early empirical American sociology. In-depth community studies, which form a large aspect of the roots of rural sociology (Brunner 1957; Brunner, Hughes, and Patten 1927), were pioneered by Du Bois at least a decade before other early innovators and nearly 20 years prior to most records of the rise of rural sociology. His method of submersion into community life predates the approach that has been credited to James Michael Williams (1906) in “An American Town,” one of the early dissertation students at Columbia

University under F. H. Giddings. Lowry Nelson’s (1969) account of the roots of rural sociology gives Williams acknowledgment for pioneering a method of full immersion and participant observation before it was replicated by another Giddings student, Warren H. Wilson in “Quaker Hill” in 1907. Equally notable is that Galpin’s (1918) study is thought of as the first time that a sociologist linked rural mores, attitudes, and cultural influences to larger social issues bridging urban and rural areas (Brunner 1957:5). Du Bois not only predates Galpin on this topic, he also surpasses Galpin in the amount of data collected and the rigorous methods used in the investigations.

Du Bois’ community case studies illustrate his early attempts at analyzing the intersection of social class, race, and labor markets and form the first tier of his Department of Labor research project. In the next section we discuss Du Bois’ structure of agriculture studies. These studies show that Du Bois was keenly aware that many of the processes affecting rural localities were regional and national in nature and therefore required a larger methodological scope.

### *The Structure of Agriculture Studies*

The two final Department of Labor studies, “The Negro Landholder in Georgia” (Du Bois 1901b) and “The Negro Farmer” (Du Bois 1904b), both used regional and national data focused on large patterns of rural property accumulation, agricultural production, and rural labor markets. Using census data from 1900, Du Bois offered lengthy discussions of changes within rural property ownership and wealth accumulation since the mid-nineteenth century. In these studies, Du Bois explicitly acknowledged that agriculture and rural labor markets were reorganizing rural populations because of changes in production technology and land tenure after emancipation. These changes included the emerging postslavery labor system and accompanying wide-scale demographic shifts and migration taking place within rural spaces, both of which contributed to the redistribution of land ownership at the turn of the twentieth century.

“*The Negro Landholder in Georgia.*” In “The Negro Landholder in Georgia” (Du Bois 1901b) (hereafter “Landholder”), Du Bois set out to investigate the changing relationship between the freedman and the land. Documenting the “steps by which 470,000 Black freedmen and their children have in one of the former slave states gained possession of

NUMBER OF ACRES AND ASSESSED VALUE OF LAND OWNED BY NEGROES OF GEORGIA  
1874 TO 1900.

Year.	Acres owned.	Assessed value.	Year.	Acres owned.	Assessed value.
1874.....	338,769	(a)	1888.....	868,501	\$2,822,943
1875.....	396,658	\$1,263,902	1889.....	877,112	3,047,695
1876.....	457,635	1,234,104	1890.....	967,234	3,425,176
1877.....	458,999	1,262,723	1891.....	1,004,306	3,914,143
1878.....	501,890	1,294,383	1892.....	1,063,649	4,477,183
1879.....	541,199	1,348,758	1893.....	1,043,860	4,450,121
1880.....	586,664	1,522,173	1894.....	1,064,431	4,386,366
1881.....	660,358	1,754,800	1895.....	1,038,824	4,158,960
1882.....	692,335	1,877,861	1896.....	1,043,847	4,234,848
1883.....	666,583	2,065,938	1897.....	1,057,567	4,353,798
1884.....	756,703	2,262,185	1898.....	1,097,087	4,340,100
1885.....	788,376	2,362,889	1899.....	1,062,223	4,220,120
1886.....	802,939	2,508,198	1900.....	1,075,073	4,274,549
1887.....	813,725	2,598,650			

a Not reported.

**Figure 5.** Acres owned by Black individuals in Georgia from 1874 to 1900.

over a million acres of land in a [single] generation" (p. 648), Du Bois reported both the aggregate value of the land and the current conditions of its ownership (p. 649). Du Bois noted that Georgia is important for the study of Black communities as it "holds a mass of peculiarly self-reliant Black folk" and because Georgia has collected "detailed record of Negro landholding, extending over a quarter of a century" (p. 648). In fact, no other state has such detailed records on land ownership by race (see Hargis 1998, 2002; Schweninger 1990). Land and property ownership was critical to the development of rural Black communities, and recognizing this fact, Du Bois accumulated data to speak to the potential for social mobilization among rural Black families. He noted that

perhaps there could be found no other single index of the results of the struggle of the Freedman upward so significant as the ownership of land; and as tremendous social experiment as the question of the relation of the Freedman to the soil is among the most important of our day. (p. 648)

For "Landholder," Du Bois collected data on the 56 Georgia counties with the highest Black populations. Du Bois critiqued the methodological shortcomings of the census data in ways that have been echoed by contemporary rural sociologists (Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002). The agricultural census did not measure farmland owners directly but rather counts farm operators and farms. This is still encountered by contemporary rural sociologists (Fisher 1973, 1978; Gilbert, Sharp, et al.

2002; Wood and Gilbert 2000). Du Bois mentioned this and other shortcomings in the categorization of census data as well as the lack of a centralized census archive in Georgia. Despite the difficulties, Du Bois provided dozens of maps and tables depicting changes in land ownership since the 1870s.

Du Bois' data provided evidence of a substantial increase in ownership of land and property among Black families across Georgia in both urban and rural settings. Figure 5 shows the number of acres owned by Black individuals in Georgia from 1874 to 1900 and the assessed value of those acres.

In this table, Du Bois included all acres of land owned by Black individuals regardless of whether it was in a rural or urban setting. He documented both the value and acreage of Black-owned land as he hypothesized that even large Black farms would not be highly valuable, a hypothesis which he suggested is somewhat supported by the data. He then focused his attention to the amount of land that was used for agricultural production as the majority of Black individuals in Georgia were engaged in agricultural occupations (Du Bois 1901b:663). Anticipating the structure of agriculture studies of the twentieth century, his research documented the number of farms, their size and value, including buildings, implements, and livestock in Georgia from 1850 to 1890. Du Bois' table is depicted in Figure 6.

Du Bois next analyzed characteristics of farms owned by Black individuals. He provided many detailed tables we do not discuss, but we draw attention to his table comparing the average size of Black-owned farms in Georgia with the sizes of farms elsewhere. Du Bois discussed the notably small sizes of Black-owned farms compared with

NUMBER, AVERAGE SIZE, AND VALUE OF FARMS OF GEORGIA, AND PER CENT OF UNIMPROVED LAND, BY CENSUS YEARS, 1850 TO 1890.

Year.	Number of farms.	Average size of farms (acres).	Per cent of unimproved land in farms.	Value of farms, etc. (a)
1850.....	51,759	441	72.05	\$127,376,011
1860.....	62,003	430	69.75	202,289,924
1870.....	69,956	338	71.11	129,330,486
1880.....	138,626	188	68.50	143,158,308
1890.....	171,071	147	61.97	189,249,198

a Including land, buildings, implements, live stock, etc.

**Figure 6.** Number of farms and their size and value, including improvements, in Georgia from 1850 to 1890.

	Acres.
Average size of Negro farms in 56 counties of Georgia (a) .....	79
Average size of all farms in Georgia (1890) .....	147
Average size of farms in southern Atlantic States (1890) .....	134
Average size of farms in the United States (1890) .....	137
Average size of farms in Massachusetts (1890) .....	87

**Figure 7.** Comparison of the size of Black-owned farms in Georgia to farms elsewhere.

farms across the region and throughout the country. He then compared the average size of Black-owned farms in the 56 focal counties with the average size of farms in Massachusetts. On the basis of his comparison, Du Bois (1901b:670) suggested that the small size of Black-owned farms in the 56 focal counties was likely a condition of low wages and profits, which were in turn influenced by race. Figure 7 reproduces the table, showing again how his work anticipates the findings of rural sociologists (see Wood and Gilbert 2000). Du Bois' table presenting the numbers of horses, mules, cattle, and mechanical tools owned by Black farmers in Georgia is depicted in Figure 8.

In compiling data on property accumulation among rural Black communities in Georgia, Du Bois also provided insights into economic prosperity by documenting the growth in the value of livestock, mechanical tools, and assorted farm equipment in the 56 focal counties of Georgia.

Throughout "Landholder," Du Bois' discussion of the data is carefully optimistic, suggesting that the level of land and property accumulation among rural Black families was a sign of increasing social development. His data showed that rural Black families had accumulated a substantial amount of land in a relatively short amount of time, but he mentioned that "it would not have been unnatural to suspect that under the [historical] circumstances

the Negroes would become a mass of poverty-stricken vagabonds . . . for generations; and yet this has been far from the case" (Du Bois 1901b:648). For Du Bois, this somewhat surprising positive sign "is of the greatest sociological interest" as he continued to accurately document the connections between social policy, land ownership patterns, and continued economic inequality in southern rural communities (p. 648), yet another topic shared with contemporary rural sociology (see Dyer and Bailey 2008; Gilbert, Sharp, et al. 2002; Gilbert, Wood, and Sharp 2002; Green, Green, and Kleiner 2011; Hargis 1998, 2002; Hinson and Robinson 2008; Schwenger 1990; Wood 2006; Wood and Gilbert 2000; Wood and Ragar 2012; Zabawa, Siaway, and Baharanyi 1990).

"Landholder" is a fundamental aspect of Du Bois' emancipatory rural sociology. Dealing directly with the accumulation of land, capital, and property, Du Bois (1901b) suggested that "the Georgia Negro is in the midst of an unfinished cycle of property accumulation" and that positive social development awaits many (p. 777). One of the many methodological issues discussed by Du Bois in "Landholder" was that land and property values should be analyzed by decades and not by individual years. Land and property markets are too frequently volatile to be accurately described and analyzed on a yearly basis. His creation and

ASSESSED VALUE OF HORSES, MULES, CATTLE, AND OTHER STOCK, AND OF PLANTATION AND MECHANICAL TOOLS, OWNED BY NEGROES OF GEORGIA, 1875 TO 1900.

Year.	Assessed value.		Year.	Assessed value.	
	Horses, mules, cattle, and other stock.	Plantation and mechanical tools.		Horses, mules, cattle, and other stock.	Plantation and mechanical tools.
1875.....	(a)	\$20,017	1888.....	\$2,314,356	\$331,876
1876.....	\$241,106	125,120	1889.....	2,315,480	384,827
1877.....	1,926,942	162,647	1890.....	2,915,635	474,386
1878.....	1,641,367	166,780	1891.....	3,429,223	645,261
1879.....	1,704,230	143,258	1892.....	3,180,322	590,902
1880.....	2,054,787	163,086	1893.....	3,130,818	547,739
1881.....	2,213,021	225,973	1894.....	2,997,587	511,316
1882.....	2,031,361	193,898	1895.....	2,288,850	402,040
1883.....	2,361,662	238,308	1896.....	2,494,390	416,091
1884.....	2,387,282	242,222	1897.....	2,676,186	491,956
1885.....	2,245,801	228,894	1898.....	2,579,770	479,520
1886.....	2,166,569	260,549	1899.....	2,213,905	433,125
1887.....	2,178,518	304,815	1900.....	2,424,674	469,637

a Not reported.

**Figure 8.** Assessed value of mechanical tools and livestock on Black-owned farms, 1875 to 1900.

use of maps also adds to an already elaborate presentation of tables and charts depicting land acreage and values of owned property among rural communities.

"*The Negro Farmer*." "The Negro Farmer" (Du Bois 1904b) (hereafter "Farmer") was Du Bois' final Department of Labor study, in which he expanded his approach from "Landholder" (Du Bois 1901b) to conduct a national empirical analysis of "the relative importance of the Negro in agriculture" (Du Bois 1904b:90). In "Farmer," Du Bois again discussed inadequate census methodology from 1890 and 1900. Du Bois again attempted to update government data on the landownership and tenure of rural Black farmers, but this time across several southern states. Recognizing the significance of land ownership, Du Bois critiqued the methods of the 11th census (1890) for not collecting data on ownership of farms by race and the 12th census in 1900 for its categorization of farms by the individual who manages the farm, not who owns the land. Du Bois mentioned various shortcomings, such as the example of 50 Black managers working farms owned by a single White individual. These farm managers appear in the census data as 50 individual farms. This, to Du Bois, was unacceptable and largely contributes to an inflated analysis of progress among Black farmers and an underestimation of wealth among Black landowners. Du Bois used this example to help support his argument for the importance of Black-owned farm land not simply managing

farms owned by others. These concerns anticipate frequently discussed problems with the Census of Agriculture and its focus on farms rather than farmers (see Wood, Wiley, and Rissler 2016).

In "Farmer," Du Bois (1904b) presented data on the proportion of farm homes among all Black homes in the United States in 1900. Figure 9 shows how Du Bois separated data into regions of the country to illustrate that the majority of Black farm homes were in the South. As Figures 10 and 11 show, Du Bois then presented data on the size of farms in each region before separating these data by value of farms. Du Bois' method of providing evidence of farm size, value, and tenure throughout the Department of Labor studies but at larger geographic regions reveals how Du Bois increasingly expanded the scope of this research agenda.

A main focus of Du Bois' (1904b:69) discussion in "Farmer" is the division between Black farmers who own their land and farmers who operate farms owned by others. Building on his discussion of land owning farmers in "Landholder" (Du Bois 1901b), Du Bois analyzed national data to determine the rate of landowning development among Black farmers in the United States. Du Bois' tables, in some ways, present the geographic distribution of economic development among rural Black populations at the time. Stressing the importance of separating data by land tenure, Du Bois remarked that he was among the first scholars to push for a theoretically motivated separation of land owners, cash renters, and crop sharers within census data. His separation of data on the number and rate of

TABLE I.—*Comparison of negro farm homes with all negro homes: 1900.*

DIVISION.	All homes.	Farm homes.	Per cent farm homes form of all homes.
Continental United States.....	1,833,759	758,463	41.4
North Atlantic.....	78,838	1,740	2.2
South Atlantic.....	761,105	293,512	38.6
North Central.....	110,932	12,840	11.6
South Central.....	875,919	450,009	51.4
Western.....	6,965	362	5.2

Figure 9. Comparison of homes and farm homes for Black populations in U.S. regions.

TABLE IV.—*Farms of negro farmers, classified according to area: 1900.*

NUMBER OF FARMS IN EACH CLASS.

CLASS OF FARMS.	Conti- nental United States.	North Atlantic division.	South Atlantic division.	North Central division.	South Central division.	Western division.
All farms.....	746,715	1,761	287,933	12,255	444,429	337
Under 3 acres.....	4,448	50	2,850	167	1,368	13
3 and under 10.....	50,831	358	27,270	1,192	21,985	26
10 and under 20.....	119,710	303	40,416	1,616	77,351	24
20 and under 50.....	343,173	433	120,979	4,422	217,301	38
50 and under 100.....	134,228	349	54,192	2,651	77,004	32
100 and under 175.....	66,582	195	28,556	1,512	36,184	135
175 and under 260.....	16,535	55	8,301	379	7,779	21
260 and under 500.....	8,715	15	4,086	257	4,332	25
500 and under 1,000.....	2,007	3	1,055	44	889	16
1,000 and over.....	486	.....	228	15	236	7

PER CENT WHICH THE NUMBER OF FARMS IN EACH CLASS FORMS OF THE TOTAL NUMBER.

All farms.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 3 acres.....	0.6	2.8	1.0	1.4	0.3	3.9
3 and under 10.....	6.8	20.3	9.5	9.7	4.9	7.7
10 and under 20.....	16.0	17.2	14.0	13.2	17.4	7.1
20 and under 50.....	45.9	24.6	42.0	36.1	48.9	11.3
50 and under 100.....	18.0	19.8	18.8	21.6	17.3	9.5
100 and under 175.....	8.9	11.1	9.9	12.3	8.1	40.1
175 and under 260.....	2.2	3.1	2.9	3.1	1.8	6.2
260 and under 500.....	1.2	0.9	1.4	2.1	1.0	7.4
500 and under 1,000.....	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.2	4.7
1,000 and over.....	0.1	.....	0.1	0.1	0.1	2.1

Figure 10. Size and number of Black-owned farms categorized by U.S. regions.

Black-owned, managed, and worked farms according to tenure is shown in Figure 12.

In addition to the four tables above, Du Bois also provided multiple tables that compared the

size of Black-owned farms with the total number of farms in the country and reported that Black-owned farms remained much smaller than White-owned farms.

TABLE V.—VALUE OF PROPERTY ON FARMS OF NEGRO FARMERS: 1900.

DIVISION.	VALUE OF FARM PROPERTY.					PER CENT OF TOTAL VALUE OF ALL FARM PROPERTY.				AVERAGE VALUE PER FARM.				
	Total.	Land and improvements (except buildings).	Buildings.	Implementations and machinery.	Live stock.	Land and improvements (except buildings).	Buildings.	Implementations and machinery.	Live stock.	All farm property.	Land and improvements (except buildings).	Buildings.	Implementations and machinery.	Live stock.
Continental U.S..	\$499,941,234	\$324,242,997	\$71,902,265	\$18,859,757	\$84,936,215	64.8	14.4	3.8	17.0	\$669	\$434	\$96	\$25	\$114
North Atlantic.....	4,776,245	2,664,718	1,465,500	206,777	439,250	55.8	30.7	4.3	9.2	2,712	1,513	832	117	250
South Atlantic.....	162,841,284	106,251,076	26,668,379	5,879,229	24,062,600	65.2	16.4	3.6	14.8	566	369	83	20	84
North Central.....	24,608,045	17,926,162	2,933,377	723,125	3,025,381	72.9	11.9	2.9	12.3	2,008	1,463	239	59	247
South Central.....	306,665,271	196,682,266	40,734,135	12,014,612	57,234,258	64.1	13.3	3.9	18.7	690	443	91	27	129
Western.....	1,090,389	718,775	110,874	36,014	181,726	68.4	10.6	3.4	17.6	3,117	2,133	329	107	548

Figure 11. Value of property and improvements of Black-owned farms categorized by U.S. regions.

TABLE XVI.—Farms of negro farmers classified according to tenure.

DIVISION.	NUMBER OF FARMS OPERATED BY—					
	All classes.	Owners.	Managers.	Tenants.		
				All.	Cash.	Share.
Continental United States..	746,715	187,797	1,744	557,174	273,560	283,614
North Atlantic .....	1,761	1,150	67	544	304	240
South Atlantic .....	287,933	84,389	966	202,578	100,523	102,055
North Central .....	12,255	6,972	109	5,174	1,708	3,466
South Central .....	444,429	95,029	595	348,805	170,999	177,806
Western .....	337	257	7	73	26	47

DIVISION.	PER CENT OPERATED BY—					
	All classes.	Owners.	Managers.	Tenants.		
				All.	Cash.	Share.
Continental United States..	100.0	25.2	0.2	74.6	36.6	38.0
North Atlantic .....	100.0	65.3	3.8	30.9	17.3	13.6
South Atlantic .....	100.0	29.3	0.3	70.4	34.9	35.5
North Central .....	100.0	56.9	0.9	42.2	13.9	28.3
South Central .....	100.0	21.4	0.1	78.5	38.5	40.0
Western .....	100.0	76.2	2.1	21.7	7.7	14.0

Figure 12. Number of Black-owned, Black-managed, and Black-worked farms by U.S. regions.

Another set of tables that deserves inclusion and genuinely illustrates Du Bois' rural sociological contributions is his presentation of data on the principle sources of income among Black farmers separated by region, the acreage used for production of specific crops, and the average number of livestock

populations on Black-owned farms separated by geographical region. These tables are depicted in Figures 13, 14, and 15, respectively.

Du Bois also quickly recognized the significant differences in life chances that were associated with different land tenure arrangements. Figure 16



TABLE XII.—*Farms of negro farmers classified according to principal source of income in 1899.*

NUMBER OF FARMS IN EACH CLASS.

CLASS OF FARMS.	Conti- nental United States.	North Atlantic division.	South Atlantic division.	North Central division.	South Central division.	Western division.
All farms .....	746,715	1,761	287,933	12,255	444,429	337
Farms reporting as principal source of income—						
Cotton .....	526,225	.....	166,146	126	359,953	.....
Miscellaneous products .....	92,844	508	55,117	2,520	34,641	58
Hay and grain .....	51,170	243	25,562	4,389	20,892	84
Live stock .....	30,922	437	13,000	3,845	13,536	104
Tobacco .....	19,454	13	14,565	129	4,747	.....
Vegetables .....	15,526	287	9,518	622	5,068	31
Dairy produce ...	5,142	201	947	353	3,600	41
Fruit .....	2,191	59	1,293	255	568	16
Rice .....	2,132	.....	1,722	.....	410	.....
Sugar .....	1,083	.....	57	16	1,010	.....
Flowers and plants .....	19	10	5	.....	2	2
Nursery products	7	3	1	.....	2	1

Figure 13. Sources of income categorized by U.S. region.

TABLE XI.—*Acreage and production of specified crops on farms of negro farmers in continental United States: 1899.*

CROP.	FARMS REPORT- ING.		ACRES.		QUANTITY PRODUCED.		
	Num- ber.	Per cent of all farms.	Total.	Average per farm.	Unit of measure.	Total.	Average per acre.
Cotton .....	566,180	75.8	9,623,301	17.0	Bales ...	3,707,881	0.4
Corn .....	673,885	90.2	7,055,084	10.5	Bushels.	99,512,692	14.1
Wheat .....	76,140	10.2	470,630	6.2	Bushels.	3,669,475	7.8
Hay and forage ..	232,918	31.2	312,118	1.3	Tons....	367,809	1.2
Oats .....	64,737	8.7	269,254	4.2	Bushels.	3,356,367	12.5
Tobacco .....	40,262	5.4	143,271	3.6	Pounds.	88,179,141	615.5
Sweet potatoes...	244,620	32.8	133,118	0.5	Bushels.	8,969,524	67.4
Rice .....	22,641	3.0	48,834	2.2	Pounds.	23,367,482	478.5
Potatoes .....	70,797	9.5	35,744	0.5	Bushels.	2,440,275	68.3
Rye .....	2,111	0.3	7,570	3.6	Bushels.	56,827	7.5
Barley .....	302	(1)	3,063	10.1	Bushels.	58,610	19.1
Buckwheat .....	603	0.1	1,649	2.7	Bushels.	19,313	11.7

<sup>1</sup> Less than one-tenth of 1 per cent.

Figure 14. Acreage and production of crops on Black-owned farms.

presents two maps in which Du Bois documented the geographic difference between areas where Black farmers were mostly tenants and where farmland was owned by Black farmers. The first map presents farmland in which Black tenants worked but did not own the land, while the second

map shows Black owner-operated farms. Of particular importance, of course, is that owners have a significant basis of wealth. This line of research becomes a major aspect of later studies in both rural sociology and the sociology of racial inequality. The two maps are nearly inversions of one

TABLE VIII.—*Per cent of the farms of negro farmers reporting specified domestic animals, with the average number of animals per farm and the per cent of the total number in each geographic division: 1900—Continued.*

AVERAGE NUMBER PER FARM REPORTING.								
DIVISION.	Neat cattle.	Dairy cows.	Horses.	Mules.	Asses and burros.	Sheep. <sup>1</sup>	Swine.	Goats.
Continental U.S. ....	3.6	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.6	17.2	5.8	6.9
North Atlantic ...	6.2	3.9	2.3	2.0	1.0	34.4	4.5	7.0
South Atlantic ...	2.8	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.6	13.4	4.5	5.6
North Central ...	5.9	2.1	3.0	2.1	2.1	30.8	10.8	5.5
South Central ...	4.1	1.7	1.8	1.5	1.6	16.8	6.5	7.9
Western .....	24.7	4.3	5.9	5.1	2.8	36.7	13.0	13.7
PER CENT OF TOTAL NUMBER.								
Continental U.S. ....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
North Atlantic ...	0.5	0.7	0.6	( <sup>2</sup> )	0.1	2.4	0.2	( <sup>2</sup> )
South Atlantic ...	29.5	30.2	23.5	29.0	12.8	26.1	31.0	34.3
North Central ...	3.1	2.7	5.3	1.3	6.3	16.4	3.0	1.1
South Central ...	66.6	66.3	70.3	69.7	79.6	54.4	65.7	64.4
Western .....	0.3	0.1	0.3	( <sup>2</sup> )	1.2	0.7	0.1	0.2
<sup>1</sup> Including lambs. <span style="float: right;"><sup>2</sup> Less than one-tenth of 1 per cent.</span>								

Figure 15. Domestic animals and livestock on Black-owned farms categorized by U.S. region.

another and show how in the heart of the famous "Black belt" the best land was owned by large White landowners yet largely worked by sharecroppers and tenants, many of whom were Black. By contrast, the areas with Black owner-operators are outside the heart of the prime agricultural land. Du Bois also used the simultaneous depiction of both maps to illustrate the fact that Black owner-operators were largely marginalized to farmlands outside of the most fertile ground in the deep South.

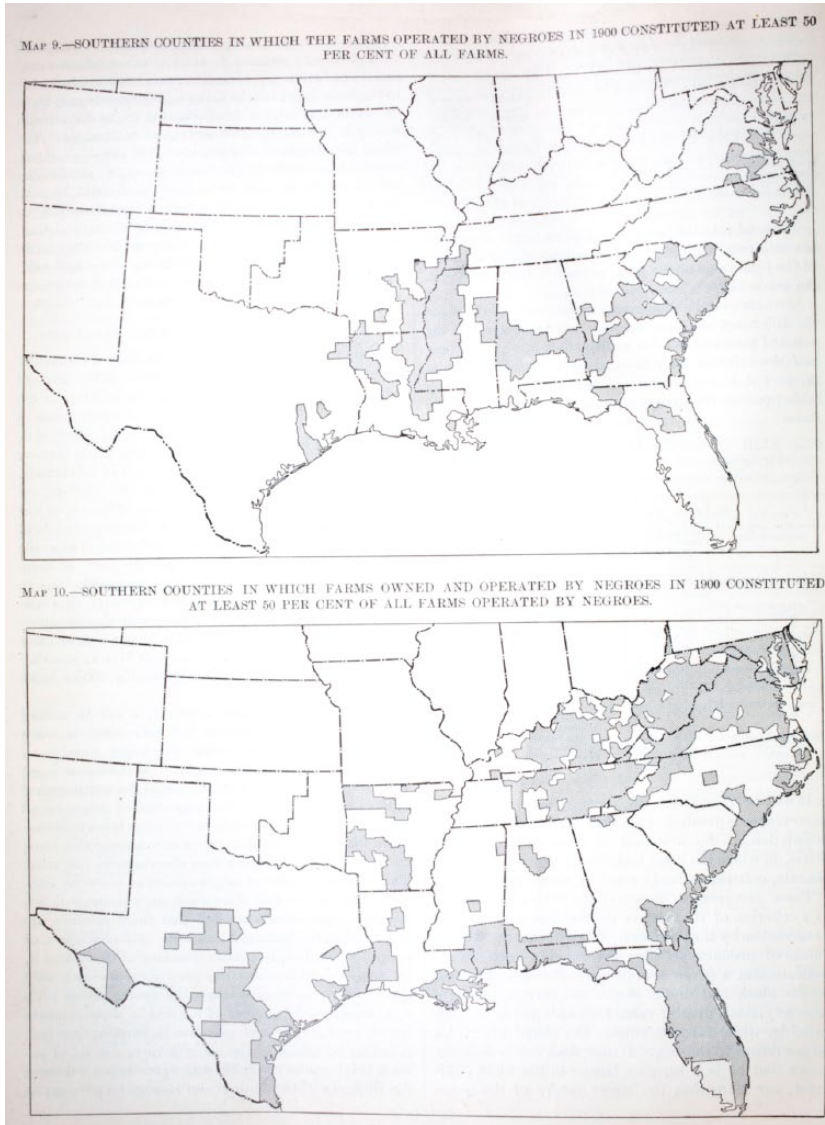
In "Farmer," Du Bois (1904b) provided many elaborate tables on the changes within Black property accumulation and ownership. Using aggregate data in regional categories on property value, farm equipment and livestock values, land ownership rates, and land tenure separated by regions, Du Bois reported the current conditions and potential developments among Black farmers throughout the United States.

Discussing the negative impacts of seasonal agricultural labor on local commodity markets and

migration Du Bois (1904b) painted a stark portrait of economic opportunity in the rural South and highlighted the push factors that send many rural youth into urban areas. Those who remain in rural spaces are subject to increasing income stratification, land rents, and production costs under sharecropping, a system that created "laborer without capital and without wages, and an employer whose capital consists largely of food and other supplies advanced to laborers—an arrangement unsatisfactory to both parties, and in vogue usually on poor land with hard pressed owners" (p. 81).

Many of Du Bois' (1904b) comments on the collection of the 1900 census data in "The Negro Farmer" are great examples of his methodological insights. He highlighted the limitations of the government classification of farmers in a manner that does not always differentiate between owners and operators. Consequently, he correctly concluded that the number of Black individuals who own their own farms is likely lower than the census data





**Figure 16.** Map of counties in which 50 percent of all farms are Black owned.

suggests with its broader category of farm operator and that the number of those who work as laborers, croppers, and tenants is likely higher than the data reports. The data did, however, allow Du Bois to speak to two conditions that he observes among Black agricultural populations, specifically that Black farmers are able to make a somewhat decent living within agricultural production in rural spaces, but that such lifestyles do not offer any opportunity for generational mobility or social progress (p. 98).

*Structure of Agriculture Summary.* Both “The Negro Landholder in Georgia” (Du Bois 1901b) and “The Negro Farmer” (Du Bois 1904b) offer insight into Du Bois’ awareness that economic processes exceed geographic boundaries of local rural spaces. They are an attempt by Du Bois to extend his methodological approach to a higher level of analysis, eventually aggregating and analyzing regional and national-level data. Both studies within the second tier were critical components of bridging the two tiers of Du Bois’ Department of Labor research and

providing an empirical framework of information on which Du Bois would build his research agenda.

As with the community studies, Du Bois' attention to land tenure precedes the foundational work in the field. In 1911, Galpin recognized that tenants are less involved and invested in community institutions, which can lead to social decline (Gillette 1922). Galpin's (1911) study of Jefferson County, New York, posited a direct relationship between tenancy and community. Du Bois discussed these phenomena in 1901 and 1904 in "Landholder" and "Farmer," respectively. Furthermore, Du Bois added an additional layer of analytical complexity by studying Black tenants who were also facing racist limitations in their accumulation of property and economic growth. His discussion of the importance of Black landownership is echoed in the more general discussion of the characteristics of common tenants, including being younger, less educated, less healthy, and less involved in community affairs. The social importance of Black-owned farmland in the Black Belt continues to be part of contemporary rural sociology (see Hargis 1998, 2002; Gilbert, Wood, et al. 2002; Grant, Wood, and Wright 2012; Schweninger 1990; Wood and Gilbert 2000). His critical discussion of modern agricultural production with its emphasis on expanded production, mono-cropping, and profit-driven production of food, also predates the critical turn within the "new" rural sociology and the sociology of agriculture by nearly a century (Falk and Gilbert 1985; Newby and Buttel 1980).

## CONCLUSION

Du Bois situated much of his rural sociology into a context of intellectual inquiry poised between two eras, the premodern and the modern. Yet for Du Bois, this task was doubly charged with engaging the major questions around the rise of modernity while also providing advocacy for changing the legacy of suffering for Black Americans. The promises of modernity needed to be weighed against the preservation of local communities and tradition. The desire to retain the dignity of rural people and places, while recognizing the tension which accompanies economic and social modernization, characterizes both Du Bois' Department of Labor studies and also much of the field of contemporary rural sociology (Lobao 2006; Smith 2011).

The rise of modern society, for many canonized social theorists such as Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and even Du Bois, offered an opportunity for scholars to simultaneously think about the past, observe

the present, and imagine the future. Du Bois recognized the potential for social and economic development that reside within rural Black populations and thus set out to observe modernity taking place in rural spaces. Unlike many others, however, Du Bois' racial identity afforded him a powerfully different perspective on many aspects of social progress. Emphasizing the ways that many within the Black population are uniquely positioned—historically, economically, and socially—Du Bois was able to document the conditions of a generation of rural Blacks whose parents witnessed the "rise and fall of the plantation slave system" (Du Bois 1898:4) and who would experience the beginnings of the great migration of Black Americans within the next few decades (1910–1940).

As discussed in this article, Du Bois' rural sociology was grounded in an emancipatory empiricism. It was primarily focused on alleviating Black communities from the weight of inaccurate cultural stereotypes which inhibited their social development. The preliminary foundation for his emancipatory research agenda was built upon his rural observations of populations undergoing social and economic transformation. It seems, in fact, that Du Bois' unique life experiences and quality of professional training allowed him to more accurately describe the relationship between social structure, agency, and the limitations that extralocal forces placed upon local agency in rural areas. Du Bois was positioned to be a better rural sociologist of the conditions of Black Americans than most of his White peers due in large part to his position as a Black man. Marginalized rural spaces and people, for Du Bois, were not much different from the experience of a marginalized race; both strive for the attainment of agency while constantly facing restrictions from dominant social structures. These two types of marginalization were not only similar, but also compounding. Du Bois understood the depth and weight of the experience of a mass of rural people experiencing the transition surrounding industrialization while also facing racist inequality in access to new labor markets and property accumulation. His early rural sociology directly informed his more popular urban community research. After all, his most famous investigation, *The Philadelphia Negro* ([1899] 1973), is fundamentally about the "urbanization of a rural peasantry" (Du Bois 1968:157, 160; Morris 2015; Rabaka 2010). In both settings, Black communities were mired in structurally influenced conditions of poverty and often stuck within positions of little opportunity and potential for betterment. Aspects

of his rural sociology are evident throughout his entire academic portfolio and reflect the type of scholar Du Bois was. His theoretical concepts surrounding race, such as the color line and the veil, were linked to his personal experiences of racial prejudice in the rural south and later observations of rural spaces (Du Bois 1968). Rural spaces, for Du Bois, were characterized by both the processes of marginalization that accompanied the onset of modernity and the potential economic and social development that Du Bois wished to see Black communities attain. It was in the vast regions of rural spaces that Du Bois first described the foundations of his emancipatory goals of social and economic development and it was in rural spaces that he conducted his first investigations toward realizing these goals.

## NOTE

1. For other work involving rural populations and spaces by Du Bois, see "The Relation of Negroes to Whites in the South" (Du Bois 1901c); "Spawn of Slavery: The Convict Lease-system in the South" (Du Bois 1901d); "The Negroes of Dougherty County, Georgia" (Du Bois 1901a); "The Development of a People" (1904a); "The Negro South and North" (Du Bois 1905); and "Sociology and Industry in Southern Education" (Du Bois 1907).

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