Unrecognized Roots of Service-Learning in African American Social Thought and Action, 1890-1930

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African American social thought has evolved to become pragmatic, urgent, and concerned with merging social theory and action. This study examines what may be considered unrecognized roots of service-learning embedded in African American social thought and action. These roots, or precursors, to service-learning are part of a community service agenda using various educational procedures and social welfare initiatives to promote race pride and influence social change. The study argues that the agenda in this historical perspective, which incorporates service-learning ideals, although not specifically identified as such, is organized social action for community-building used by African American social activists, women’s groups, and educators interested in social justice and community empowerment.

African American social thought has evolved to become pragmatic, urgent, and concerned with merging social theory and action. Given the problems identified in the black American existence, this expression of social thought has focused on social justice, group empowerment, and encouraging social change to promote real democracy. Such a response is understandable since, historically, African Americans’ social thought has been marginalized from acknowledged bodies of academic social thought, and expressed in action rather than print. Social protest activity, political ideology, and social movements to address issues of racial equality are some familiar articulations of this social thought.

There is a less obvious educational agenda obscured in this action-oriented and pragmatic expression of social thought. Revealed in a social welfare orientation, this agenda is embedded in a community service ideal that combines intellectual ideas and education with direct social action to improve conditions and standards in American black communities. With careful scrutiny one may locate important precursors to service-learning pedagogy and philosophy in the community service perspective that is an expression of African American social thought. These precursors, or early forms of service-learning, are often embedded in the community service perspective, sharing the social welfare orientation with its practical interest in social betterment, supportive communal systems, and education designed to promote race pride and sense of community.

Service-learning, though embodied in earlier philosophical ideas and issues, has surfaced as a relatively new concept in education. Pioneers in the field identified with the pedagogy of experiential education, including a reflection component and students making personal sacrifice (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). The early service-learning educators operated in a value-oriented philosophy of education to promote learning through service (Chisholm, 1987), with interest in community development, community empowerment, and campus-community reciprocal learning (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz). Today, service-learning remains attached to these historical antecedents. Community service and academic excellence are joined to address social justice issues that encourage learning through experience and reflection. In the expression of African American social thought, service-learning is not a formalized educational approach or organized social movement. However, service-learning is a response in the community service perspective that, combined with other social actions, promotes community enrichment and empowerment. It is a practice and teaching philosophy seeking to partner community and academe for community betterment.

In the black American experience, there is a long-standing interest in the community service ideal. This perspective in the context of African American social thought is manifested as a racial legacy dedicated to strengthening community to deal with internal problems and promote broader social change. Responding to the urgency in African American social thought, the community service perspective is conceived as a social obligation and organizing principle for blacks actively committed to the social advancement of American
black communities. The agenda in this perspective is therefore eclectic, with a social welfare emphasis to encourage self-help, collective initiatives, and education for social improvement and cultural enrichment. While the perspective does not have an officially defined agenda, the priority in its service orientation and educational activities are devoted to promoting the social, economic, and cultural empowerment of the black community. Given the action orientation and pragmatic emphasis in African American social thought, the community service perspective is an interactive process that incorporates various ideas and initiatives to engage people and community in problem solving and education.

The community service perspective was already evident more broadly at the close of the 19th century. At this time, the concept of experiential learning could be found in the progressive education ideas of John Dewey and others (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997), though it was not fully developed. The social settlement movement made prominent in the United States by Jane Addams and the Hull House neighbors also experimented with certain forms of interactive education and community. However, a practical application of experiential learning and education devoted to race and community development, and ideas later associated with service-learning, might be observed in most “Negro” institutions like the church, black colleges, and other civic-minded organizations. Social programs, developed in some black churches that dealt with social welfare needs and spiritual values, often had an intentional educational component. African American educators and other groups also participated in the service perspective, using their traditional academic background, skills, and knowledge in community problem solving and non-traditional educational programs. African American women were probably in the forefront of community service, improvising with self-styled social welfare systems and education programs designed for racial uplift and community enrichment (Lindsay, 1956).

Emphasizing this community service perspective, this study examines philosophical and pedagogical precursors to service-learning found in African American social thought. The examination covers the period roughly between 1890 and 1930, centering on the activity of African American women, the agenda of the black women’s social club movement, and African American educators.

African American Women: Social Services, Citizenship, and the Social Club Movement

African American women were vanguards, having developed self-styled support systems, social clubs, and other collective and individual initiatives early in the 19th century. By the close of that century, African American women could be found working in missionary schools and conventional social agencies alongside white women, in addition to working independently in their own communities (Lindsay, 1956). Most of the women were middle class, college-educated and affiliated with the black women’s social club movement. The black women, like their white women contemporaries, saw themselves as social reformers and social change agents. Many of the women believed that the best way to create a viable black community and to reform society was to educate, instruct, and care for the young and elderly, so they engaged in teaching, social work, and other communal efforts (Osofsky, 1995; Reid, 1965). Through their actions, they intended to promote social change and strengthen the internal social order of community. With this mindset and emphasis on using citizenship, democracy, and unity in the race, black women seemed to embrace the service-learning philosophy in programs and social action rather than as a formal education approach.

For many black women the ideas about citizenship and social action began at the local level. They were expected to demonstrate a commitment of service to community and duty to race (Shaw, 1995). These values for black women, to a large extent, were instilled in a socialization process lodged in family life and other social institutions. When leaving home to attend college, for example, young black women were sometimes reminded that their formal education was an investment in their community as much as in themselves (Shaw). Janie Porter Barrett, a prominent member in the black women’s social club movement, identifies this as a social obligation in her college experience (Shaw). She insists that students at Hampton Institute could not escape this call to duty and service. Barrett remembers rejoicing on Sundays because it was the one day she, “didn’t have to do a single thing for my race” (Shaw, p. 437). Jane Edner Hunter, another product of a black college, felt compelled in this service commitment to share the benefit of her education as partial repayment for the warm reception she experienced while working her way through college. W.E.B. DuBois (1903) was among the male students who were influenced to contribute to the community service perspective when he attended Fisk University. This call to service, if not a formal curriculum item, at least had a latent function at most black colleges.

There was a resurgence of the black women’s social club movement in the last decade of the 19th century (Giddings, 1984; Shaw, 1995). While some
ideas and programs that emerged were pioneering and innovative, many of them were patterned on traditional education and social services. However, most of the activity sponsored by black women’s social clubs stressed social commitment, skill, and knowledge for civic responsibility and participation, which suggests attributes of effective citizenship (Eyler & Giles, 1995).

The women of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) shared these principles and activated them organizationally and programmatically, using their motto, “lifting as we climb,” in a variety of education and social service programs. Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett were among the prominent leaders of NACW who, along with countless lesser known black women, devoted attention to local community programs as well as broader social change issues. Whereas the obvious intent of the programs was a response to a race mandate, black women’s social clubs’ emphasis on social commitment, knowledge, participation, and on expanding educational opportunities for non-traditional populations is consistent with present-day service-learning commitments.

Anna Julia Cooper: A Teaching and Service Model

The settlement house concept was important in several black women’s social club projects. The social settlement movement, which was identified with social work, gained momentum around the turn of the century with a focus on the plight of European immigrants and their problems with assimilation and entry into America’s industrial society. Its programs, rich in social services and self-help interests, were designed to bring higher ideals of life and character among immigrants, preparing them for participation in urban community life and democratic society. The settlement houses, combining social services and practical learning with connections to traditional education, were a valiant attempt to make education meaningful and accessible to poor and working-class immigrants. Such educational programs could be found in social settlements in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago (Lemert & Bhan, 1998). Family and home life, neighborhood visiting, and cooperative endeavors, conceived in a spirit of community, were important elements in the success of this model.

Anna Julia Cooper, an educator and scholar who identified with the problems of the black poor, found practical applications in the social settlement concept. Cooper was interested in education and cultural enlightenment of the disaffiliated, the segment she described as the most neglected people of the race. Essentially, this group was comprised of the poor, migrants, women destined for domestic service jobs, and other blacks who were cut off from traditional educational opportunities (p. 222). Cooper believed that the mixture of social services with practical learning and instruction, given in the spirit of communion that she observed in the settlement house model, was important for this segment of the black population, just as it was for the immigrant groups.

Cooper recognized that an important educational component was vital to the success of the social settlement movement. This educator, who had a long-standing involvement with black social settlements in Washington D.C., was familiar with Jane Addams’ work, and was favorably impressed with the interactive education program at Hull House (Lemert & Bhan, 1998). College men and women at Hull House, Cooper observed, shared experiences with the immigrant groups and interacted with them socially in a spirit of communion and community. The exchange that occurred in this activity, she further observed, established a relationship with people which offered them practical education and learning experiences in social efficiency and social economy (p. 219). When neighbors, via social settlement actions, organized with the college women and men in a collective effort to address public issues, raise questions pertaining to city services and community life, or for other problem solving, such involvement offered valuable learning opportunities regarding citizenship and democracy. Cooper’s observations of Jane Addams’ example at Hull House and her personal experiences with black social settlements suggest that education and important learning could take place through various informal procedures and in venues not typically associated with traditional education.

Such efforts, of course, are not service-learning. Nonetheless, they share ideals associated with service-learning and suggest that goals and objectives of social welfare and education are closely related. For Cooper, there was great promise in this teaching model, especially for the education of non-traditional populations such as the immigrant groups and the neglected segment of African Americans. Given her experiences working among the poor and unaffiliated groups, she realized the power of the teacher to touch people as much as books could (Lemert & Bhan, 1998, p. 222). There was personal growth and a reflection component in this experience for Cooper. Through her involvement and the knowledge she acquired, Cooper came to understand that to be effective in such a non-traditional educational milieu required learning to speak
the language of the people they intend to teach and demonstrating respect for their social life.

Cooper’s involvement with education and the social settlement concept might be viewed as an early demonstration in experiential education (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998). Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who was similarly impressed with the Hull House example of Jane Addams, also used that model in Chicago’s black community.

_Ida B. Wells-Barnett: A Maverick and Practical Educator_

The work of Ida B. Wells-Barnett is another example in the history of black community service. A pivotal member of NACW, she held leadership positions in several national organizations that addressed social justice, racial equality, and women’s issues. Her presence and personal imprint were prominent in the formation of the NAACP and women’s suffrage movement. She is associated with a group of activist women educators and scholars—Anna Julia Cooper and Jane Addams among them—who have been described as “practical sociologists” because they did not rigidly adhere to the prescribed academic canon (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998). It is difficult to identify Wells-Barnett with precursors to service-learning because she was elusive, a maverick and lonely warrior who sometimes deliberately evaded conventional behavior (Giddings, 1984; Holt, 1982). However, as an advocate of participatory democracy, she not only believed that community people should be involved in problem identification and problem solving, but found effective ways to engage local people in her service- and social justice-oriented projects.

The Negro Fellowship League, a project that originated in a Sunday school class that Wells-Barnett taught, is one such project. Centered around criminal justice issues at its inception, the Negro Fellowship League became a social settlement agency in 1910 (Duster, 1972). It evolved as a response to the Springfield, Illinois riot of 1908 in which three African American men were lynched. A well-known anti-lynching crusader, Wells-Barnett was particularly concerned about black male migrants to Chicago who too quickly became entrenched in vices and social deviant circles, and thereby swelled the criminal numbers (Duster). She was also concerned with the plight of ex-prisoners from Joliet State prison who had little assistance with their reentry into civilian life and often returned to criminal behavior. This was a pressing issue for Wells-Barnett because she believed it was these ex-prisoners and misguided migrants who were often mistreated by a biased justice system, and easy prey for the lynching mob (Duster). Recognizing the complex circumstances for this neglected segment of the race, she urged her Sunday school class to take social action in the interest of this group (Duster, p. XXV). Through her leadership and organizing skills, a center was established in the heart of Chicago’s black belt (Giddings, 1984, pp. 54-55).

The League, conceived as a cooperative effort, was designed to become a lighthouse on State Street (Duster, 1972). Wells-Barnett envisioned it as a beacon for incoming black migrants and newcomers to the city, in addition to offering programs for the problematic ex-criminal element. The center included a reading room, modest library, and education programs, in accord with the social settlement model. Given its origin in the Sunday school class, religious values were also espoused. Meanwhile, Wells-Barnett mobilized the center as a base for her community research and fact-finding projects, in which local people participated in collecting data. This aspect of the League was perceived as education and social action. Local people learned about social problems and were involved in examining those social conditions affecting their daily lives. It is through these kinds of activities that Wells-Barnett used the service perspective to merge social action and education in order to promote civic activity.

Wells-Barnett might be viewed as an early advocate for action research. The idea that action research should be done with the community seems to be very much incorporated in her fact-finding projects. Her ability and interest in working with community residents to identify social problems and their solutions connects learning and action to the life of the community. These efforts combined social services and educational ideas to assist people in becoming proactive participants in community and society.

_Black Women’s Social Club Movement_

The Black Women’s Social Club programs were committed to a strong social service orientation combined with some form of education (Ovington, 1996). A program developed by Sara Fleetwood, a leading citizen in the black Washington D.C. community at the turn of the century, offers another example of how social services and education were merged (Lindsay, 1956). Fleetwood and her group were primarily interested in a charitable effort to assist their needy neighbors through a typical social welfare endeavor. But when the group discovered that these needy welfare families were extremely limited in their knowledge of how, “to relate themselves to the mainstream of American
Social equality for most of the college educated change. Education was perceived as the path to the race. Their programs emphasized social philosophy of service-learning.

Some club women used their own personal finances and resources to sponsor programs. Janie Porter Barrett and Jane Edner Hunter were two enterprising women who did just this (Shaw, 1995; Spain, 2001). Barrett established the Locust Street Social Settlement in Hampton, Virginia shortly after completing her undergraduate education. The program provided social services and practical education for wayward girls in the city. Barrett, like many other black club women, hoped this response would provide the young women with basic education about responsible citizenship (Shaw). Hunter, in another project, combined community organizing with practical education. Working with a group of African American women, Hunter established the Working Girls Home Association in Cleveland, Ohio (Shaw). The program that evolved embodied the social settlement idea, providing the young women with lessons in urban acculturation and assimilation as they negotiated the city in a rapidly changing industrial society. This program, like that of several initiatives developed later by black club women, assisted young black women and urban newcomers to become proactive participants in community and civic life.

There was a two-fold character to the program. The Working Girls Home was, on the one hand, a temporary residence and service to assist young black women who had no family and friends when they migrated to the city to find employment (Shaw, 1995, pp. 438-439). On the other hand, it was a community organizing strategy in which Hunter sought to engage college educated women with these less educated newcomers to the city, using their knowledge, skills, education, and personal financial resources for direct social action. Most of all, it seems that black club women were intent on using their education as a resource to deal with internal issues of race pride, sense of community, and social equality. While such activity is perhaps identified with social work and organized social welfare, it is these ideas and social actions that connect black club women and their programs with the community service and civic participation philosophy of service-learning.

Black women were steadfast in their dedication to the race. Their programs emphasized social change. Education was perceived as the path to social equality for most of the college educated women. While formal education was not the central focus, their programs typically incorporated some “creative” or improvised education and learning experience to promote community enrichment. The programs of black women’s clubs were not original, since their activity paralleled and interacted with ideas in traditional education and other fields. Nevertheless, black women’s clubs seemed to identify with the implicit social club norm that its members should share their knowledge with others in the community (Williams, 1995). For many of the women, the most important lesson learned was that it was opportunity and environment, not the circumstances of birth or previous experience, that separated them from the masses. Therefore, the club women believed they had a social obligation to share this lesson and create opportunities and educational environments in which others—especially less fortunate black women—might improve their character and stature. The women in the black social club movement, viewed in this social context, unknowingly operationalized a precursor to service-learning.

Black Educators: Teaching and Social Action

African American male educators also participated in the community service perspective. Motivated to social action to confront obstacles to racial progress and educational enlightenment, black male educators, like the black women, saw teaching and instruction in the community as a practical and immediate response. Whereas experiential and service-learning were not recognized pedagogical models at the beginning of the 20th century, certain elements can be identified in the work of some African American educators. George Edmund Haynes, a founding member of the National Urban League and Fisk University educator (Blackwell & Janowitz, 1974; Carlton-LaNey, 1983), and W.E.B. DuBois, considered one of the most important intellectual minds of the 20th century (Lewis, 1993), are among the black educators whose work embodied aspects of the service-learning philosophy and pedagogy.

George E. Haynes: Experiential Education and Social Utility

George Edmund Haynes was a social science educator and social worker educated in the progressive era. He developed an experiential education course at Fisk University that was a precursor to today’s service-learning courses. Through his work as a field secretary with the YMCA, he was familiar with the educational problems and social welfare issues plaguing the black community (Carlton-La Ney, 1983). He was also aware that tra-
ditional social service agencies and educational institutions had limited appreciation and understanding of the plight of African Americans (Haynes, 1911, 1912). Haynes’ interest in racial uplift, self-help initiatives, and education to improve conditions of black people led him to develop a course of instruction that provided black students with systematic knowledge about their race and sensitive appreciation of pressing social problems in their community. The course was designed so students could utilize social science knowledge and skills in field experience and service in the black community. It was, in effect, an internship with both a service and reflection component, in which students were expected to learn from their subjects and gain insight from their community involvement. The students in this exchange would share their academic knowledge with the community by identifying problems, utilizing social science skills, and participating in problem solving with the community (Carlton-LaNey).

The course was conceived in the spirit of reciprocity. Haynes was interested in community enrichment, and social change in race relations. He sought to include students in this plan for social action. Students in this experiential learning exercise would study social problems in the traditional academic curriculum as well as through their supervised involvement in the black community. The hope was that such intense involvement would instill in students a deeper appreciation for the plight of the race. This new appreciation would encourage students toward further social action.

Haynes, who shared many of the ideas expressed in the black women’s social club movement, was also directing attention to the “neglected segment of the race.” He intended to use the course as an interactive educational approach. Developed in this manner, the course might be viewed as an educational exercise to bring college students and community inhabitants together in an organized activity centered around common interests. In a larger sense this course was an early effort to form a partnership between the university and its surrounding environment to strengthen both systems. This learning exercise, with its modest research component, encouraged cooperation and collaboration between the education system and the community, adding credence to important concepts later found in action research. The idea that research is done with community rather than on the community (Porpora, 1999) seems implicit, if not openly stated, in Haynes’ course. It also reflects views conveyed in “Principles of Good Practice in Combining Service and Learning,” particularly in the statement that “...service combined with learning adds value to each and transforms both” (Honnet & Paulsen, 1989, p. 8).

Haynes, who saw himself as a change agent, used this experiential course to establish an educated cadre, sensitive to and knowledgeable about black community problems. It was an attempt to merge social theory with social action in a proactive response to the urgency in the African American community. This experiential education model, like some of the black women’s ideas, has received broad application in social work. However, the model might also be viewed as an antecedent to service-learning courses (Blau, 1999).

W.E.B DuBois: Education and Daily Life

The educator and scholar W.E.B. DuBois also used a facsimile of the service-learning philosophy during his early teaching experiences in the hills and backwoods of rural Tennessee (1903), as well as in the participatory action component of his landmark study, The Philadelphia Negro (DuBois, 1967). The way he sought to engage various aspects of the community in the Atlanta University studies he directed between 1898 and 1910 (Green & Driver, 1978) also suggest the action research approach. However, it was the transformative power of experiential education that seemed to have a significant impact on this black scholar. The initial encounter with ideals later incorporated into experiential and service-learning, along with practical ideas from progressive education and adult education, seemed to happen in DuBois’ Fisk University education. Like many other students who attended black colleges, he was encouraged to participate in community service. DuBois responded to this call to service by teaching in rural Tennessee during the summer when he was a student (DuBois, 1903). It was during this experience, when he lived among the people he taught, that DuBois recognized the connection of education and daily life (DuBois, 1968).

DuBois’ teaching experience was very different from taking classes in Nashville. Rural Tennessee placed DuBois in an isolated environment of extreme poverty, where formal education seemed inconsequential. He described the locality as a milieu where book learning competed with the need for students to work alongside uneducated “old folk” in the fields and mills who had little perception of a horizon beyond their locale (DuBois, 1903). People living in this kind of isolation, he soon observed, saw little value in schooling or formal education if it was not immediately relevant to their situation. With this discovery, DuBois came to appreciate that for education to be of value to this population, it needed to reflect the experiences of...
the community. A teacher in the social context of this environment, DuBois concluded, had to learn to use the simplest English with local applications, to convince rural people of the value of education (p. 51). Therefore, he placed great emphasis on making education accessible.

In an effort to understand the obstacles, DuBois visited homes and talked with parents about the circumstances that caused students to miss school. He became involved with his students and their families on a daily basis in activities that moved beyond typical school and classroom routines. Through this engagement, he established social networks and bonded with people in ways that made it easier to relate to the “simple folk.” DuBois shared Cooper’s insight that educators need to speak the language of the people they intend to teach, with special attention devoted to non-traditional student populations.

This teaching experience in rural Tennessee reflects both progressive educational ideas as well as views in adult education (Dewey, 1938; Knowles, 1970). DuBois seems in agreement with Dewey (1900), who argued that school should be an active part of community life, instead of a place set apart to learn lessons. He also shares a similar idea associated with adult education of the teacher as guide or helper who connects the learner’s experiences with the community (Knowles). DuBois (and Haynes) had a particularistic emphasis on race in their educational interest. They intended to use education and schooling as a tool for social action to address social inequities in the black community. Given these objectives, their activities favorably identify with service-learning. In addition, the emphases placed on active engagement in education, as well as connecting daily life issues with civic responsibility, speak to cherished values in the service-learning community.

Unfortunately, formal schooling was a short lived process in this isolated community in rural Tennessee (DuBois, 1903). Nonetheless, an important lesson for DuBois at the time—experiencing the transformative power of experiential education—then became a part of his future teaching philosophy. In fact, certain ideas from his Tennessee teaching experience emerge in his sociological study of Philadelphia’s black community.

The study of the Philadelphia Negro was important in several respects. Completed at the turn of the century, it was one of the first sociological studies of a black community conducted in the United States (Drake & Cayton, 1962). The research was sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania and its affiliate, the College Settlement Association, with interest in studying the social problems that plagued Philadelphia’s black community. DuBois, who was familiar with Charles Booth’s study of poverty in London and Jane Addams’ work at Hull House, was interested in the project because he believed the world had erroneous information regarding the problem of the American Negro. He was thoroughly convinced that, due to racial prejudice, even the academic and intellectual community lacked significant and systematic data about the group (DuBois, 1968). Drawing on his knowledge of community work in the social settlements, DuBois was interested in a thorough study of a black community. The project was therefore an opportunity for DuBois to conduct a scientific investigation, producing systematic data to advance knowledge about the race. Such knowledge, he assumed, would reduce ignorance and prejudicial views, and encourage social action in the interest of the Negro (p. 197). The study, now considered a classic in sociology and social science research, used surveys and participant-observation, with DuBois living among his study’s subjects, as did early social settlement workers.

DuBois resided in Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward, the site of his research for approximately two years. During this period he not only surveyed people in his academic and scholarly quest, he also constantly interacted with them socially. His immersion as a participant observer, similar to the teaching experience in rural Tennessee, helped him appreciate social and economic aspects of the community. In addition to traditional academic and intellectual inquiry, DuBois found life in the community to be filled with personal insights. Moreover, he acknowledged that the experience had such a profound impact that it was during this study of poverty and life in Philadelphia’s black community that he learned what he wanted to do, “in his real life work and how to do it” (DuBois, 1968, p. 198). By the end of the project, DuBois had amassed significant scientific data, and personally surveyed and talked with more than 5,000 people (p. 198).

There were important lessons in the research process. The idea of experience as education which was reflected in rural Tennessee seemed to have currency in researching urban Philadelphia too. For this research, DuBois appreciated the need for mutual education between the researcher and community to facilitate communication. The idea in action research (and service-learning) that research (and teaching) should be done with community was also implicit in this situation. The need for the researcher to form a partnership with the community and the subjects of the study corresponds with current ideas in participatory research and service-
learning.

Nevertheless, DuBois soon learned that the ability to establish the needed social bond and communication with the community posed a major obstacle. “Colored people in the city,” DuBois found, did not appreciate the invasion of researchers and others. He surmised that Philadelphia Negroes did not like being studied like, “some strange species” (1968, p. 197). How ironic, since it was this black scholar’s interest in correcting misconceptions and stereotypes of the American Negro that influenced him to conduct the research in the first place. Nevertheless, despite his genuine interest and sincerity, DuBois found that local people did not open up to outsiders, even if they were the same race.

DuBois was initially upset by this turn of events. He was not prepared for this lack of acceptance as an outsider. The manner in which DuBois negotiated this obstacle is a useful lesson for service-learning educators. At first, surprised at being considered an outsider, DuBois admitted, “they sent me groping” (Dubois, 1968, p. 198). Upon reflection, however, the experience revealed to DuBois that he was, indeed, “an outsider,” an educator, and a researcher who did not know very much about his own group (p. 198). Consequently, he grappled for ways to connect with the social life of the community. His response to the problems of perception and communication included some practical actions. He visited people and established social relationships through various groups and collaborative activities. DuBois communed with Philadelphians similar to the way he had done in rural Tennessee. In his own words, “I met again and in a different guise those cross currents and social whirlings” (p. 198), and thereby changed the perception of those who questioned his presence. DuBois, in negotiating this obstacle, removed himself from the outsider category and established the important communication link to make the research compatible with the community. It is in this persistence to reduce the social distance and the constraints imposed on “outsiders” that one can anticipate principles and ideas conceptualized in action research and service-learning. Reflecting on the research experience and the mutual education embodied in the project, DuBois commented in his autobiography that, “I learned far more from Philadelphia Negroes than I had taught them concerning the Negro problem” (p. 198). It was through his experiences in teaching in rural Tennessee and urban Philadelphia that DuBois acquired insights that are relevant to service-learning work.

DuBois and Haynes were among the black educators who unwittingly discovered principles that undergird service-learning pedagogy. Their agenda in the community service perspective, developed as an expression of African American social thought, incorporated education procedures to encourage social consciousness and to inform social action. These educators were interested in racial uplift, community development, and sought to understand those social issues that blocked the educational enlightenment of their people. They intended to use education and scholarship as a tool to address social problems of America’s black community. Both of these educators were intent on using their educational training for problem solving and social betterment efforts. In promoting a community service perspective that emphasized race pride and empowerment, the educators demonstrated a commitment to values that are important in service-learning practice.

Conclusion

Service-learning, in various ways, is exemplified in various expressions of African-American social thought. While these expressions were not identified as service-learning at the time, they were concerned with developing programs and educational efforts that partnered the community with the academy. Coming into the 20th century, this response, lodged in a social welfare perspective, addressed the mandate of an oppressed minority group, centered around issues of racism, sexism, and social class, all of which posed an overwhelming threat to the group’s collective existence. In retrospect, African Americans responded with an urgency to deal with problems of social inequality and with the complexities that accompanied the shift from rural to urban society. In another sense it is an expression of African-American social thought demonstrated by black social clubs, black women, and black educators centered around a vision of community.

While the agenda in community service considered here is race oriented, it is not intended to be exclusive. Similar activity and initiatives might be observed among other groups. The perspective does not claim originality; it is guided by practicality and pragmatic application, drawn from various resources. Nonetheless, there are references and relevant lessons that seem to connect service-learning with the action-oriented expression of African American social thought around the turn of the 20th century. DuBois and Cooper, for example, offer some insights in how educators might negotiate the “outsider” category that is so often a problem for those perceived as outsiders to the community. Educators must learn to relate to the social life of the people they intend to teach, i.e., speak their
language, “use the simplest English,” and demonstrate a social commitment to the education process. Mutual interaction, cooperation, and volunteerism with a purpose are important themes found in the agenda, though they are not specifically labeled service-learning. Knowledge of institutions, personal investment with the target population, and appreciation of their circumstances are shared themes in service-learning and the African-American community service perspective.

While many similarities may be drawn between African American social thought around the turn of the 20th century and today’s service-learning movement, questions remain. How might the knowledge of this historical antecedent, for example, serve current service-learning programs? How do racial and social class differences among the socially committed affect service-learning program development, and civic and academic outcomes? How might social science knowledge and social service skills become more systematically incorporated into current service-learning programs?

This study illuminates several historical African American perspectives that parallel and closely correlate with service-learning and action research. It reveals how much higher education’s civic responsibility may have been advanced if these scholars and activists had been more welcome in the higher education community. Further, it is an implicit indictment of how much the academy might have expanded its ideas and knowledge base and been much stronger if the individuals highlighted here had been included in the mainstream of higher education during their lifetimes.

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