

# Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964) and Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931) The Foundations of Black Feminist Sociology

## BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Anna Julia Cooper was born on August 10, 1858,<sup>1</sup> in Raleigh, North Carolina, and died on February 27, 1964, at her home in Washington, D.C. at the age of 105. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was born July 16, 1862, in Holly Springs, Mississippi, and died on March 25, 1931, in Chicago, Illinois. As African American women in the post-Civil War period, Cooper and Wells-Barnett created social theory under conditions of radical social change which they experienced biographically and understood historically and sociologically. While they were not intellectual intimates, that is, they did not “feed” each other ideas, they responded to the same critical experiences in African American history; and in the early 1890s, each published significant social analyses—Cooper, the book-length collection of essays *A Voice from the South* (1892), and Wells-Barnett, two major research pamphlets, *Southern Horrors* (1892) and *A Red Record* (1895). We place them together in this chapter for three main reasons: (1) save for Cooper’s extraordinarily long life, they were almost exact contemporaries and shared a common regional heritage; (2) each brought a sociological consciousness to her response to African American experience, and (3) there are thematic commonalities in their social analyses which form part of the tradition of black feminist thought (see Collins, 1990; Giddings, 1984, and “General Social Theory” and “Cooper and Wells-Barnett and the Tradition of Feminist Sociology” later in this chapter).

To understand the biographical experiences that propelled them to social analysis, we have to look at the challenge posed to African Americans in the period between 1865 and 1900. The gulf separating Cooper and Wells-Barnett from their white contemporaries is illustrated by the fact that for Addams (Chapter 3), Gilman (Chapter 4), and the Chicago Women (Chapter 7), the Civil War was a date, not a life event; their lives can be told

without a mention of Reconstruction. But for Cooper and Wells-Barnett, the Civil War and Reconstruction are major life-patterning experiences. Some of the white women we have studied chose to go into situations of hardship, but they knew they could always retreat to the safety of upper-middle-class material security. Cooper and Wells-Barnett could duck or fight, but they could not escape American racism. In their lifetimes, the African American was freed from slavery (1865); plunged back into it almost immediately in the Southern Black Codes (1865–1867); “liberated” anew with opportunities for education and political participation under the policies of radical Reconstruction (1867–1875); abandoned by the North with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South (1877); and left to struggle against disenfranchisement, mob violence and organized terrorism, and the steady encroachment of legal segregation in the South, and against pervasive racism and de facto segregation in the North.

But African Americans refused to be defeated, mobilizing both organizationally and intellectually for collective self-protection and self-advancement. They started businesses, founded newspapers and schools, enrolled in white schools, patented inventions, and became teachers, lawyers, dentists, doctors, ministers, journalists, skilled craftspersons, small entrepreneurs, and laborers in every walk of life they were permitted. They protested against attempts to exclude them from opportunities, organizing at the local level into teachers’ groups, settlement houses, and women’s and men’s clubs, and at the national level into the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (which had its own paper, *Woman’s Era*), the National Association of Colored Men, the Colored National League, the National Afro-American Council, the American Negro Academy, the Invincible Sons and Daughters of Commerce (a secret society pledged to buy from black merchants and shopkeepers), the Negro Business League—and by 1910, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At every step, while they had some white support, they met with a much greater white opposition.

Intellectually, the 1890s were an open moment for African Americans; they were still inspired by the hope of the post-Emancipation period, and no one, black or white, could foresee with certainty how quickly and rigidly the United States would become a segregated society. In this context of opportunity and oppression, African Americans created a rich discourse of social and political analysis in which women were active participants. Henry Louis Gates suggests that “literary historians could well call [the period 1890–1910] the ‘Black Woman’s Era,’” so extraordinary was the productivity of black women in fiction (Gates, 1988:xvi)—a productivity paralleled in essays of literary criticism and social analysis. It was within this discourse that Cooper and Wells-Barnett created their sociology.

In the two sections that follow, we trace how Wells-Barnett’s and Cooper’s personal biographies interface with this history, focusing especially on the events that turned them toward social analysis.

### Ida B. Wells-Barnett

The best introduction to Wells-Barnett’s life is her autobiography, *Crusade for Justice* (1970), which although unfinished at her death, has been admirably edited by her



Ida B. Wells-Barnett, age about 25

daughter, Alfreda M. Duster. Useful overview biographical essays are Thomas Holt's "The Lonely Warrior: Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the Struggle for Black Leadership" (1982) and Trudier Harris's introduction to the Schomburg Library edition of Wells-Barnett's selected works (1991). Emilie Townes studies the religious and philosophic underpinnings of Wells-Barnett's activism in *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (1993). Paula Giddings is working on a major biography.

Wells-Barnett was born to slave parents who after the Civil War used their new-won freedom for themselves and their children. Her mother, Elizabeth Warrenton Wells, enrolled to learn to read her Bible at what is now Rust College, an institution started by white Northerners for the education of freedmen. Her father, Jim Wells, continued to work as a skilled carpenter for the white builder to whom his slave master had apprenticed him; her mother cooked for the builder, and the family lived on his property. In her autobiography, Wells-Barnett credits her parents with giving her

the interest in politics, the clear sense of justice, and the confidence for independent thought which are hallmarks of her sociology. She remembers proudly that when the white builder tried to dictate her father's vote—a common practice of coercion by white employers toward black employees—Jim Wells resisted, promptly moving his family off the builder's property, buying his own tools, and opening his own carpentry shop. Wells-Barnett attended school at Rust College until 1876, when a yellow fever epidemic killed her parents and left her, the oldest of five children, determined to keep the family together.

She cut short her formal education and became a teacher, responding to the desperate need for anyone with literacy to teach in the schools that were being formed throughout the South. A quick study, she found herself in demand as a teacher and worked to qualify to teach in Memphis, where salaries were higher than in the rural districts. In Memphis, Wells-Barnett joined a circle of other black schoolteachers who shared writing and discussion on Friday evenings, producing a newspaper covering the week's events and gossip. Wells-Barnett became its editor and was encouraged by the popularity of her work to submit columns, under the pen name Iola, to black Baptist papers. Her career as a journalist starts in these efforts, and it is as a journalist that she comes to social analysis.

Her first major personal act of resistance to discrimination occurred in this period, beginning on May 4, 1884, when, traveling back to Memphis and sitting as usual in what was called the "ladies car," she was ordered by the conductor to move to the "smoker." This

order, though Wells-Barnett did not realize it at the time, was one consequence of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 1883 that the Congressional Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional. This decision allowed Southern states to begin the practice of racial segregation—of which segregated railway cars were a part. Smoker cars were partitioned, and black men and women were put in one half, which Wells-Barnett describes as “filthy [and] stifling” (1892/1969:13). On that day in 1884, Wells-Barnett resisted strenuously, and on her return to Memphis began a complicated legal proceeding against the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad. She made headlines when she won her case in the circuit court—“DARKY DAMSEL GETS DAMAGES” (Wells-Barnett, 1970:19). She lost the case on appeal to the Tennessee Supreme Court and had to pay court costs of some \$200, having resisted on principle the railroad lawyer’s attempt to get her to settle out of court. The incident became famous in the African American community, and Cooper makes indirect reference to it.

But the event that led Wells-Barnett to her “crusade for justice” was the lynching of three black men in Memphis in 1892. By 1889, Wells-Barnett had embarked full-fledged on her career as a journalist and, following a practice she held to wherever possible, was part owner of the paper for which she wrote, *The Free Speech and Headlight of Memphis*. The lynching of 1892 took the lives of three men—Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stuart—who were making a success of an enterprise called the People’s Grocery Company. One of them, Moss, was a close friend of Wells-Barnett, someone she identified as “believ[ing], with me, that we should defend the cause of right and fight wrong where we saw it” (1970:47–48). Their success led them to a quarrel with a white grocer across the street and to a confrontation in the dark in which three white men were injured. Wells-Barnett reports in her first anti-lynching pamphlet, *Southern Horrors*, “There was no law on the statute books which would execute an Afro-American for wounding a white man, but the ‘unwritten law’ did. Three of these men, the president, the manager and clerk of the grocery—‘the leaders of the conspiracy’ [according to white papers]—were secretly taken from jail and lynched in a shockingly brutal manner” (1892/1969:19).

Witnessing the way the white newspapers distorted the event, Wells-Barnett began a campaign against lynching through the pages of the *Free Speech*. Part of this campaign urged blacks to follow Moss’s last words—“tell my people to go West—there is no justice for them here”—and Wells-Barnett reported a heavy black exodus from the city, with a resulting financial loss to white business (1970:53–54). But the lynchings did not stop in the South, and in the May 21, 1892 *Free Speech*, Wells-Barnett wrote the editorial that was to banish her from Memphis and to begin the analysis of the complex ties among gender, race, class, and geopolitical location that forms the theoretical core of her sociology. She directly confronted what had become the South’s new excuse for lynching—the allegations that black men were raping white women: “Eight Negroes lynched since the last issue of the ‘Free Speech’ . . . and five on the same old racket—the new alarm about raping white women. . . . Nobody in this section of the country believes the old thread bare lie that Negro men rape white women” (Wells-Barnett, 1892/1969:4). She suggested that all the publicity may have pointed to an alternate reality—that white women were attracted to black men. White citizens of Memphis burned the *Free Speech* offices to the ground. Fortunately, Wells-Barnett was already out of town, keeping a pre-arranged engagement to report on a conference of the African Methodist Episcopal

Church in Philadelphia. Unable to return to Memphis, she accepted an offer from black publisher Thomas Fortune to write for his paper the *New York Age*, and her first article was a statement of what had happened in Memphis.

Her *New York Age* articles led to other opportunities. She met Frederick Douglass, the leading spokesperson in the African American community. Black women in New York and Brooklyn organized a testimonial in her honor at which she spoke to a large audience for the first time about what she knew about lynchings. The testimonial gave Wells-Barnett the money to publish her first pamphlet on lynching, *Southern Horrors*,<sup>2</sup> and began her public speaking career. Speaking in Philadelphia, she met Catherine Impey, a British reformer who offered to help Wells-Barnett take her anti-lynching campaign to Britain. Wells-Barnett launched an international anti-lynching campaign with two sets of lectures in Britain, in April 1893 and in March–June 1894. These British lectures got her enormous attention in the US white press—attention that was often abusive but which kept the issue of lynching before both the US and British publics.

Before her departure for her first British tour, Wells-Barnett was active in another struggle to shape public opinion, this time about the blatantly discriminatory exclusion of African American achievements from the Columbian World Exposition hosted in Chicago in 1892, a media event of proportions rivaling those of today's Olympic Games. This exclusion was particularly galling to African Americans because in the brief quarter century since Emancipation they had made enormous gains, having taken advantage of every opportunity remotely given or begrudged them. To expose this gross discrimination to both American and foreign visitors to the Exposition, Wells-Barnett and others decided to put out a pamphlet, *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (1893).<sup>3</sup> They planned to have it printed in English, French, and German, but a shortage of funds let them do only the introduction in all three languages. Along with her own contribution on lynching, the pamphlet included papers by Frederick Douglass, J. Garland Penn of the Negro Press Association, and F. L. Barnett, the Chicago lawyer whom Wells would marry in 1895. Ten thousand copies were distributed to Fair visitors. Wells-Barnett's social analyses reflect an understanding of the power that a growing mass media would have in shaping public opinion and of the relation between that opinion and the enforcement or non-enforcement of the law. In 1895, she produced her second major analysis of lynching, *A Red Record*, in which she used white newspapers' statistics on and coverage of lynchings, saying, "Out of their own mouths shall the murderers be condemned" (1895:15).

Many feared that after her marriage Wells-Barnett would cease to be an effective social activist—she herself speaks of the problems of "a divided duty." But her activism continued unabated to the end of her life. She was so effective a speaker that African American women's clubs begged her to tour Illinois, promising her room, board, and childcare for her firstborn: "I have often referred to it in my meeting with the pioneer suffragists, as I honestly believe that I am the only woman in the United States who ever traveled throughout the country with a nursing baby to make political speeches" (1970:244). She was part of black protest delegations that called on Presidents McKinley and Wilson. She helped organize numerous black women's clubs; she tried to build bridges to white women's groups, with varying success; she started her own small but highly effective settlement, the *Negro Fellowship League*; she worked constantly to create a unified organization for

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African Americans, beginning with the Afro-American League and ultimately contributing to the founding of the NAACP. And she continued to fight injustice wherever she found it—in single instances of young black men harassed by white police, organized race riots by whites, attempts by the *Chicago Tribune* to lobby for segregated schools, the continued practice of lynching, and what she and her husband (along with many others) saw as the attempts of Booker T. Washington to control black political power in the United States. Thomas Holt (1982) suggests that this last battle cost both Barnetts dearly, for Washington was an implacable enemy.

Wells-Barnett is described by Holt as “a lonely warrior” and by Townes, in a well-crafted distinction, as “not unusual in her inability to work in coalitions” (1994:173). This inability Wells-Barnett herself perceived, reporting her husband’s remark “that I had to learn to take my friends as I found them, making allowances for their shortcomings, and still hold on to friendships” (1970:285). But this inability was a result of her greatest strength: an absolute fearlessness when standing for what she knew was right. She could be hurt and she could feel the pain of insult, but she could not be made to flinch in speaking her mind. She kept the determination that came to her after the lynching of Thomas Moss: “I felt that one had better die fighting against injustice than to die like a dog or a rat in a trap. I had already determined to sell my life as dearly as possible if attacked. I felt if I could take one lyncher with me, this would even up the score a little bit” (1970:62).

### Anna Julia Cooper

Although Cooper’s life still awaits a major biography, she has received several feminist treatments. Chief among these are Leona C. Gabel’s short but well-reasoned *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond: The Life and Writing of Anna Julia Cooper* (1982); Louise Daniel Hutchinson’s panoramic *Anna J. Cooper: A Voice from the South* (1981); Mary Helen Washington’s able introduction to the Schomburg Library edition of *A Voice from the South* (1988), and Karen Baker-Fletcher’s stimulating study of Cooper’s theology and philosophy, *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper* (1994). Many of Cooper’s privately printed manuscripts will be available with the publication of *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, edited by Charles Lemert and Esme Bahn (1998).

In Cooper’s life, unlike that of Wells-Barnett, the biographer does not find a crystallizing moment that explains her turn to social theory. Instead, Cooper’s life is the story of an extraordinary intellect, with a genuine love for learning and for aesthetic experience, reflecting on a world that put up barriers of race, gender, and class to her pursuit of that love. In the years leading to *A Voice from the South*, Cooper showed remarkable ability and daring in her determination to find a life she could at first build only in imagination out of the slenderest of fragments.

Cooper was born Anna Julia Hayworth to Hannah Stanley, a slave of Fabius Hayworth, Cooper’s probable father. Cooper’s handwritten memories of her early years show a love of learning and an appreciation of the strengths of her mother (as well as a contempt for her father): “My mother was a slave & the finest woman I have ever known. Tho untutored she could read her Bible & write a little. It is one of my happiest childhood memories explaining for her the subtle differences between q’s and g’s or between b’s and l’s. Presumably my father was her master, if so I owe him not a sou. She was always

too modest . . . ever to mention him” (reproduced in Hutchinson, 1981:4). Although her mother and brothers were only marginally literate, Cooper by age seven seems to have learned to read and write, despite living in the midst of a civil war and in a society that prohibited teaching slaves to read.

However acquired, her literacy gave Cooper her first opportunity to reach for a world beyond her home. When she was about eight, she became one of the few girls admitted to the newly founded Episcopal freedmen’s school, St. Augustine Normal School and Collegiate Institute, where she received a stipend for tutoring other students, often adult men, in reading and writing. At St. Augustine’s, Cooper formed

a lifelong attachment to the Episcopal faith. An extraordinarily able student, she describes herself as being “like *Oliver Twist*,” devouring everything set before her and begging for more to study (1892:76). In this quest, she had her first personal encounters with gender discrimination in education; the school gave aid to male students and left her and the other girls, no matter how able, to struggle to earn their way; she had to plead with the school president to be allowed to take the first class in Greek. Her love of learning and her devotion to Episcopalianism came together in the Greek class, which was taught by George A. C. Cooper, a native of the British West Indies, who became the second black ordained in the Episcopal Church in North Carolina, and whom she married in 1877. After his death in 1879, she never remarried; and years later she showed her continuing allegiance to a host of values and experiences—education, her faith, the marriage to Cooper, and the greatness of the African American people—in the donation to the school chapel of a stained-glass window in her husband’s memory, telling the story of Simon of Cyrene, the black man whom legend has carrying the Cross part of the way on Jesus’ march to crucifixion.

After her husband’s death, Cooper made the daring decision to try to leave St. Augustine’s, where she had been teaching, and go North for more education. With no role models, proceeding on what she knew by reputation and rumor, she wrote to Oberlin College in Ohio, known as a pioneering institution in the admission of women and African American students. Cooper sought admission to Oberlin’s rigorous bachelor’s curriculum, not its teaching certificate program. Only one black woman, Mary Jane Patterson in the class of 1862, had completed the bachelor’s program before Cooper’s admission. Writing directly to the president of Oberlin, Cooper introduced herself as what we would today term a non-traditional student—“the widow of an Episcopal clergyman (Colored)”—and



*Anna Julia Cooper, age 34*

stressed the tightness of her economic situation, the seriousness with which she took her education, and the thoroughness of her preparation (listing an impressive transcript of courses in Latin, Greek, and mathematics) (Hutchinson, 1981:32). She concluded by asking for free tuition.

Cooper entered Oberlin in the autumn of 1881, the same year as two other African American women, Mary Church (Terrell) and Ida Gibbs, both younger and from affluent families. At Oberlin, she lived with the large, comfortably situated Churchill family—Professor Charles H. Churchill, his wife, Henrietta Vance Churchill, their four children, and “Granma Vance” and she remained close friends with the Churchills all her life. The Churchill household made real the culturally rich life Cooper had imagined. Hutchinson suggests, “The Churchills had shown her another lifestyle, and the fierce determination of her mother and the cultured environment of the Churchills were to become role models that she would [always] remember” (1981:37).

Cooper graduated from Oberlin in 1884 and for the next three years experimented with making a life—first teaching mathematics and modern languages at Wilberforce University, a black school in Xenia, Ohio, and then, in 1885, in response to her mother’s concerns, returning to Raleigh, as a teacher at St. Augustine’s. She helped her mother and her brother’s widow and six children and worked as a member of the North Carolina Teachers’ Association (a black group). In 1886, she traveled to Washington, D.C., to address a meeting of the African American Episcopal clergy on the topic “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race”; the address became a chapter in *A Voice from the South*.

By 1887 Cooper was seeking a life wider than Raleigh afforded. Awarded an MA in mathematics from Oberlin, she received through her Oberlin connections an offer to teach mathematics and science in the only black high school in Washington, D.C. The Washington Colored High School (known locally as “the ‘M’ Street School”) admitted students by qualifying exam, drew from a mix of economic classes, and offered both industrial training and liberal arts courses. By 1891, Cooper was teaching the final year of Latin as well as the math and science courses.

In Washington, Cooper achieved the culturally rich life she wanted. She formed her most meaningful personal relationship, a friendship with the Reverend Francis J. Grimké and his sophisticated and artistic wife, Charlotte Forten Grimké. Until Charlotte Grimké’s death in 1914, they maintained, with selected friends, a weekend pattern in which on Fridays they met at the Grimkés’ and on Sundays at Cooper’s for discussion, study, and music. In those early years in Washington, Cooper began to be in demand as a public speaker, and she used her talks to build a writing portfolio that in 1892 she would turn into *A Voice from the South*. We learn from that book, that in the years preceding its publication, Cooper developed a systematic social analysis to explain events in her personal life, the African American community, the women’s movement, American literature and popular culture, and US society. She spoke at Howard University on the national importance of higher education for women; went to an exchange meeting with black teachers in Toronto, which afforded her an opportunity for cross-cultural comparison of race relations; listened to white suffragist Anna Shaw’s talk, “Woman versus Indian,” at the National Woman’s Council in Washington, D.C., and took issue

with its basic premise; responded immediately to the publication of the white racist poem "A Voodoo Prophecy," which had angered the African American community; followed critically the reports of the 1890 census; and offered one of the first reviews of William Dean Howells's novel of race relations, *An Imperative Duty* (1892). These events formed the empirical foundation for her social theory.

In 1892 Cooper published her great work of social analysis, *A Voice from the South*, claiming for the black woman a distinctive angle of vision on the social world: "from her peculiar coigne of vantage as a quiet observer . . . the colored woman . . . is watching . . . to weigh and judge and advise" (1892:138) (see "General Social Theory"). The book received superlative reviews from black and white publications alike, many of which are summarized in Monroe Majors's *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities* (1893); the *Boston Transcript*, the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, the *Detroit Plaindealer*, the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, the *Kingsley Times* (Iowa), and *Public Opinion* all gave it laudatory reviews. The *New York Independent* suggests the flavor of the book's general reception: "It is an open secret that the author of this volume is Mrs. A. J. Cooper. She puts a voice in her book . . . which it is impossible to shake off. She writes with a strong but controlled passion, on a basis of strong facts" (Majors, 1893:284–285).

The decade from 1892 to 1902 was one of heady achievement for Cooper. In 1893, she and two other African American women, Fannie Barrier Williams, a Chicago civic leader, and Fannie Jackson Coppin, a respected authority on education, were invited to speak at a special meeting of the (white) Women's Congress held in Chicago to coincide with the Columbian Exposition. In 1894, the Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C., which she had helped organize, officially incorporated and began offering a host of services—homemaking classes, kindergarten training for teachers, aid for poor blacks who had immigrated from the rural South. In 1895, Cooper addressed the first National Conference of Colored Women in Boston. In 1896, she attended the first Annual Convention of the National Federation of Afro-American Women—an event made momentous by the presence of Harriet Tubman. Cooper was one of the few women to participate in the American Negro Academy. In 1900, she attended the first Pan-African Conference in London, delivering the speech on "The Negro Problem in America."

This productivity came to an end in 1902 when Cooper became principal of the M Street School. Her workload as principal and her commitment to service in the black community left less time for writing, and her administration was complicated by a highly political debate on black education. Many people, in the black and white communities, for a mix of reasons, supported the plan of Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee Institute which called for rigorous training in industrial arts as the best way to guarantee black people a place in US society; others were equally committed to W. E. B. DuBois's call for a liberal arts education to prepare "the talented tenth" as a core leadership for the race. Cooper tried to walk a middle ground in this debate, acknowledging the worth of industrial training and yet believing that black students who had a love of classical learning should be allowed that too—that the mind knew no color line. But despite her best efforts, she became embroiled in what was known as "the M Street School Controversy." This battle is still being dissected, but in broad

outline we can trace its main elements: white racism, black dissension, and sexism. Cooper's own statement is a good summary:

"During my principalship of M St. H.S. the colored prin.[cipal] was under the white Director of High Schools. At a meeting of Principals she [Cooper is referring to herself] was told when the question of scholarships in colleges came up, that her graduates were not eligible to try for them. The Director at the same time recommended to Congress that a different curriculum be granted to the Colored High School, whose pupils he said were not capable of doing the regular work. Insubordination was charged and effectively pressed when the principal sent to Harvard, Yale, Brown and Oberlin students directly from the M St. classes who passed successfully their entrance exams . . . For which unpardonable 'sin' against racial supremacy said principal suffers to this day the punishment of the damned from both the white masters and the colored understrappers." (cited in Gabel, 1982:54)

Cooper's fitness as principal was questioned and she was slurred with typical sexist charges that she could not maintain discipline, that she was too sympathetic with poorly prepared students, and that she herself engaged in immoral behavior with her foster son (she had adopted John and Lula Love of North Carolina when their parents died in the 1890s). In 1906, the board canceled the contracts of all teachers, rehiring each teacher individually, and Cooper was not rehired. She spent the next four years teaching at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri—a period she regarded as exile. In 1910 a new superintendent invited her back to teach Latin at the M Street School.

Demoted but not broken, Cooper returned to Washington determined to vindicate herself by earning her doctorate, a project made difficult by the continuing politics of the District school system and by her own decision in 1915 to assume the guardianship of her deceased brother's five grandchildren. Prior to this adoption, she had studied intermittently during summers in Paris—she was a gifted linguist—and had moved towards a doctorate at Columbia with the preparation of an edition of a French medieval epic. But her guardianship made meeting the residency requirements at Columbia impossible. Not until 1922, when the children were older, did she try again for the doctorate—this time at the Sorbonne. Cooper, in her mid-sixties transferred her credits from Columbia and wrote her dissertation, *Slavery and the French Revolutionists, 1788–1805*, in French (1925/1988), receiving her doctorate in 1925.

Cooper lived another active forty years. After her retirement from the D.C. school system, she took the leadership of an adult education program known as Frelinghuysen University designed for working black men and women. Cooper ran the university out of her home until 1940, when she retired again. In 1951, at the age of 93, she published privately a two-volume work, *Personal Recollections of the Grimké Family and the Life and Writings of Charlotte Forten Grimké*.

Evaluating Cooper's life, Baker-Fletcher suggests that Cooper perhaps "failed to question the class ideology she grew into as she moved up the socio-economic ladder" (1994:173). To a degree this may be true, but in Cooper's defense it must be noted that she may have found in the world of ideas a place where she was absolutely at home. In her educational philosophy and her social service, Cooper seems to have balanced respect for the manual arts with her genuine love of the life of the mind. Cooper's social theory

is, in part, a response to a world which on the basis of race, class, and gender, denies people that “sense of freedom in mind . . . necessary to the . . . inspiring pursuit of the beautiful. A bird cannot warble out his fullest and most joyous notes while the wires of his cage are pricking and cramping him at every heart beat” (1892:223).

## GENERAL SOCIAL THEORY

### Assumptions

Cooper’s and Wells-Barnett’s ideas were shaped by the discourse within the African American community (Collins, 1990; Giddings, 1984) that was working to define itself under the new conditions seemingly made possible by emancipation and to relate to white discourse, much of it racist. This community of **intellectuals and activists**, many of them women, included free blacks active in abolitionist activities before the Civil War, **older blacks who had lived under slavery for a significant part of their lives**, and members of the generation to which Cooper and Wells-Barnett belonged, the **first generation to grow up after Emancipation**.<sup>4</sup>

This community took as one assumption that white domination and its accompanying doctrine of white supremacy had to be confronted. American social darwinists were giving intellectual legitimacy to white, which at this time meant Anglo-Saxon, imperialism abroad and supremacy at home, producing dogma such as that in James K. Hosmer’s *Short History of Anglo-Saxon Freedom*: “Though Anglo-Saxon freedom in a more or less partial form has been . . . imitated. . . . By that race alone it has been preserved amidst a thousand perils; to that race alone is it thoroughly congenial” (in Hofstadter, 1955:174). This same racism came to infect and corrupt the white women’s movement for suffrage, beginning perhaps with the fierce debates surrounding the Fifteenth Amendment, which gave black men the right to vote while still denying that right to all women. O’Neill summarizes the racism in the white women’s movement as follows:

By the 1890’s the growth of racist feelings through the country and the emergence of a Southern suffrage movement combined to make, as Aileen Kraditor puts it, a **“pact between woman suffrage and white supremacy”** both natural and expedient. It was sealed at the NAWSA convention in New Orleans in 1903. On that occasion Anna Howard Shaw [argued that white men] “have put the vote into the hands of your black men, thus making them the political superiors of your white women. Never before in the history of the world have men made former slaves political superiors of their former mistresses. . . .” When Dr. Shaw, who grew up in Michigan, took so crude a line, no one would expect Southern women to be less candid. (1971:70)

The situation was confused by the fact that women like Shaw and Susan B. Anthony often acted in personally liberal ways—ways reported by both Cooper and Wells-Barnett. Caraway, in *Segregated Sisterhood*, points out that this double standard in behavior “should serve as a warning about the limitation of personal commitments to decency; those private goals yield easily to other perceived interests” (1991:154).

Amidst this growing racism, African American women spoke in a double and sometimes triple context—as blacks and as women to white Americans, as women to black

men, and as individuals of particular class backgrounds to and for themselves. They defined themselves to white America as American black citizens and as Christians, emphasizing the ties that they shared with white Americans and the failure of white Americans to keep their own principles. In 1891, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, lecturer, poet, and novelist, in an address to the National Council of Women of the United States, in Philadelphia, presented the African American case:

I deem it a privilege to present the negro, not as a mere dependent asking for Northern sympathy or Southern compassion, but as a member of the body politic who has a claim upon the nation for justice, **simple justice**, which is the right of every race, upon the government for protection, which is the rightful claim of every citizen, and upon our common **Christianity** for the best influences which can be exerted for peace on earth and good-will to men. . . .

A government which can protect and defend its citizens from wrong and outrage and does not is vicious. A government which would do it and cannot is weak; and where human life is insecure through either weakness or viciousness in the administration of law, there must be a lack of justice. (1891/1976:247–248)

Further, black women had to address the ever present, rarely publicly spoken charge of **sexual immorality**. Addressing the Women's Congress in Chicago in the year of the Columbian Exposition, on the same speaker's platform as Cooper, Chicago civic leader Fannie Barrier Williams detailed the extraordinary accomplishments of African American women, then laid the blame for sexual immorality on the white institution of chattel slavery and white men, and alluded subtly to the continuing sexual exploitation of black women by white men by praising the "chivalric sentiment" of African American men in protecting the women of their race—"I do not wish to disturb the serenity of this conference by suggesting why this protection is needed or the kind of men against whom it is needed" (1893/1976:274–275).

In **situations which pitted the identity of race against the identity of gender**, black women tended to agree with Harper's analysis: "that when it was a question of race she let the lesser question of sex go. But the white women all go for sex, letting race occupy a minor position" (Lerner, 1972:245). Giddings notes, however, that while there was a strong and vocal movement of white anti-suffragists, "one would be hard pressed to find any Black woman who did not advocate getting the vote" as a way to stop sexual exploitation, increase education, and improve working conditions (1984:120).

Mary Church Terrell voiced the concerns of black women among themselves about class differences and about the duties of those empowered through class position toward those disempowered. Terrell, a leading figure in the black women's club movement, argued that "Self-preservation demands that [Black women] go among the lowly . . . to whom they are bound by ties of race and sex . . . to reclaim them" (cited in Giddings, 1984:97). **Black women recognized that class differences among them were largely unperceived in a white world in which race was the first identifier imposed on them and gender the second. Class and individual attainment could go all but unnoticed and never count enough to overmaster the other two identities.**

Finally, as part of their assumptions, Cooper and Wells-Barnett were engaged in dialogues about progress and history. Like other African Americans, they saw themselves as lucky to be alive at this moment of dawning opportunities. In their treatment of history,

Cooper and Wells-Barnett assume that their reader will know U.S. history and current events—most especially slavery and Reconstruction—and at the same time that that reader may have a white sense of that history and those events. Their writings show that **an alternative interpretation of Reconstruction was already in place in the black community**, as suggested in Cooper's description of it as the period of "alleged corruption of Negro supremacy, more properly termed the period of white sullenness and desertion of duty" (1892:192).

### Major Themes

Cooper and Wells-Barnett construct a sociological analysis of society as a **dynamic of power and difference**, a theory as complete and critical as any achieved in American sociology—a **radical, non-Marxian conflict theory**. Their focus is on a pathological interaction between difference and power in U.S. society, a condition they variously label as "repression," "domination," "suppression," "despotism," "subordination," "subjugation," "tyranny," "our American conflict." Looking at society through the dual lenses of **race** and **gender**, they come also to **class**, and help to create a **black feminist sociology**. This section presents their sociology in terms of four themes: **their sense of the project of social analysis and of a method appropriate to that project**, their **model of the social world**, their **theory of domination**, and their **alternative to domination**.

**1. Cooper and Wells-Barnett create sociology from the standpoint of the oppressed; for them, the project of social analysis is justice and the method appropriate to the project is cross-examination.** Cooper and Wells-Barnett undertook social analysis as part of their morally propelled resistance to oppression. Standing in the situation of the oppressed, they use social analysis to **witness** to what is happening, as a means of empowering the African American community, exposing the oppressors, and appealing to the conscience of potentially supportive publics. Wells-Barnett (1892/1969) begins her analysis of lynching with this claim: "Somebody must show that the African-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen upon me to do so. . . . If this work can . . . arouse the conscience of the American people to a demand for justice . . . I shall feel I have done my race a service" (1892/1969:Preface). Cooper offers essentially the same justification for her theoretical project, which she defines as part "of our American Conflict" over race, saying that she speaks "because I believe the American people to be conscientiously committed to a fair trial and ungarbled evidence, and because I feel it essential to a perfect understanding and an equitable verdict that truth from *each* standpoint be presented at the bar" (1892:II).\*

Cooper explicitly contrasts this orientation to sociology with that of scientific objectivity, a contrast she typifies as that between "**faith**" and "**skepticism**" (and among her representatives of the skeptical, or "unimpassioned," scientist are Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer). Faith is essential for the individual, race, or nation to meet "the great,

\*An asterisk following a citation in the text means that the passage quoted is given in fuller context in the readings at the end of the chapter.

the fundamental need . . . for heroism, devotion, sacrifice”—qualities incompatible with “a primarily skeptical spirit.” She defines faith as “*treating the truth as true*” (1892:297). People, including the social analyst, will not always agree on truth; but people as moral agents must openly declare and publicly practice what they believe to be true. Wells-Barnett shares Cooper’s sense that moral agency begins in a willingness to live what you profess to believe.

In bringing a moral standard to bear in their analysis of society, Cooper and Wells-Barnett use two principles: (1) whether the actors in the situation are true to their professed principles and, (2) whether the actors in the situation conform to the analyst’s own principles of just behavior. **For Cooper the fundamental source of truth is in religion.** Applying that standard to American society in her time, and especially to the African American’s situation, she analyzes that situation as the direct result of the Anglo-Saxon’s confusion of faith: “[T]he problematical position at present occupied by descendants of Africans in the American social polity . . . grow[s] . . . out of the continued indecision in the mind of the more powerful descendants of the Saxons as to whether it is expedient to apply the maxims of their religion to their civil and political relationships” (1892:185). **Wells-Barnett’s moral stance is in the principles of American democracy.** Her critique of the United States is for its failure to abide by its laws. In her analysis, she calls to account those people who stand as hypocrites—by practicing action contrary to their enacted laws, by lying about the connection between their actions and their laws, or by failing to speak out against practices they absolutely know to be in contradiction of those laws.

Cooper and Wells-Barnett must invent a strategy for doing research from the position of the subordinate with some cultural capital but without the resources that dominants command to produce and disseminate knowledge for the whole society. They choose to **use the imagery of the courtroom in framing their method of social analysis. They “cross-examine”:** they establish their own standpoint; from that standpoint on the margin of power, they challenge dominants’ claims about the facts, using the dominants’ own words as evidence; they give their own eyewitness accounts and “subpoena” into the record the eyewitness accounts of other subordinates. They, thus, create a critical and forensic empiricism.

Speaking as witnesses, Cooper and Wells-Barnett present data from their direct observations of situations and events, for example, of Jim Crow laws and mores in public transportation, of their travels in other countries where race was not an instrument of oppressive practice, of conditions in Memphis before and after the lynching of Thomas Moss (Wells-Barnett), of barriers to the education of African American women (Cooper). Both try to collect data themselves. Cooper sends out a questionnaire to colleges admitting women, asking about their record in the education of black women (1892:73–74) and heads the Committee to Study the Georgia Convict Lease System set up by the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (Hutchinson, 1981:96). Wells-Barnett initiates her own investigation by correspondence following the New Orleans race riots of 1900 (1900/1991:311–314). In her autobiography covering her years in Chicago, she recounts her personal attempts to work as a participant observer in situations in which riots or lynchings were imminent or abating.

But by and large, power differentials in the society mean that Cooper and Wells-Barnett must use the “defendant,” that is, the white oppressor, as their chief source of data, interpreting the texts produced by dominants who control the production of knowledge. Wells-Barnett announces her intention in *A Red Record* (1895) to use white newspaper accounts of lynchings as her main data base:

The purpose of the pages which follow shall be to give the record which has been made, not by colored men, but that which is the result of the compilations made by white men, of reports sent over the civilized world by white men in the South. Out of their own mouths shall the murderers be condemned. . . . [T]he incidents hereinafter reported have been confined to those vouched for by the [Chicago] Tribune. (1895:15)\*

Cooper and Wells-Barnett show how the dominant sees the situation, and they assess that viewpoint by the standards they have established as a moral basis for critique: (1) how does the situation as described fit the principles the dominant professes; (2) how do the principles professed within the particular situation fit the more general principles of the rule of law, the ethics of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the logic of human reason.

One strategy is simply to let the dominants’ own texts convict them. Cooper, for example, presents French historian Hippolyte Taine’s description of Anglo-Saxon hordes of the fifth century—“Huge white bodies, cool-blooded, with fierce blue eyes, reddish flaxen hair. . . . Brutal drunken pirates and robbers, they . . . , landed anywhere, killed everything” (1892:157)—to establish her depiction of an Anglo-Saxon heritage of unbridled aggression. Wells-Barnett shows the same traits among white Americans of her own day by presenting white press accounts of black lynchings; for instance, she reproduces the New York *Sun’s* account of the torture killing of a mentally disabled Negro named Henry Smith, accused of murdering and violating a four-year-old white girl—a charge never proved:

“Words to describe the awful torture inflicted upon Smith cannot be found. . . . The child’s father, her brother, and two uncles . . . gathered about the Negro as he lay fastened to the torture platform and thrust hot irons into his quivering flesh. . . . Every groan from the fiend, every contortion of his body was cheered by the thickly packed crowd of 10,000 persons. . . . After burning the feet and legs, the hot irons—plenty of fresh ones being at hand—were rolled up and down Smith’s stomach, back, and arms. Then the eyes were burned out and irons were thrust down his throat.” (1895:27)\*

Wells-Barnett reprints the account in full in *A Red Record*.

A second strategy is to critique and rework the data produced by those in power. Using lynching reports as produced in the *Chicago Tribune*, Wells-Barnett develops statistics showing the exact nature of the alleged crime of the victim, the state where the lynching occurred, the sex and age of the victim, and the race. She notes anomalies in context like the time of the lynching in one report: “In Brooks County, GA., Dec. 23rd [1894], while this Christian country was preparing for Christmas celebration, seven Negroes were lynched in twenty-four hours because they refused, or were unable to tell the whereabouts of a colored man named Pike, who killed a white man” (1895:91). And she examines various conclusions that can be drawn from the data: most importantly, that despite the repeated excuse that the black man had raped a white woman, only one-third of

the black victims of lynching were so charged. Cooper also critiques white data. She points out the covert racism of census data:

One would like to be able to give reliable statistics of the agricultural and mechanical products of the colored laborer, but so far I have not been able to obtain them. . . . Our efficient and capable census enumerators never draw the color line on labor products. You have no trouble in turning to the page that shows exactly what percentage of colored people are illiterate, or just how many have been condemned by the courts; no use taking the trouble to specify whether it was for the larceny of a ginger cake, or for robbing a bank of a cool half million and skipping off to Canada: it's all crime of course, and crime statistics and illiteracy statistics must be accurately detailed—and colored. (1892:268–269)

Analyzing the depiction of the African American in white American literature, Cooper first notes the general absence of such depiction, and then criticizes the portraits whites do give as often created in ignorance of their subject or even out of a desire to do harm. As a particularly egregious example of ignorance, she takes William Dean Howells's novel *An Imperative Duty* (1892), which treats shallowly of miscegenation. Howells was an American Realist, a school that espoused giving a truthful portrait of life, yet his picture of black experience is inaccurate and hastily drawn. Howells, in Cooper's view, fails by his own standard: "Mr. Howells fails . . . because he gives only a half truth, and that a partisan half truth. One feels that he had no business to attempt a subject of which he knew so little, or for which he cared so little. . . . [I]t is an insult to humanity and a sin against God to publish any such sweeping generalizations of a race on such meager and superficial information" (1892:203). Wells-Barnett, citing the work of Frederick Douglass, offers an extended critique of the various excuses Southern whites have used over history for their wholesale attacks on African Americans—fear of insurrection, the need to maintain a white man's government against the threat of black male enfranchisement, and rape. She places each excuse in its historic context and concludes: "If the Southern people in defense of their lawlessness, would tell the truth and admit that colored men and women are lynched for almost any offense, from murder to a misdemeanor, there would not now be the necessity for this [research]" (1895:11).\*

2. Cooper and Wells-Barnett analyze any situation-at-hand in terms of the degree to which difference and power interact pathologically, as domination, or justly, as equilibrium. Cooper and Wells-Barnett present a model of social life in which the outcomes for individuals and for groups turn on the ways power is exercised and difference is organized—by race, class, gender, and geopolitical location. They extrapolate this model from and apply it to specific situations-at-hand. Many of the specific situations-at-hand they confronted were identical: Jim Crow segregation laws, exclusion of African Americans from the Columbian Exposition, white denial of the African American contribution to the building of the United States, the abuse of the African American by the political and legal systems, the misrepresentation of the African American in white media and culture, the work of building the black woman's movement and of trying to build bridges to the white woman's movement. But their most personal and compelling situations-at-hand differed. Wells-Barnett's direct experience with lynching led her to the lifelong crusade for justice

B+W  
baby



that was then and is now the basis of her reputation. Cooper's position as an educator and an intellectual led her to concentrate on discrimination against blacks in education and white denial of black intelligence, and to a special concern with the denial of educational opportunities to black women—a denial in which black men were often complicitous.

American society, in Cooper's and Wells-Barnett's models, teeters between two possible configurations of difference: domination or equilibrium. Domination's project is absolute control, and found its fullest expression in slavery, which Cooper describes as the effort of the Southerner to make the Negro "absolutely his own in body, mind, and sensibility" (1892:102). In America, racial domination distorts "difference" to mean both departure from and subordination to the norm of Anglo-Saxon whiteness: "as if to become white is the sole panacea . . .—the universal solvent for all America's irritation" (Cooper, 1892:172). For Wells-Barnett, domination is epitomized in lynching, a practice "in which might makes right . . . done to a people because of race and color" (1895:7; 1892/1969:10). Both see that class and gender are implicated in the so-called "race problem." Wells-Barnett (1970) argues that "Lynching was an excuse to get rid of negroes who were acquiring wealth and property" (1970:64). Cooper especially focuses on the problem of sexism confronting women generally and the black woman in particular.

In their model, the intersection of difference and power does not inevitably produce domination. The alternative to domination is equilibrium. Equilibrium is not conflict free but is domination free. In equilibrium no one interest, class, race, society, or individual is able to dominate and conflicts are resolved by negotiation. Equilibrium requires balance in group access to material resources as well as the will to mobilize those resources. Much of Cooper's and Wells-Barnett's writings are devoted to advancing the project of gaining this necessary balance for subordinated groups.

Neither woman presented these two configurations as morally neutral. Wells-Barnett's critique of domination is a basic moral claim: domination is wrong because justice is right. If people believe in justice—and she believes that there is a potential in human conscience, a moral sense, that does support justice—then they cannot support domination. Her method and her work are to appeal to this moral sense. Cooper in particular is absorbed with making a theoretical argument against domination. In an extended presentation, she makes the case that domination is wrong because it denies the principles of the physical universe, the record of history, the commandments of religion, and the human psychological need for a sense of progress. In all these instances, harmony and progress are "the unvarying result of the equilibrium of opposing forces" (1892:150). Drawing on the theory of eighteenth-century French historian Francois Guizot, she argues that in America the contending races, classes, principles, and interests are the "conditions in embryo" for progress and liberty. Thus, America does have a race problem, but that problem is a potential source of strength and growth.

3. For Cooper and Wells-Barnett, domination is a system of oppression and privilege patterned by five factors—history, ideology, material resources, manners, and passion. The central issue in their theory is the nature of domination. This is not just a theoretical but a practical problem, for understanding domination is a prerequisite to undermining a system bent on destroying the African American.

Wells  
Barnett

**History** Cooper and Wells-Barnett concentrate their explorations of domination in the historically specific situation of the United States in the nineteenth century, understood as falling into four periods: pre-Civil War, Civil War, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction. The pre-Civil War period presents a case of absolute domination. In comparison, Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction demonstrate the conflict between domination and equilibrium. Their choice of the United States race problem was made because it was for them overwhelmingly the situation-at-hand; but this is also their method of analysis—a case must be historically specific to be analyzable, domination does not exist outside of history. Cooper returns to the study of the historically specific setting of domination in her 1925 dissertation, analyzing the interplay between the practice of slavery in the French colony of Haiti and the ideals articulated in the French Revolution.

**Ideology** Criteria of division and distinction are essential to domination and are created through ideologies that distort and exaggerate selected differences between people. Wells-Barnett recognizes the power of ideology which in lynch law effectively “closed the heart, stifled the conscience, warped the judgment and hushed the voice of press and pulpit” (1892/1969:14). The ideology of white supremacy in the American case construes difference as a distinction between the deserving strong and the weak who are undeserving because of their weakness. Cooper critically confronts Spencerian social darwinism, especially its popularized notion of “survival of the fittest,” which she satirizes as “the survival of the bullies” (1892:118). She traces the ideological transformation of African American virtue into African American weakness, describing how during the Civil War: “when the homes and helpless ones of this country were absolutely at the black man’s mercy and not a town laid waste, not a building burned, and *not a woman insulted*—it is no argument, I say, for you to retort, ‘*He was a coward; he didn’t dare!*’ The facts simply do not show this to have been the case” (1892:198).

The label of weakness is one step in the ideological movement of domination to legitimize the definition of the subordinate as the “Other”—the being so unlike oneself that the rules one applies to oneself do not apply to this other. Cooper describes the white Southerner persuading the visitor that the African American is Other, one beyond the pale of normal human responses, “giv[ing] object lessons with his choicest specimens of Negro depravity and worthlessness; taking [the visitor] through what, in New York would be called ‘the slums,’ [and naming] our terrible problem, which people of the North so little understand” (1892:108). Wells-Barnett analyzes how this ideological portrayal of the subordinate as Other is then pushed further by the strategy Adolf Hitler will later recommend as “the big lie” which through repetition transforms that other into a monster who deserves tyrannical subjugation: “Humanity abhors the assailant of womanhood, and this charge upon the Negro at once placed him beyond the pale of human sympathy. With such unanimity, earnestness and apparent candor was this charge made and reiterated that the world has accepted the story that the Negro is a monster” (1895:10).\*

The ideological practice of using difference to create Otherness employs several criteria for the subordination of others—most notably, race, gender, and class—creating a “matrix of domination” that both oppresses and privileges (Collins, 1990). Cooper’s analysis repeatedly traces the complex intersection of race, class, and gender in individual experience

under conditions of domination. Taking as a specific situation-at-hand her ride on Southern trains under Jim Crow conditions, she first notes the nexus of race/class/gender oppression in the plight of young, poor black men she sees from the train window: “working on private estates, convicts from the state penitentiary, among them squads of boys fourteen to eighteen years of age in a chain-gang, their feet chained together and heavy blocks attached—not in 1850, but in 1890, ‘91, and ‘92” (1892:96). She then points to the impossible fragmentation of self this same nexus produces for women of color: “[A]t a dilapidated station . . . I see two dingy little rooms with ‘FOR LADIES’ swinging over one and ‘FOR COLORED PEOPLE’ over the other; while wondering under which head I come” (1892:96). The matrix of domination on the one hand produces fragmentation and confusion for a lady (gender, class) of color (race), while on the other hand in the chain gang, these criteria (race, gender, class) intersect to reproduce the conditions of slavery.

Wells-Barnett began her analysis of race/class/gender dynamics with the lynching of Thomas Moss and his partners, established businessmen who had “believed the [race] problem was to be solved by eschewing politics and putting money in the purse.” The white newspapers described them as “Negro desperadoes who kept a low dive” (1892/1969:18–19). Class, then, is the lie offered as an explanation for the lynching—the victims were dangerous lower-class blacks—and class indeed is much of the reason for the lynching, which started with white resentment of Moss’s business success. She concludes that “white citizens are wedded to any method however revolting, any measure however extreme, for the subjugation of the young manhood of the race. They have cheated him out of his ballot, deprived him of his civil rights of redress therefor in civil courts, robbed him of the fruits of his labor, and are still murdering, burning, and lynching him” (1892/1969:37). She also explores the distortion of intimacy between individuals produced by the race/gender nexus. Race stratification corrupts the relation between white men and black women, entitling the former to unregulated desire, and creating a centuries-long sexual oppression of the latter: “no one who reads the record, as it is written in the faces of the million mulattoes in the South, will for a minute conceive that the southern white man had a very chivalrous regard for the honor due the woman [that] circumstances placed in his power” (1895:13).<sup>\*</sup> Relationships between white women and black men are also corrupted. White women, terrified of discovery and social disgrace, will lie, betray, even help lynch their lovers—though not always; Wells-Barnett’s cases also show white women offering desperate resistance in an effort to save black lovers. The ultimate victim of this situation is the black man “lynched for an assault upon women when the facts were plain that the relation between the victim lynched and the alleged victim of his assault was voluntary” (1895:81).<sup>\*</sup> For in the logic of the oppressor, the white man, “it is impossible for a voluntary alliance to exist between a white woman and a colored man, and therefore, the fact of an alliance is a proof of force” (1895:11).<sup>\*</sup>

**Material Resources** Domination turns not only on ideological and relational exaggerations of difference but on the marshaling of material resources—violence, production, the knowledge that makes production possible, and communication. Wells-Barnett’s case studies make clear the amount of material resources expended in lynching: guns, rope, kerosene, hot brands, nails, and human labor. Both women describe the ways whites control basic means

of production—capital, commerce, transportation, and technical skill. Cooper is concerned about the marginalization of the skilled black worker: “The white engineer holds a tight monopoly both of the labor market and of the science of his craft. Nothing would induce him to take a colored apprentice or even to work beside a colored workman” (1892: 255). Wells-Barnett focuses on white control of communication, which means that “the race which holds Negro life cheap [is the same race] which owns the telegraph wires, newspapers and all other communications with the outside world. They write the reports which justify lynching by painting the Negro as black as possible, and those reports are accepted by the press associations and the world without question or investigation” (1893/1991:75).

Cooper and Wells-Barnett argue, however, that material interest is an insufficient explanation of domination. Cooper shows that many actions taken by the dominant are not in his real material self-interest. For instance, reflecting on the experience of travel in segregated railroad cars, she can but “wonder at the expensive arrangements of the company and of the state in providing special and separate accommodations for the transportation of the various hues of humanity” (1892:94). Wells-Barnett points out as a lesson in the history of race relations that since Reconstruction no concession by blacks to whites’ supposed material self-interest has stemmed violence against blacks.

*Manners* One explanation of the persistence of domination is its routinization and reproduction in everyday interactions between racial dominants and subordinates. Cooper and Wells-Barnett sketch the daily practices in Southern society of “doing race” in the context of differential power. To the dominant in the taken-for-granted stance, the issue, as Cooper portrays it, is one of manners, of the prescribed norms for routine relations, within and across lines of racial distinction. Expectations of reciprocal civility, in the dominant’s view, extend only to those one regards as one’s social equals—that is, to those of the white race (framed by understandings of class and gender). In interactions across race, deferential civility is expected only of the subordinate; the expectation of dominants in this situation is that they will enact distance to subordinates as a sign of their superiority, occasional suspensions of this expectation in specific cases serving only to prove the general rule. As Cooper puts it, “[T]here is hardly a man of them [white Southerners] but knows, and has known from childhood, some black fellow whom he loves as dearly as if he were white. . . . He would die for A or B, but suddenly becomes utterly impervious to every principle of logic when you ask for the simple golden rule to be applied to the class of which A or B is one” (1892:218). Wells-Barnett traces the fatal consequences that flow from the subordinate’s suspension of this relational rule, reporting on numerous instances of lynching in which African Americans were charged with being saucy and, in her autobiography, on numerous instances of white persons—from President Wilson to a Chicago society matron—taking offense when a black person simply held firm, stated the truth, or contradicted a white statement.

Manners, thus, matter to racism, to domination. Through the pervasive patterning of daily relationships the subordinate is spiritually drained, while the superordinate reproduces an allegiance to an oppressive system by a multitude of taken-for-granted practices. And manners, if even mildly nudged in the direction of civility, can begin systematically to undermine domination.

**Passion** But above all, domination rests on **emotion**, a **desire for absolute control**, which is a self-feeding, ever expanding passion. Wells-Barnett sees the violent emotion in lynching as “the inevitable result of unbri[d]led power exercised for two and a half centuries, by the white man over the Negro” (1892/1969:7). This passion is intensified by any threat to itself, any manifestation of autonomy by the subordinate, for within the emotional framing of the caste system of race, the subordinate’s autonomy triggers the dominant’s self-induced terror of pollution and defilement. Exploring this point, Cooper analyzes a powerful propaganda poem by a white man, “A Voodoo Prophecy” by Maurice Thompson, published in the white New York *Independent*. The speaker in the poem is supposed to be a black man.

Within my loins an inky curse is pent,  
 To flood  
 Your blood  
 And stain your skin and crisp your golden hair.  
 As you have done by me, so will I do  
 By all the generations of your race;  
 Your snowy limbs, your blood’s patrician blue  
 Shall be  
 Tainted by me,  
 And I will set my seal upon your face. (cited in Cooper, 1892:215)

Cooper’s argument is that “Maurice Thompson in penning this portrait of the Negro, has, unconsciously it may be, laid bare, his own soul—its secret dread and horrible fear” (1892:217).\* **White guilt creates this terror of reprisal**. The lie about black rape of white women and the brutal cruelty which meets any such charge are responses of a collective memory of white rape of black women. **The dominant is afraid that the situation may be reversed**—that the subordinate will assume dominance over him. Wells-Barnett traces this in the brutal resistance to black enfranchisement: “‘No Negro domination’ became the new legend on the sanguinary banner of the sunny South, and under it rode the **Ku Klux Klan**, the **Regulators**, and the lawless mobs, which for any purpose chose to murder one man or a dozen as suited their purpose best” (1895:9).\*

Cooper and Wells-Barnett make passion neither a secondary nor a derivative factor in domination, but its **self-renewing energy**; in this analysis, they make a significant contribution to **critical sociological theories of power**—both **neo-Marxian and feminist**. **This thesis challenges the easy claim of the possibility of rational discourse and helps us understand the violence and recalcitrant determination to triumph through injustice that are part of our present as well as our past.**

**4. Cooper and Wells-Barnett argue for a society patterned by coexistence, or equilibrium, rather than domination.** Cooper’s and Wells-Barnett’s alternative to domination is neither a melting pot of assimilation nor a functional complementarity of institutions. Rather, **they foresee a society characterized by ongoing conflict between the competing interests and contrasting ideals of opposing groups who are sufficiently equal**

in power resources to prevent domination by one faction: “Progressive peace in a nation is the result of conflict; and conflict, such as is healthy, stimulating, and progressive, is produced through the co-existence of radically opposing or radically different elements” (Cooper, 1892:151). This conflict swirls around a space that it itself generates—a space in which practices of civility and reciprocity, as well as the processes of liberty and progress, are dynamically produced and reproduced. The facts of difference, framed by norms of inclusion, infuse the practice of power in this alternative to domination, which Cooper calls “equilibrium” or “coexistence.”

Wells-Barnett advocates a series of strategies for subordinate groups to achieve equal empowerment. They must use whatever economic resources they can effect to force the dominant into capitulation: boycotts, withdrawal of labor, publicity to drive away capital investment. They must be willing to meet force with force: “When the white man who is always the aggressor knows he runs as great a risk of biting the dust every time his Afro-American victim does, he will have greater respect for Afro-American life” (1892/1969:23). They must mobilize public opinion. For Wells-Barnett the problem of domination, as manifest in lynching, is to be met in two courts—that of law and that of public opinion; and these two she sees as linked: “The strong arm of the law must be brought to bear upon lynchers in severe punishment, but this cannot and will not be done unless a healthy public sentiment demands and sustains such action” (1892/1969:21). Her methods are to create a black media, to use the white press against itself, and to take her case to an audience that will listen—Northern blacks, Northern whites, and the world community.

Cooper adds to this the case for coalition between subordinates, especially women and people of color. Domination exists in the United States, she argues, because of two fundamental forms of disequilibrium in the current social system: one, the Anglo-Saxon race exercises a disproportionate influence in the national discussion, and that race bears a tradition of excessive aggression as its way of being; two, the woman’s voice has been largely excluded, and the civilization is based on the masculine cultural ethic. Cooper connects these two imbalances by placing the current civilization in a historical context: “Since the idea of order . . . succumbed to barbarian brawn and brutality in the fifth century, the civilized world has been like a child brought up by its father. It has needed the great mother heart to teach it to be pitiful, to love mercy, to succor the weak and care for the lowly” (1892:51). She makes the case for a heritage of Anglo-Saxon aggression, using Taine’s description of the barbarian of the fifth century as the quintessential Anglo-Saxon (see Theme 1, preceding). Her manifest message is of an Anglo-Saxon heritage that is contemptuous of weakness, proclaiming, “Verily we are the people, and after us there is none other. Our God is power; strength, our standard of excellence” (1892:53). But the description also presents a hidden message—that of the white man as brute.

Against this, she contrasts her own heritage as an African American and the heritage of female culture. Cooper praises the African American’s desire “for law and order, his inborn respect for authority, his inaptitude for rioting and anarchy, his gentleness and cheerfulness as a laborer” (1892:173). In her discussion of masculine and

feminine cultures, she argues that the presence of the feminine principle in the public arena will radically transform the world culture:

You will not find theology consigning infants to lakes of unquenchable fire long after women have had a chance to grasp, master, and wield its dogmas. . . . [Y]ou will not find jurisprudence formulating as an axiom the absurdity that man and wife are one, and that one the man . . . ; you will not find political economists declaring that the only possible adjustment between laborers and capitalists is that of selfishness and rapacity—that each must get all he can and keep all that he gets. (1892:58)

But, Cooper warns, for the female ethic to triumph, woman must not, in her own quest for her rights, trample on the rights of others, or be drawn into a masculine engagement in which what matters is to conquer. Looking at the **growing racism in the white women's rights movement**, Cooper is dismayed that some women seem willing to claim their right to vote by arguing the unworthiness of already enfranchised men of color, men of races they hold inferior to the Anglo-Saxon woman. For Cooper the woman's duty is absolutely clear: "Woman should not, even by inference, or for the sake of argument, seem to disparage what is weak. For **woman's cause is the cause of the weak**; and when all the weak shall have received their due consideration, then woman will have her 'rights'" (1892:117).

For Cooper, the role of the black woman in building the coalition among women and people of color is essential. The black woman represents the voice of the weakest and yet the most enduring; she is the inextinguishable element most abused among all the contending forces—and she has been too long silent. Equilibrium in the individual, in the race, in the nation, and in the world now depends on her voice.

## **THE RELEVANCE OF COOPER AND WELLS-BARNETT FOR THE HISTORY AND PRESENT PRACTICE OF SOCIOLOGY**

### **Cooper and Wells-Barnett and the Canon of Sociology**

Cooper and Wells-Barnett did their most important and creative sociological work in the early **1890s**; their work predates or is contemporaneous with the now canonized contributions of white male thinkers like Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and George Herbert Mead, as well as the contributions of white women sociologists like Addams, Gilman, Marianne Weber, Webb, and the Chicago Women.

Four claims can be made about their contribution. First, as a general social theory created through the lens of race relations, it is **without precedent in mainstream sociological theory and should be viewed as an essential statement in the context of the present need for a more multi-cultural understanding of the discipline**. Second, Cooper and Wells-Barnett were **not lone voices, but part of an enormous, segregated tradition of social analysis by African Americans—including a rich discourse by African American women (Collins, 1990; Giddings, 1984) and the towering but shamefully neglected achievement of W. E. B. DuBois**. Third, Cooper and Wells-Barnett create a **social theory morally and passionately centered in a standard of justice derived from Judeo-Christian religion and**

**American democratic and republican claims.** They strengthen the claim that sociology is a science of morality, a claim that runs from Comte and Martineau to Addams but vanishes in the discipline's scramble for professional modernity and detachment. And fourth, Cooper and Wells-Barnett produce a **theory of the intersection of race, class, and gender which adds a vital strand to the feminist tradition of sociology.** In this section, we assess the relationship of Cooper and Wells-Barnett to three paradigms—functionalism, Marxian conflict theory, and interpretive theory. In the next section, we assess their significance for the feminist paradigm.

**Functionalism** Cooper and Wells-Barnett both reject the **social darwinist ideology** of “the survival of the fittest” which permeates early American functionalism. Yet **both seek order, which Cooper calls “equilibrium,” as a social good.** Unlike white male functionalists, however, **Cooper and Wells-Barnett believe that equilibrium is achieved out of contention between distinct cultural groups rather than through assimilation.** To use the later language of Talcott Parsons, they locate equilibrium in the processes of two functional areas—integration and latent pattern maintenance. Wells-Barnett focuses on the legal system as the source of order but adds the important corollary that the legal system will work only if public opinion supports its working. She is one of the first sociologists—perhaps only Harriet Martineau predates her—to recognize the role of the **mass media** as a force in social structure. Cooper is concerned with the role of the home and the role of the woman in socializing children, civilizing adults, and reinforcing group mores. One of her chief emphases is that the **mores of civility in a highly diverse society** function to “lubricate the joints and minimize the frictions of society” and that women have a major part to play in shaping these mores (Cooper, 1892:121). Thus, Cooper sees women's expressive function as patterning not only the private but the public sphere (an argument later made in Johnson 1988, 1989, 1993). Cooper and Wells-Barnett **would reject the functionalist project of objectivity;** their project is not to show what is, but to produce what is just. Given the inequities in society, the analyst must privilege the least-heard voices.

**Marxian Conflict Theory** Cooper and Wells-Barnett acknowledge the role of material resources in conflict; but they **do not see ideas or ideology as a superstructure resting on a material substructure.** Central to their analysis is the sense that **ideas,** though sometimes influenced by material conditions, can in turn pattern the way a society organizes its material conditions. Wells-Barnett, urging African Americans to act to protect themselves, names as an immediate step: “help disseminate the facts . . . to the end that public sentiment may be revolutionized” (1892/1969:97). Cooper and Wells-Barnett differ significantly from Marxian conflict theory in that **they do not see class as the primary relation of inequality but argue that unequal arrangements of race, gender, color, class, and geopolitical location all affect individual biography and social structure.** They also see a difference between class practices of exploitation and color and race practices of prejudice, tracking the horizontal hostility between white and black workers in the United States. Nor do they see conflict being resolved by a classless society. For them, difference and opposition are permanent facts of social life; the challenge to a society is to find equitable ways to manage conflict.

**Interpretive Theory** Cooper and Wells-Barnett have much in common with the interpretive paradigm: belief in symbolic interaction, in socially constructed typifications, and in interactional practice as a shaping force in society. But they differ sharply with mainstream interpretive theory in that they see meaning and interaction occurring across lines of difference and power. They recognize that symbolic meanings are constructed within a historical context and that issues of power, domination, and subordination are always present in that construction. Cooper argues that a frictionless interaction does not arise naturally out of association or as the result of a sympathetic understanding of the other as an individual. Rather, civility across lines of difference depends on a typified impersonal generalization of the other as *any other*, who deserves the politeness one accords to *all others*. In societies organized by domination, one is never simply “any other”; one is always an other in a complex power relation. The dominant cannot relate to the subordinate as any other, but only as a “less-than” other; the closer the subordinate becomes to the dominant in status, which would seem to bring the possibility of more sympathetic understanding, the more the dominant responds by seeking to re-establish difference—through rudeness, incivility, and coercion.

### Cooper and Wells-Barnett and the Tradition of Feminist Sociology

Adding Cooper and Wells-Barnett to the tradition of feminist sociology challenges and expands that tradition in ways that are more significant than the consequences of their addition to the male canon. For the white women sociologists in this text, “race” meant diverse ethnic groupings in which the African American experience was one of many; none of them in life experience or intellectual endeavor focused on the black/white schema central to Cooper and Wells-Barnett and to much of the history and politics of the United States. The white women’s personal identity might be challenged in terms of how much authority or freedom a woman should exercise, but their bodily safety was not at issue. In contrast, Cooper and Wells-Barnett had personal and wide experience with the arbitrary exercise of power as domination and the manipulation of difference into radical caste inferiority. Given these differences in life situation, it is remarkable first to note how much there is a feminist sociological tradition shared by all the women in this text. Second, it is important to add to this tradition Cooper’s and Wells-Barnett’s distinctive theoretical understandings. Third, we must not, in presenting Cooper and Wells-Barnett together, homogenize them so that important differences between them are obscured.

**Commonalities of a Feminist Tradition** Like nearly all the women in this text, Cooper and Wells-Barnett have a faith in the moral appeal and in the human being as a moral agent. They recognize that moral agent as an embodied actor, having physical needs and weaknesses, vulnerable to intimidation, and capable of failure through bodily exhaustion or violation. They believe in the moral duty of women to speak out (and that society should educate women so they can speak out), not just on women’s issues, but on all the critical political, economic, social, and religious issues facing the country and the world. They share with Martineau, Gilman, and Weber a willingness to confront sexuality as part of human experience. And, like Martineau, they confront the relation between race and sexuality. They share with the Chicago Women a confidence in research and in empirical

this textbook does not make it easy not to homogenize them lol

data—although they bring a more critical edge to their use of that data, always considering its source. Like Addams and Martineau most especially, each follows the **methodological practice of keeping herself present in her social science accounts as a woman with a particular biography and vantage point shaped by race, class, nationality, religion, and history.**

### **Distinctive Contributions of a Black Feminist Tradition**

*Diversity* Cooper and Wells-Barnett place **diversity—differences between individuals and between groups of individuals—**squarely at the center of the feminist problematic. They accept the fact that **diversity makes collisions of interests and beliefs a permanent feature of social life.** To think of a moment when conflict ceases is really to imagine the erasure of diversity, possible only under practices of monstrous tyranny. The issue is how to equally empower all parties in a conflict to allow for a dynamic negotiation of interests and claims.

*Domination as Pathology* All the feminists considered in this book understand the **theoretical essence of domination:** the project by one party to reduce other parties to non-existence as independent subjectivities. Cooper and Wells-Barnett understand this fundamentally, **its ideal-type being their community's recollection of slavery.** What they add to this theoretical understanding of domination is, first, an **analysis of how domination operates if challenged.** They describe in detail the physical coercion the dominant will use—not only material deprivation, but brutality, torture, killing, and terrorism. This thesis is essential to a feminist understanding of domination; without it, the interconnections among media reports of **disparate but continuous violent moments in world events may go theoretically unremarked.** Second, Cooper and Wells-Barnett show us that **domination is not only a calculus of will, but an enactment of passion.** Dominants enjoy the experience of their power and do **not yield it in response to reasonable appeals.** **Domination must be understood as a pathology which even when momentarily dismantled, will—without constant countervailing vigilance—erupt again.**

*The Matrix of Privilege and Oppression* Cooper and Wells-Barnett describe a situation of domination as one in which social diversity is organized in terms of a matrix of oppression and privilege in which race, class, gender, color, and geopolitical location intersect in individual lives and societal configurations. They describe the effects of this oppressive complex in their own lives, through self-reflective accounts; in the lives of their community, through anecdotes (Cooper) and case studies (Wells-Barnett); and in US history and politics. They see that this matrix works not only to oppress but also to privilege. They look at the white male's sense of entitlement toward black women, at the Southern white woman's attempt to divide the women's movement in terms of race, and at the Northern white feminist's prioritizing of her interest, gender, over other dimensions of oppression such as race and class.

*Differences between Women* For Cooper and Wells-Barnett, the experience of gender subordination does not necessarily lead women to transcend differences produced by race and class. They write frequently on the white woman's blindness to the plight of poor

black women, on stereotypical thinking by white women about black women and men, and on the betrayal by white feminists of people of color. Cooper captures the anomaly of the black woman's situation, appealed to on the grounds of gender and class injustice and ignored in terms of racial injustice:

One often hears in the North an earnest plea from some lecturer for "our working girls" (of course this means white working girls). . . . I am always glad to hear of the establishment of reading rooms and social entertainments to brighten the lot of any women who are toiling for bread. . . . But how many have ever given a thought to the pinched and down-trodden colored women bending over wash-tubs and ironing boards—with children to feed and house rent to pay, wood to buy, soap and starch to furnish—lugging home weekly great baskets of clothes for families who pay them for a month's laundrying barely enough to purchase a substantial pair of shoes! (1892:254–255)

Wells-Barnett portrays white women's stereotypical ideas of race in her account of her protracted fight with Frances Willard of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) over the specific issue of voluntary sexual relations between white women and black men—a relation Willard called "an imputation upon half the white race"—and over the policy issue that the WCTU refused to come out firmly against lynching. Cooper bitterly portrays Southern white women's racism in women's organizations and sharply criticizes the willingness of white women to use racism as a tool in their struggle for suffrage. To Cooper and Wells-Barnett, progressive whites are potential allies in the struggle against domination—theirs is the conscience that can be reached; but societal racism makes them unreliable allies.

**Differences between Cooper and Wells-Barnett** Our intention in presenting Cooper and Wells-Barnett together has been to suggest some of the elements of a black feminist tradition in sociology. We have therefore focused on their similarities. We do not, however, wish to so blend them that the reader sees only "two black women sociologists"; there are important differences between them. The primary difference may be that Wells-Barnett was above all an activist, a researcher, and a crusading journalist, while Cooper was essentially an intellectual and theorist. But these two styles of doing sociology are distinguished from each other only in our present configuration of the sociological enterprise, a configuration that arises out of a gender, race, and class politics within the profession. In the tradition of black sociology, one has to understand that the roles of activist and theorist are linked responsibilities of the social analyst. Wells-Barnett had strong theoretical interests, and Cooper was active in fighting for black rights all her life.

Additionally, Wells-Barnett may be most theoretically excited by the ways knowledge and public opinion are socially constructed and act back upon the society that has constructed them, while Cooper may be most fascinated by the logical connection or disconnection between what people claim to believe and what they are capable of doing. Both women define the human being in terms of moral agency, but Cooper develops this position out of her own religious faith and locates the source of that agency in the "infinite possibilities of the individual human soul" (1892:298); Wells-Barnett develops her position from a belief in democratic legal processes and locates the essence of the individual's

moral agency in the potential for accountability. In exploring issues of sexuality and race, Wells-Barnett insists that unions between blacks and whites are a natural outcome of close contact. Cooper prefers to see these as exceptions to the rule, since her desire is to calm what she has defined as one of the white Southerner's worst fears. Cooper and Wells-Barnett both look to black empowerment through education and economic mobilization, but Wells-Barnett is comfortable in a way Cooper is not with the possibility that a part of empowerment must be through violent resistance. Cooper's faith restrains her here, while Wells-Barnett's commitment to law inspired by public sentiment urges her on. Wells-Barnett believes that public opinion can be shaped by both appeals to conscience and appeals to self-interest, of which the most basic is the knowledge that one will get hit back.

Wells-Barnett expresses a feminist consciousness first by a championing of the weak; she is willing to fight for the very weakest member of society, as she shows in the case of Henry Smith, the poor, black, mentally impaired man accused of murder (a charge Wells-Barnett seems to accept). Further, she makes the paradigm of gender and race central to her analysis of American society. Cooper's feminist consciousness is most present in her critique of masculine culture and her eloquent description of what she sees as the nature of the balancing feminine principle: "Let her try to teach her country that every interest in this world is entitled at least to a respectful hearing, that every sentiency is worthy of its own gratification, that a helpless cause should not be trampled down, nor a bruised reed broken" (1892:124).

## ENDNOTES

1. There is debate about this date, but it is the one Cooper herself used in filling out "A Survey of racial attitudes of Negro students" in 1930 for a study by Dr. Charles S. Johnson (1932), a sociologist who was president of Fisk University.
2. Her method of distribution was, in part, always to have copies of the pamphlet with her and to urge her listeners and readers to pass it or the facts in it on to other persons—to spread the word.
3. The pamphlet was not late, the Fair was; the management could not get the buildings ready until 1893.
4. On the basis of whether the formative years were primarily slave or free, Cooper (1858–1964), Wells-Barnett (1862–1931), Booker T. Washington (1856–1915), W. E. B. DuBois (1868–1963), and Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954) belong to this first generation after emancipation; Frederick Douglass (ca. 1817–95), Harriet Tubman (ca. 1820–1913), and Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797–1883) belong to those who had lived part of their lives as slaves; and Fannie Barrier Williams (1855–1930), Charlotte Forten Grimké (1837–1914), and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911) are examples of those born into free black families before emancipation.

① Cooper = bullies  
 ② Wells = women  
 S.P. —  
 Ida —

## READING 5-1

Excerpts from Wells-Barnett's  
*A Red Record*

*These selections are excerpted from pages 1–98. They show the main points in Wells-Barnett's theory and method: that domination results from the interaction of history, ideology, material resources, and emotion; that justice needs the mobilization of public opinion and a legal system that protects the weak; that sexual attraction across race happens frequently, but the ideology of domination tries to hide this; and that the oppressed must turn the oppressors' own words against them, using the white media to convict white people by cross-examination of the data they present. The reader should note Wells-Barnett's careful construction of lynching statistics, of which only a sample is given here.*

**EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER I,  
THE CASE STATED**

The student of American sociology will find the year 1894 marked by a pronounced awakening of the public conscience to a system of anarchy and outlawry which had grown during a series of ten years. . . .

Beginning with the emancipation of the Negro, the inevitable result of unbri[d]led power exercised for two and half centuries, by the white man over the Negro, began to show itself in acts of conscienceless outlawry. During the slave regime, the Southern white man owned the Negro body and soul. It was to his interest to dwarf the soul and preserve the body. Vested with unlimited power over his slave, to subject him to any and all kinds of physical punishment, . . . the white owner rarely permitted his anger to go so far as to take a life, which would entail upon him a loss of several hundred dollars. . . .

*Source:* Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *A Red Record* (Chicago: Donohue and Henneberry, 1895).

But Emancipation came and the . . . white man had no right to scourge the emancipated Negro, still less has he a right to kill him. But the Southern white people had been educated so long in the school of practice in which might makes right, that they disdained to draw strict lines of action in dealing with the Negro. . . . [A] new system of intimidation came into vogue; the Negro was not only whipped and scourged; he was killed.

Not all nor nearly all of the murders done by white men during the past thirty years in the South have come to light, but the statistics as gathered and preserved by white men, and which have not been questioned, show that during these years more than ten thousand Negroes have been killed in cold blood, without the formality of judicial trial and legal execution. And yet, as evidence of the absolute impunity with which the white man dares to kill a Negro, the same record shows that during all these years, and for all these murders only three white men have been tried, convicted, and executed. . . .

Naturally enough the commission of these crimes began to tell upon the public conscience, and the Southern white man, as a tribute to the nineteenth century civilization, was in a manner compelled to give excuses for his barbarism. . . . That greatest of all Negroes, Frederick Douglass, in an article of recent date . . . shows that there have been three distinct eras of Southern barbarism, to account for which three distinct excuses have been made.

The first [excuse] given to the civilized world for the murder of unoffending Negroes was the necessity of the white man to repress and stamp out alleged "race riots." . . . It was always a remarkable feature in these insurrections and riots that only Negroes were killed during the rioting, and that all the white men escaped unharmed. . . .

. . . But this story at last wore itself out. No insurrection ever materialized; no Negro rioter was ever apprehended and proven guilty, and no dynamite ever recorded the black man's protest against oppression and wrong. . . .

Then came the second excuse, which had its birth during the turbulent times of reconstruction. By an amendment to the Constitution the Negro was given the right of franchise, and, theoretically at least his ballot became his invaluable emblem of citizenship. . . . "No Negro domination" became the new legend on the sanguinary banner of the sunny South, and under it rode the Ku Klux Klan, the Regulators, and the lawless mobs, which for any cause chose to murder one man or a dozen as suited their purpose best. It was a long, gory campaign; the blood chills and the heart almost loses faith in Christianity when one thinks of Yazoo, Hamburg, Edgefield, Copiah, and the countless massacres of defenseless Negroes whose only crime was the attempt to exercise their right to vote.

. . . Scourged from his home; hunted through the swamps; hung by midnight raiders, and openly murdered in the light of day, the Negro clung to his right of franchise with a heroism which would have wrung admiration from the hearts of savages. He believed that in that small ballot there was a subtle something which stood for manhood as well as citizenship, and thousands of brave black men went to their graves, exemplifying the one by dying for the other.

The white man's victory soon became complete. . . . With no longer the fear of "Negro Domination" before their eyes, the white man's second excuse became valueless. . . .

Brutality still continued: Negroes were whipped, scourged, exiled, shot and hung whenever and wherever it pleased the white man so to treat them, and . . . the murderers invented the third excuse—that Negroes had to be killed to avenge their assaults upon women. . . .

Humanity abhors the assailant of womanhood, and this charge upon the Negro at once placed him beyond the pale of human sympathy. With such unanimity, earnestness and apparent candor was this charge made and reiterated that the world has accepted the story that the Negro is a monster. . . .

The Negro has suffered much and is willing to suffer more. . . . But there comes a time when the veriest worm will turn, and the Negro feels today that [he must] . . . defend his name and manhood from this vile accusation. . . .

. . . [T]he Negro must give the world his side of the awful story. . . .

. . . The question must be asked, what the white man means when he charges the black man with rape. Does he mean the crime which the statutes of civilized states describe as such? Not by any means. With the Southern white man, any mesalliance existing between a white woman and a colored man is a sufficient foundation for the charge of rape. The Southern white man says that it is impossible for a voluntary alliance to exist between a white woman and a colored man, and therefore, the fact of an alliance is a proof of force. In numerous instances where colored men have been lynched on the charge of rape, it was positively proven after the victim's death, that the relationship sustained between the man and woman was voluntary. . . .

It was for the assertion of this fact, in the defense of her own race, that the writer hereof became an exile; her property destroyed and her return to her home forbidden under penalty of death. . . .

But threats cannot suppress the truth.

During all the years of slavery, no such charge was ever made. . . . While the master was away fighting to forge the fetters upon the slave, he left his wife and children with no protectors save the Negroes themselves. And yet during those years of trust and peril, no Negro proved recreant to his trust and no white man returned to a home that had been dispoiled.

Likewise during the period of alleged "insurrection" . . . in the Reconstruction era, when the hue and cry was against "Negro Domination." . . . It must appear strange indeed, to every thoughtful and candid man, that more than a quarter of a century elapsed before the Negro began to show signs of such infamous degeneration.

. . . To justify their own barbarism [Southern white men] assume a chivalry which they do not possess. True chivalry respects all womanhood, and no one who reads the record, as it is written in the faces of the millions of mulattoes in the South, will for a minute conceive that the southern white man had a very chivalrous regard . . . for the womanhood which circumstances placed in his power. . . . Virtue knows no color line, and the chivalry which depends upon complexion of skin and texture of hair can command no honest respect.

When emancipation came . . . [f]rom every nook and corner of the North, brave young white women answered that call and left their cultured homes, their happy associations and their lives of ease, and with heroic determination went to the South to carry light and truth to the benighted blacks. . . . [T]hese young women . . . became social outlaws in the South. . . . **“Nigger teachers”**—unpardonable offenders in the social ethics of the South, and were insulted, persecuted and ostracised, not by Negroes, but by the white manhood which boasts of its chivalry toward women.

And yet . . . thrown at all times and in all places among the unfortunate and lowly Negroes, whom they had come to find and to serve, these northern women . . . went about their work, fearing no assault and suffering none. . . .

The Negro . . . faithful to his trust in both of these instances . . . should now have the impartial ear of the civilized world. . . .

. . . [H]e must disclose to the world that degree of dehumanizing brutality which fixes upon America the blot of a national crime. . . . It becomes a painful duty of the Negro to reproduce a record which shows that **a large portion of the American people avow anarchy, condone murder and defy the contempt of civilization.** . . .

The purpose of the pages which follow shall be to give the record which has been made, not by colored men, but that which is the result of compila-

tions made by white men, of reports sent over the civilized world by white men in the South. Out of their own mouths shall the murderers be condemned. For a number of years the Chicago Tribune, admittedly one of the leading journals of America, has made a specialty of the compilation of statistics touching upon lynching. The data compiled by that journal and published to the world January 1st, 1894, up to the present time has not been disputed. In order to be safe from the charges of exaggeration, the incidents hereinafter reported have been confined to those vouched for by the Tribune.

## EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER II, “LYNCH LAW STATISTICS”

From the record published in the Chicago Tribune, January 1, 1894, the following computation of lynching statistics is made referring only to the colored victims of Lynch Law during the year 1893:

### ARSON

Sept. 15, Paul Hill, Carrollton, Ala.; Sept. 15, Paul Archer, Carrollton, Ala.; Sept. 15, William Archer, Carrollton, Ala.; Sept. 15, Emma Fair, Carrollton, Ala.

### SUSPECTED ROBBERY

Dec. 23, unknown negro, Fannin, Miss.

### ASSAULT

Dec. 25, Calvin Thomas, near Bainbridge, Ga.

### ATTEMPTED ASSAULT

Dec. 28, Tillman Green, Columbia, La.

### INCENDIARISM

Jan 28, Patrick Wells, Quincy, Fla.; Feb. 9, Frank Harrell, Dickery, Miss.; Feb. 9, William Fielder, Dickery, Miss. . . .

### BURGLARY

Feb. 17, Richard Forman, Granada, Miss.

### WIFE BEATING

Oct. 14, David Jackson, Covington, La. . . .

## OFFENSES CHARGED ARE AS FOLLOWS

Rape, 39; attempted rape, 8; alleged rape, 4; suspicion of rape, 1; murder, 44; alleged murder, 6; alleged complicity in murder, 4; murderous assault, 1; attempted murder, 1; attempted robbery, 4; arson, 4; incendiarism, 3; alleged stock poisoning, 1; poisoning wells, 2; alleged poisoning wells, 5; burglary, 1; wife beating, 1; self defense, 1; suspected robbery, 1; assault with battery, 1; insulting whites, 2; malpractice, 1; alleged barn burning, 4; stealing, 2; unknown offense, 4; no offense, 1; race prejudice, 4; total, 159.

## LYNCHINGS BY STATE

Alabama, 25; Arkansas, 7; Florida, 7; Georgia, 24; Indian Territory, 1; Illinois, 3; Kansas, 2; Kentucky, 8; Louisiana, 28; Mississippi, 17; Missouri, 3; New York, 1; South Carolina, 15; Tennessee, 10; Texas, 8; Virginia, 10. . . .

While it is intended that the record here presented shall include specially the lynchings of 1893, it will not be amiss to give the record for the year preceding. The facts contended for will always appear manifest—that **not one-third of the victims lynched were charged with rape**, and further that the charges made embraced a range of offenses **from murders to misdemeanors**.

In 1892 there were 241 persons lynched. . . .

Of this number 160 were of Negro descent. Four of them were lynched in New York, Ohio, and Kansas; the remainder were murdered in the South. Five of this number were females. The charges for which they were lynched cover a wide range. They are as follows:

Rape, 46; murder, 58; rioting, 3; race prejudice, 6; no cause given, 4; incendiarism, 6; robbery, 6; assault and battery, 1; insulting women, 2; desperadoes, 6; fraud, 1; attempted murder, 2; no offense stated, boy and girl, 2.

In the case of the boy and girl above referred to, their father, named Hastings, was accused of the murder of a white man; his fourteen-year-old daughter and the sixteen-year-old son were hanged and their bodies filled with bullets, then

the father was also lynched. This was in November, 1892, at Jonesville, Louisiana.

**EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER III,  
"LYNCHING IMBECILES"  
TORTURED AND BURNED IN TEXAS**

Never in the history of civilization has any Christian people stooped to such shocking brutality and indescribable barbarism as that which characterized the people of Paris, Texas, and adjacent communities on the 1st of February, 1893. The cause of this awful outbreak of human passion was the murder of a four year old child, daughter of a man named Vance . . . a police officer in Paris for years . . . known to be a man of bad temper, overbearing manner and given to harshly treating the prisoners under his care. . . .

In the same town there lived a Negro, named Henry Smith, a well known character, a kind of roustabout, who was generally considered a harmless, weak-minded fellow. . . . Smith . . . was accused of murdering Myrtle Vance. The crime of murder was of itself bad enough . . . but . . . the father and his friends . . . shamefully exaggerated the facts and declared that the babe had been ruthlessly assaulted and then killed. . . . As a matter of fact, . . . [p]ersons who saw the child after its death, have stated, under the most solemn pledge to truth, that there was no evidence of such an assault. . . .

Lest it might be charged that any description of the deeds of that day [of Smith's lynching] are exaggerated, a white man's description which was published in the white journals of this country is used. The New York Sun of February 2d, 1893, contains an account, from which we make the following excerpt:

[“]PARIS. Tex., Feb. 1, 1893.—Henry Smith, the negro ravisher of 4-year-old Myrtle Vance, has expiated in part his awful crime by death at the stake. . . . When the news came last night that he had been captured at Hope, Ark. . . . the city was

wild with joy. . . . Curious and sympathizing alike, they came on train and wagons, on horse, and on foot, . . . Whiskey shops were closed, unruly mobs were dispersed, schools were dismissed by a proclamation from the mayor, and everything was done in a business-like manner. . . .

Arriving here at 12 o'clock the train was met by a surging mass of humanity 10,000 strong. The negro was placed upon a carnival float . . . and, followed, by an immense crowd, was escorted through the city. . . .

. . . [W]hen he was told that he must die by slow torture he begged for protection. . . . He pleaded and writhed in bodily and mental pain. . . . His clothes were torn off piecemeal and scattered in the crowd, people catching the shreds and putting them away as mementos. The child's father, her brother, and two uncles then gathered about the Negro as he lay fastened to the torture platform and thrust hot irons into his quivering flesh. . . . Every groan from the fiend, every contortion of his body was cheered by the thickly packed crowd of 10,000 persons. . . . After burning the feet and legs, the hot irons—plenty of fresh ones being at hand—were rolled up and down Smith's stomach, back, and arms. Then the eyes were burned out and irons were thrust down his throat.

The men of the Vance family having wreaked vengeance, the crowd piled all kinds of combustible stuff around the scaffold, poured oil on it and set it afire. The Negro rolled and tossed out of the mass, only to be pushed back by the people nearest to him. . . . Hundreds of people turned away, but the vast crowd still looked calmly on. . . .["]

It may not be amiss in connection with this awful affair, in proof of our assertion that Smith was an imbecile, to give the testimony of a well known colored minister, who lived at Paris, Texas, at the time of the lynching. He was a witness of the awful scenes there enacted, and attempted in the name of God and humanity, to interfere in the programme. He barely escaped with his life, was driven out of the city and became an exile because

of his actions. . . . [W]e quote his account as an eye witness of the affair. . . .

"I had known Smith for years, and there were times when Smith was out of his head for weeks. Two years ago I made an effort to have him put in an asylum. . . . For days before the murder of the little Vance girl, Smith was out of his head and dangerous. He had just undergone an attack of delirium tremens and was in no condition to be allowed at large."

#### EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER V, "LYNCHED FOR ANYTHING OR NOTHING"

Details are very meagre of a lynching which occurred near Knox Point, La., on the 24th of October, 1893. Upon one point, however, there was no uncertainty, and that is, that the persons lynched were Negroes. It was claimed that they had been stealing hogs, but even this claim had not been subjected to the investigation of a court. That matter was not considered necessary. A few of the neighbors who had lost hogs suspected these men were responsible for their loss, and made up their minds to furnish an example for others to be warned by. The two men were secured by a mob and hanged.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of this record of lynch law for the year 1893, is the remarkable fact that five human beings were lynched and that the matter was considered of so little importance that the powerful press bureaus of this country did not consider the matter of enough importance to ascertain the causes for which they were hanged. It tells the world, with perhaps greater emphasis than any other feature of the record, that **Lynch Law has become so common in the United States that the finding of the dead body of a Negro, suspended between heaven and earth to the limb of a tree, is of so slight importance that neither the civil authorities nor press agencies consider the matter worth investigating.** . . .

. . . John Hughes, of Moberly, and Isaac Lincoln, of Fort Madison, and Will Lewis in Tullahoma, Tenn., suffered death for no more serious charge than that they “were saucy to white people.” In the days of slavery it was held to be a very serious matter for a colored person to fail to yield the sidewalk at the demand of a white person, and it will not be surprising to find some evidence of this intolerance existing in the days of freedom. But the most that could be expected as a penalty for acting or speaking saucily to a white person would be a slight physical chastisement, to make the Negro “know his place” or an arrest and fine. But Missouri, Tennessee and South Carolina chose to make precedents in their cases and as a result both men, after being charged with their offense and apprehended, were taken by a mob and lynched. The civil authorities . . . did not feel it their duty to make any investigation after the Negroes were killed. They were dead and out of the way and as no one would be called upon to render account for their taking off, the matter was dismissed from the public mind.

#### EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER VI, “HISTORY OF SOME CASES OF RAPE”

It has been claimed that . . . all colored men, who are lynched, only pay penalty for assaulting women. It is certain that lynching mobs have not only refused to give the Negro a chance to defend himself, but have killed their victim with a full knowledge that the relationship of the alleged assailant with the white woman who accused him, was voluntary and clandestine. . . . This [Wells-Barnett’s] defense has been necessary because the apologists for outlawry insist that in no case has the accusing woman been a willing consort of her paramour, who is lynched because overtaken in wrong. It is well known, however, that such is the case. . . . Such cases [of mutual consent] are not rare, but the press and people conversant with the facts, almost invariably suppress them.

The Cleveland, Ohio, Gazette, January 16, 1892, gives an account of one of these cases of “rape.”

Mrs. J. C. Underwood, the wife of a minister of Elyria, Ohio, accused an Afro-American of rape . . . during [her husband’s] absence in 1888, stumping the state for the Prohibition Party. . . . She subsequently pointed out William Offett, a married man, who was arrested, and, being in Ohio, was granted a trial.

The prisoner vehemently denied the charge of rape, but confessed he went to Mrs. Underwood’s residence at her invitation and was . . . intimate with her at her request. This availed him nothing against the sworn testimony of a minister’s wife, a lady of the highest respectability. He was found guilty, and entered the penitentiary, December 14, 1888, for fifteen years. Sometime afterwards the woman’s remorse led her to confess to her husband that the man was innocent. These are her words: “I met Offett at the postoffice. It was raining. He was polite to me, and as I had several bundles in my arms he offered to carry them home for me, which he did. He had a strange fascination for me, and I invited him to call on me. He called, bringing chestnuts and candy for the children. By this means we got them to leave us alone in the room. Then I sat on his lap. He made a proposal to me and I readily consented. Why I did so I do not know, but that I did is true. He visited me several times after that and each time I was indiscreet. I did not care after the first time. In fact I could not have resisted, and had no desire to resist.”

When asked by her husband why she told him she had been outraged, she said: “I had several reasons for telling you. One was the neighbors saw the fellow here, another was, I was afraid I had contracted a loathsome disease, and still another was that I feared I might give birth to a Negro baby. I hoped to save my reputation by telling you a deliberate lie.” Her husband, horrified by the confession, had Offett, who had already served four years, released and secured a divorce.

There have been many such cases throughout the South, with the difference that Southern white men in insensate fury wreak their vengeance

without intervention of law upon the Negro who consorts with their women.

The Memphis (Tenn.) Ledger, of June 8, 1892, has the following: "If Lillie Bailey, a rather pretty white girl, seventeen years of age, who is now at the city hospital would be somewhat less reserved about her disgrace there would be some very nauseating details in the story of her life. She is the mother of a little coon. The truth might reveal a fearful story of depravity or evidence of a rank outrage. She will not divulge the name of the man who has left such black evidence of her disgrace, and in fact says it is a matter in which there can be no interest to the outside world. She came to Memphis nearly three months ago, and was taken in at the Woman's Refuge. . . . She remained there until a few weeks ago when the child was born. The ladies in charge of the Refuge were horrified. The girl was at once sent to the city hospital. . . . When the child was born an attempt was made to get the girl to reveal the name of the Negro who had disgraced her, she obstinately refused and it was impossible to elicit any information from her on the subject."

Note the wording: "The truth might reveal a fearful story of depravity or evidence of a rank outrage." If it had been a white child, or if Lillie Bailey had told a pitiful story of Negro outrage, it would have been a case of a woman's weakness or assault and she could have remained at the Woman's Refuge. But a Negro child and to withhold its father's name and thus prevent the killing of another Negro "rapist" was a case of "fearful depravity."

#### **EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER X, "THE REMEDY"**

It is a well established principle of law that every wrong has a remedy. Herein rests our respect for law. The Negro does not claim that all of the one thousand black men, women, and children, who have been hanged, shot, and burned alive during the past ten years, were innocent of the charges made against them. We have associated too long

with the white man not to have copied his vices as well as his virtues. But we do insist that the punishment is not the same for both classes of criminals. In lynching, opportunity is not given the Negro to defend himself against the unsupported accusations of white men and women. . . . No evidence he can offer will satisfy the mob: he is bound hand and foot and swung into eternity. Then to excuse its infamy, the mob almost invariably reports the monstrous falsehood that its victim made a full confession before he was hanged. . . .

What can you do, reader, to prevent lynching, to thwart anarchy, and promote law and order throughout our land?

1st. You can help disseminate the facts contained in this book by bringing them to the knowledge of every one with whom you come in contact, to the end that public sentiment may be revolutionized. Let the facts speak for themselves, with you as a medium.

2d. You can be instrumental in having churches, missionary societies, Y.M.C.A.'s, W.C.T.U.'s and all Christian and moral forces in connection with your religious and social life, pass resolutions of condemnation and protest every time a lynching takes place; and see that they are sent to the place where these outrages occur.

3d. Bring to the intelligent consideration of Southern people the refusal of capital to invest where lawlessness and mob violence hold sway. Many labor organizations have declared by resolution that they would avoid lynch infected localities as they would the pestilence when seeking new homes. If the South wishes to build up its waste places quickly, there is no better way than to uphold the majesty of the law by enforcing obedience to the same, and meting out the same punishment to all classes of criminals, white as well as black. "Equality before the law," must become a fact as well as a theory before America is truly the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

4th. Think and act on independent lines in this behalf, remembering that after all, it is the white

man's civilization and the white man's government which are on trial. This crusade will determine whether . . . this Nation shall write itself down a success at self government, or in deepest humiliation admit its failure complete; whether the precepts and theories of Christianity are professed and practiced by American white people as Golden Rules of thought and action, or adopted as a system of morals to be preached to heathen until they attain to the intelligence which needs the system of Lynch Law.

5th. Congressman Blair offered a resolution in the House . . . The organized life of the country can speedily make this a law by sending resolutions to Congress indorsing Mr. Blair's bill.

## READING 5-2

### Excerpts from Cooper's *A Voice from the South*

#### EXCERPT FROM "OUR RAISON D'ÊTRE."

*This selection is excerpted from pages i–iii. In this preface, Cooper invokes the image of the courtroom for her social analysis, arguing that all viewpoints need to be represented in the discussion of American race relations, and that the black woman's vantage point is distinctive and important.*

. . . The colored man's inheritance and apportionment is still the sombre crux, the perplexing *cul de sac* of the nation. . . . One important witness has not yet been heard from. The summing up of the evidence deposed, and the charge to the jury have been made—but no word from the Black Woman.

It is because I believe the American people to be conscientiously committed to a fair trial and

*Source: Anna Julia Cooper, A Voice from the South (Xenia, OH: Aldine Press, 1892).*

ungarbled evidence, and because I feel it essential to a perfect understanding and an equitable verdict that truth from *each* standpoint be presented at the bar,—that this . . . Voice has been added to the already full chorus. The "other side" has not been represented by one who "lives there." . . .

. . . [A]s our Caucasian barristers are not to blame if they cannot *quite* put themselves in the dark man's place, neither should the dark man be wholly expected fully and adequately to reproduce the exact Voice of the Black Woman. . . .

. . . If these . . . utterances can in any way help to a clearer vision and a truer pulse-beat in studying our Nation's problem, this Voice by a Black Woman of the South will not have been raised in vain.

#### EXCERPT FROM "WOMAN VERSUS THE INDIAN"

*This selection is excerpted from pages 80–126. Cooper responds here to a speech by a leading white feminist who argues that it is unjust for men of color (including Native American men) to have the vote denied to white women. Cooper offers a sociological analysis of the importance of manners (or mores) in social life and thus in affecting relations between races; an historical analysis of the power of the white South in influencing politics and manners in the United States; a feminist analysis of the corruption of the white women's movement by Southern racism; and her own vision of feminist values as promoting inclusivity and opposing domination.*

In the National Woman's Council convened at Washington, February 1891, among a number of thoughtful and suggestive papers read by eminent women, was one by the Rev. Anna Shaw, bearing the above title. . . .

Susan B. Anthony and Anna Shaw . . . [a]s leaders in the woman's movement of today . . . have need of clearness of vision as well as firmness of soul in adjusting recalcitrant forces, and wheeling into line the thousand and one none-such,

never-to-be-modified, won't-be-dictated-to banners of their somewhat mottled array.

The black woman and the southern woman, I imagine, often get them into the predicament of the befuddled man who had to take singly across a stream a bag of corn, a fox, and a goose. . . .

The black woman appreciates the situation and can even sympathize with the actors in the serio-comic dilemma.

But, may it not be that, as women, the very lessons which seem hardest to master now, are possibly the ones most essential for our promotion to a higher grade of work? . . .

The American woman of to-day not only gives tone directly to her immediate world, but . . . the deepest layers of society feel the vibrations. It is pre-eminently an age of organizations. The "leading woman," the preacher, the reformer, the organizer "enthuses" her lieutenants and captains, the literary women, the thinking women; these in turn touch their myriads of church clubs, social clubs, culture clubs, pleasure clubs and charitable clubs, till the same lecture has been duly administered to every married man in the land (not to speak of sons and brothers). . . .

The American woman then is responsible for American manners. . . . The atmosphere of street cars and parks and boulevards, of cafes and hotels and steamboats is charged and surcharged with her sentiments and restrictions. Shop girls and serving maids, . . . wage earner, salaried toiler, or proprietress . . . are . . . bound together by a system. . . . The one talismanic word that plays along the wires from palace to cook-shop, from imperial Congress to the distant plain, is *Caste*. With all her vaunted independence, the American woman of to-day is as fearful of losing caste as a Brahmin in India. That is the law under which she lives, . . . the lesson which she instills into her children with their first baby breakfasts, the injunction she lays upon husband and lover with direst penalties attached. . . .

It was the good fortune of the Black Woman of the South to spend some weeks, not long since, in a

land over which floated the Union Jack. The Stars and Stripes were not the only familiar experiences missed. A uniform, matter-of-fact courtesy, a genial kindness, quick perception of opportunities for rendering any little manly assistance . . . in shops and waiting rooms, in cars and in the streets seemed to her chilled . . . soul to transform the commonest boor in the service of the public into one of nature's noblemen, and when the old whipped-cur feeling was taken up and analyzed she could hardly tell whether it consisted mostly of self pity for her own wounded sensibilities, or of shame that her countrymen offered such an unfavorable contrast.

. . . The Black Woman of the South has to do considerable travelling in this country, often unattended. . . .

I purposely forbear to mention instances of personal violence to colored women travelling in less civilized sections of our country, where women have been forcibly ejected from cars, thrown out of seats, their garments rudely torn, their persons wantonly and cruelly injured. America is large . . . There are murderers and thieves and villains in both London and Paris. Humanity from the first has had its vultures and sharks, and representatives of the fraternity who prey upon mankind may be expected no less in America than elsewhere. That this virulence breaks out most readily and commonly against colored persons in this country, is due of course to the fact that they are, generally speaking, weak and can be imposed upon with impunity. Bullies are always cowards at heart and may be credited with a pretty safe instinct in scenting their prey. Besides, society, where it has not exactly said to its dogs "s-s-sik him!" has at least engaged to be looking in another direction or studying the rivers of Mars. It is not of the dogs and their doings, but of society holding the leash that I shall speak. . . .

There can be no true test of national courtesy without travel. . . . Moreover the weaker and less influential the experiment, the more exact and scientific the deductions. . . . [T]he Black Woman holds that her femininity linked with the impossibility of

popular affinity or unexpected attraction through position and influence in her case makes her a touchstone of American courtesy. . . .

I would eliminate also from discussion all uncharitable reflections upon the orderly execution of laws existing in certain states of this Union, requiring persons known to be colored to ride in one car, and persons supposed to be white in another. A good citizen may use his influence to have existing laws and statutes changed or modified, but a public servant must not be blamed for obeying orders. A railroad conductor is not asked to dictate measures, nor to make and pass laws. His bread and butter are conditioned on his managing his part of the machinery as he is told to do. If, therefore, I found myself in that compartment of a train designated by the sovereign law of the state for presumable Caucasians, and for colored persons only when traveling in the capacity of nurses and maids, should a conductor inform me, as a gentleman might, that I had made a mistake, and offer to show me the proper car for black ladies; I might wonder at the expensive arrangements of the company and of the state in providing special and separate accommodations for the transportation of the various hues of humanity, but I certainly would not take it as a want of courtesy on the conductor's part. . . . But when a great burly six feet of masculinity with sloping shoulders and unkempt beard swaggers in, and . . . growls out at me over the paper I am reading, "Here gurl," (I am past thirty) "you better git out 'n dis kyar 'f yer don't, I'll put yer out,"—my mental annotation is *Here's an American citizen who has been badly trained*. . . ; and when in the same section of our enlightened and progressive country, I see from the car window, working on private estates, convicts from the state penitentiary, among them squads of boys from fourteen to eighteen years of age in a chain-gang, their feet chained together and heavy blocks attached—not in 1850, but in 1890, '91 and '92, I make a note . . . *The women in this section should organize a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Human Beings, and disseminate civilizing tracts and send*

*throughout the region apostles of anti-barbarism.* . . . And when farther on in the same section our train stops at a dilapidated station, rendered yet more unsightly by dozens of loafers . . . ; and when, looking a little more closely, I see two dingy little rooms with "FOR LADIES" swinging over one and "FOR COLORED PEOPLE" over the other; while wondering under which head I come, . . . I know that if by any fatality I should be obliged to lie over at that station, and driven by hunger, should be compelled to seek refreshments or the bare necessities of life at the only public accommodation in the town, that [some] stick-whittler would coolly inform me, without looking up from his pine splinter, "We doan uccommodate no niggers hyur." . . .

. . . I have determined to plead with women . . . to institute reform by placing immediately in our national curricula a department for teaching GOOD MANNERS.

Now, am I right in holding the American woman responsible? Is it true that the exponents of women's advancement . . . can teach this nation to be courteous, to be pitiful, having compassion, one of the other . . . ?

I think so. . . .

One of the most singular facts about the unwritten history of this country is the consummate ability with which Southern influences, Southern ideas and Southern ideals, have from the very beginning even up to the present day, dictated to and domineered over the brain and sinew of this nation. Without the wealth, without education, without inventions, arts, sciences, or industries, without well-nigh every one of the progressive ideas and impulses which made this country, prosperous and happy, personally indolent and practically stupid, poor in everything but bluster and self-esteem, the Southerner has nevertheless with Italian finesse and exquisite skill, uniformly and invariably . . . manipulated Northern sentiment. . . . Indeed, the Southerner is a magnificent manager of men, a born educator. For two hundred years he trained to his hand a people whom he made absolutely his own, in body, mind, and

sensibility. He so insinuated differences and distinctions among them, that their personal attachment for him was stronger than for their own brethren and fellow sufferers. He made it a crime for two or three of them to be gathered together in Christ's name without a white man's supervision, and a felony for one to teach them to read even the Word of Life; and yet they would defend his interest with their life blood; his smile was their happiness, a pat on the shoulder from him their reward. . . .

And he not only managed the black man, he also hoodwinked the white man, the tourist and investigator who visited his lordly estates. The slaves were doing well, in fact couldn't be happier,—plenty to eat, plenty to drink, comfortably housed and clothed—they wouldn't be free if they could. . . .

In politics the two great forces, commerce and empire, which would otherwise have shaped the destiny of the country, have been made to pander and cater to Southern notions. . . . Every statesman from 1830 to 1860 exhausted his genius in persuasion and compromises to smooth out her ruffled temper and gratify her petulant demands. But like a sullen younger sister, the South has pouted and sulked and cried: "I won't play with you now; so there!" and the big brother at the North has coaxed and compromised and given in, and—ended by letting her have her way. Until 1860 she had as her pet an institution which it was death by law to say anything about, except that it was divinely instituted, inaugurated by Noah, sanctioned by Abraham, approved by Paul, and just ideally perfect in every way. And when, to preserve the autonomy of the family arrangements, in '61, '62 and '63, it became necessary for the big brother to administer a little wholesome correction . . . she assumed such an air of injured innocence, . . . the big brother has done nothing since but try to sweeten and pacify and laugh her back into a companionable frame of mind. . . .

. . . Still Arabella sulked,—till the rest of the family decided she might just keep her pets, and manage her own affairs and nobody would interfere.

So now, if one intimates that some clauses of the Constitution are a dead letter at the South and that only the name and support of that pet institution are changed while the fact and essence, minus the expense and responsibility, remains, he is quickly told to mind his own business and informed that he is waving the bloody shirt.

. . . Not even the chance traveller from England or Scotland escapes. The arch-manipulator takes him under his special watchcare and training, uses of his stock arguments and gives object lessons with his choicest specimens of Negro depravity and worthlessness; takes him through what, in New York, would be called "the slums" . . . but in Georgia is denominated "our terrible problem, which people of the North so little understand." . . . [A]nd not long after the inoculation begins to work, you hear this old-time friend of the oppressed delivering himself something after this fashion: "Ah, well, the South must be left to manage the Negro. . . . The Negro is not worth a feud between brothers and sisters."

Lately a great national and international movement characteristic of this age and country . . . the movement making for Woman's full, free, and complete emancipation, has, after much courting, obtained the gracious smile of the Southern woman—I beg her pardon—the Southern lady. . . .

Now the Southern woman (I may be pardoned, being one myself) was never renowned for her reasoning powers. . . .

. . . [S]he imagines that because her grandfather had slaves who were black, all the blacks in the world of every shade and tint were once in the position of slaves [and that] . . . [c]ivility to the Negro implies social equality. . . .

When I seek food in a public café or apply for first-class accommodations on a railway train, I do so because my physical necessities are identical with those of other human beings of like constitution and temperament, and crave satisfaction . . . ; and I can see no more "social equality" in buying lunch at the same restaurant, or riding in a

common car, than there is in paying for dry goods at the same counter or walking on the same street.

The social equality which means forced or unbidden association would be as much deprecated and as strenuously opposed by the circle in which I move as by the most hide-bound Southerner in the land. Indeed I have been more than once annoyed by the inquisitive white interviewer, who, with spectacles on nose and pencil and note-book in hand, comes to get some "points" about "your people." My "people" are just like other people—indeed, too like for their own good. . . .

What the dark man wants then is merely to live his own life, in his own world, with his own chosen companions, in whatever of comfort, luxury, or emoluments his talent or his money can in an impartial market secure. Has he wealth, he does not want to be forced into inconvenient or unsanitary sections of cities to buy a home and rear his family. Has he art, . . . [h]is talent aspires to study without proscription all the masters of the ages. . . .

Has he religion, he does not want to be made to feel that there is a white Christ and a black Christ, a white Heaven and a black Heaven, a white Gospel and a black Gospel,—but the one ideal of perfect manhood and womanhood, the one universal longing for development and growth. . . .

This . . . is why I conceive the subject to have been unfortunately worded which was chosen by Miss Shaw at the Women's Council and which stands at the head of this chapter.

Miss Shaw is one of the most powerful of our leaders, and we feel her voice should give no uncertain note. Woman should not, even by inference, or for the sake of argument seem to disparage what is weak. For woman's cause is the cause of the weak. . . .

The cause of freedom is not the cause of race or a sect, a party or a class,—it is the cause of human kind . . . [T]he reform of our day, known as the Woman's Movement, is essentially such an embodiment. . . . And specially important is it that there be no confusion of ideas among its leaders as to its

scope and universality. All mists must be cleared from the eyes of woman if she is to be a teacher of morals and manners. . . . [I]t is important and fundamental that there be no chromatic or other aberration when the teacher is settling the point, "Who is my neighbor?"

. . . Woman in stepping from the pedestal of statue-like inactivity in the domestic shrine . . . is merely completing the circle of the world's vision. . . .

. . . The world has had to limp along with the wobbling gait and one-sided hesitancy of a man with one eye. Suddenly the bandage is removed from the other eye and the whole body is filled with light. It sees a circle where before it saw a segment. The darkened eye restored, every member rejoices with it. . . .

. . . Why [then] should woman become plaintiff in a suit versus the Indian, or the Negro or any other race, or class who have been crushed under the iron heel of Anglo Saxon power and selfishness? If the Indian has been wronged and cheated by the puissance of this American government, it is woman's mission to plead with her country to cease to do evil and to pay its honest debts. If the Negro has been deceitfully cajoled . . . , let it be woman's mission to plead that he be met as a man and honestly given half the road. . . . [L]et her rest her plea, not on Indian inferiority, nor on Negro depravity, but on the obligation of legislators to do for her as they would have others do for them were relations reversed. Let her try to teach her country that every interest in this world is entitled at least to a respectful hearing, that every sentiency is worthy of its own gratification, that a helpless cause should not be trampled down, nor a bruised reed broken; and when the right of the individual is made sacred, when the image of God in human form, whether in marble or clay, whether in alabaster or ebony, is consecrated and inviolable, . . . when race, color, sex, condition, are realized to be the accidents, not the substance of life, . . . then is mastered the science of politeness, the art of courteous contact, which is naught

but the practical application of the principal of benevolence, the back bone and marrow of all religion; then woman's lesson is taught and woman's cause is won—not the white woman nor the black woman nor the red woman, but the cause of every man or woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong. . . . Her wrongs are thus indissolubly linked with all undefended woe, all helpless suffering, and the plenitude of her "rights" will mean the final triumph of all right over might.

**EXCERPT FROM "HAS AMERICA A RACE PROBLEM; IF SO, HOW CAN IT BEST BE SOLVED?"**

*This selection is excerpted from pages 149–174. It presents Cooper's sociological theory of the interconnections among conflict, diversity, equilibrium and progress; and her argument that racial diversity and multi-culturalism are essential.*

There are two kinds of peace in this world. The one produced by suppression, which is the passivity of death; the other brought about by a proper adjustment of living, acting forces. . . .

Now I need not say that peace produced by suppression is neither natural nor desirable. Despotism is not one of the ideas that man has copied from nature. All through God's universe we see eternal harmony and symmetry as the unvarying result of the equilibrium of opposing forces. Fair play in an equal fight is the law written in Nature's book. And the solitary bully with his foot on the breast of his last antagonist has no warrant in any fact of God. . . .

. . . Progressive peace in a nation is the result of conflict; and conflict, such as is healthy, stimulating, and progressive, is produced through the co-existence of radically opposing or racially different elements. Bellamy's ox-like men pictured in *Looking Backward* . . . are nice folks to read about; but they are not natural; they are not progressive. God's world is not governed that way. The child can never gain strength save by resis-

tance, and there can be no resistance if all movement is in one direction. . . .

I confess I can see no deeper reason than this for the specializing of racial types in the world. . . .

Each race has its badge, its exponent, its message, branded in its forehead by the great Master's hand which is its own peculiar keynote, and its contribution to the harmony of nations.

Left entirely alone,—out of contact, that is with other races . . . there is unity without variety, . . . a monotonous dullness which means stagnation,—death.

It is this of which M. Guizot complains in Asiatic types of civilization; and in each case he mentions I note that there was but one race, one free force predominating. . . .

Now I beg you to note that in none of these [ancient civilizations that died] was a RACE PROBLEM possible. . . .

But the course of empire moves one degree westward. Europe becomes the theater of the leading exponents of civilization, and here we have a *Race Problem*,—if indeed, the confused jumble of races, the clash and conflict, the din and devastation of those stormy years can be referred to by so quiet and so dignified a term as "problem." Complex and appalling it surely was. Goths and Huns, Vandals and Danes, Angles, Saxons, Jutes. . . .

Taine describes them as follows:

"Huge, white bodies, cool-blooded, with fierce blue eyes, reddish flaxen hair; ravenous stomachs, filled with meat and cheese, heated by strong drinks. Brutal drunken pirates and robbers, they dashed to sea in their two-sailed barks, landed anywhere, killed everything; . . ."

What could civilization hope to do with such a swarm of sensuous, bloodthirsty vipers? . . .

Once more let us go to Guizot. . . . "European civilization has within it the promise of *perpetual progress*. It has now endured more than fifteen centuries and in all that time has been in a state of progression. . . . While in other civilizations the exclusive domination of a principle (*or race*) led to

tyranny, in Europe the **diversity of social elements** (*growing out of the contact of different races*) the incapability of any one to exclude the rest, gave birth to the **LIBERTY** which now prevails. . . .”

There is no need to quote further. This is enough to show that the law holds good in sociology as in the world of matter, *that equilibrium, not repression among conflicting forces is the condition of natural harmony, of permanent progress, and of universal freedom.* . . .

But European civilization, rich as it was . . . was still not the consummation of human possibilities. . . . It is not . . . till the scene changes and America is made the theater of action, that the interplay of forces narrowed down to a single platform.

Hither came Cavalier and Roundhead, Baptist and Papist, . . . conservative Tory, the liberal Whig, and the radical Independent, . . . the Englishman, . . . the Chinaman, the African, . . . Irish, Jews. Here surely was a seething caldron of conflicting elements. . . .

Conflict, conflict, conflict.

America for Americans! . . . shrieks the exclusionist. Exclude the Italians! Colonize the blacks in Mexico or deport them to Africa. Lynch, suppress, drive out, kill out! America for Americans!

“*Who are Americans?*” . . .

The red men used to be owners of the soil,—but they are about to be pushed over into the Pacific Ocean. . . . If early settlers from abroad merely are meant and it is only a question of squatters’ rights—why, the Mayflower, a pretty venerable institution, landed in the year of Grace 1620, and the first delegation from Africa, just one year ahead of that,—in 1[6]19. . . .

The fact is **this nation was foreordained to conflict from its incipency**. Its elements were predestined from their birth to an irrepressible clash followed by the stable equilibrium of opposition. . . . Compromise and concession, liberty and toleration were the conditions of the nation’s birth and are the *sine qua non* of its continued existence. . . .

The supremacy of one race,—the despotism of a class or the tyranny of an individual **can not ultimately prevail** on a continent held in equilibrium by such conflicting forces and by so many and such strong fibred races as there are struggling on this soil. . . .

Has America a Race Problem?

Yes.

What are you going to do about it?

Let it alone. . . .

God and time will work the problem. . . .

. . . And we think that men have a part to play in this great drama no less than gods, and so if a few are determined to be white—amen, so be it; but don’t let them argue as if there were no part to be played in life by black men and black women, and as if to become white were the sole specific and panacea for all the ills the flesh is heir to—the universal solvent for all America’s irritations. . . .

. . . Let us not disparage the factor which the Negro is appointed to contribute to that problem. America needs the Negro. . . . [H]is instinct for law and order, his inborn respect for authority, his inaptitude for rioting and anarchy, his gentleness and cheerfulness as a laborer, and his deep-rooted faith in God. . . .

. . . [T]he historians of American civilization will yet congratulate this country that she has had a Race Problem and that descendants of the black race furnished one of its largest factors.

### EXCERPT FROM “ONE PHASE OF AMERICAN LITERATURE”

*This selection is excerpted from pages 173–237. Here, Cooper uses white American literary texts about the African American as her data for exploring American black–white relations, exposing white racism and presenting her own portrait of the African American contribution to American society. She also ventures into a sociology of literature in her explorations of the relations between society and artistic product. Albion Tourgee is a now relatively forgotten white author who had served in the Union army and been a judge during Reconstruction.*

By a rough classification, authors may be separated into two groups: first, those in whom the artistic or poetic instinct is uppermost—those who write to please—or rather write because *they* please. . . .

In the second group belong the preachers,—whether of righteousness or unrighteousness, . . . all those writers with a **purpose or a lesson**. . . .

Now owing to the problematical position at present occupied by descendants of Africans in the American social polity,—growing, I presume, out of the continued indecision in the mind of the more powerful descendants of the Saxons as to whether it is expedient to apply the maxims of their religion to their civil and political relationships,—most of the writers who have hitherto attempted a portrayal of life and customs among the darker race have belonged to our class II: they **have all, more or less, had a point to prove** . . . and through sheer ignorance oftentimes, as well as from design occasionally, have not been able to put themselves in the darker man's place. The art of "thinking one's self imaginatively into the experiences of others" is not given to all, and it is impossible to acquire it without a background and a substratum of sympathetic knowledge. . . .

This criticism is not altered by our grateful remembrance of those who have heroically taken their pens to champion the black man's cause. . . .

. . . In presenting truth from the colored American's standpoint Mr. Tourgee **excels, we think, in fervency and frequency of utterance** any living writer, white or colored. . . . Not many colored men would have attempted Tourgee's brave defense of Reconstruction and the alleged corruption of Negro supremacy, more properly termed the period of white sullenness and desertion of duty. Not many would have dared, fearlessly as he did, to **arraign the country for an enormous pecuniary debt to the colored man for the two hundred and forty-seven years of unpaid labor of his ancestors**. . . . We appreciate the incongruity and the indignity of having to stand forever hat in hand as beggars or

be shoved aside as intruders in a country whose resources have been opened by the unrequited toil of our forefathers. We know that our bill is a true one—that the debt is as real as to any pensioners of our government. But the principles of patience and forbearance, of meekness and charity, have become so ingrained in the Negro character that there is hardly enough self-assertion left to ask as our right that a part of the country's surplus wealth be *loaned* for the education of our children; even though we know that our present poverty is due to the fact that the toil of the last quarter century enriched these coffers, but left us the heirs of . . . empty handed mothers and fathers. Oh, the shame of it! . . .

In [his novel] *Pactolus Prime* Mr. Tourgee has **succeeded incomparably, we think, in photographing and vocalizing the feelings of the colored American in regard to the Christian profession and the pagan practice of the dominant forces in the American government**. And as an impassioned denunciation of the heartless and godless spirit of caste founded upon color, as a scathing rebuke to weak-eyed Christians who cannot read the golden rule across the color line, . . . the book is destined to live. . . .

Among our artists for art's sweet sake, Mr. Howells has recently tried his hand also at painting the Negro, . . . and I think the unanimous verdict of the subject is that, in this single department at least, **Mr. Howells does not know what he is talking about**. . . . [In] *An Imperative Duty*. . . . Mr. Howells merely meant to press the button and give one picture from American life involving racial complications. The kodak does no more; it cannot preach sermons or solve problems.

. . . [In portraying black characters, however] Mr. Howells fails—and fails because he gives only a half truth, and that a **partisan half truth**. One feels that he had no business to attempt a subject of which he knew so little, or for which he cared so little. There is one thing I would like to say to my white fellow countrymen, and especially to those who dabble in ink and affect to discuss the

Negro; . . . namely that it is an insult to humanity and a sin against God to publish any such sweeping generalizations of a race on such meager and superficial information. We meet it at every turn—this obtrusive and offensive vulgarity, this gratuitous sizing up of the Negro and conclusively writing down his equation, sometimes even among his ardent friends and bravest defenders. Were I not afraid of falling myself into the same error that I am condemning, I would say it seems an *Anglo Saxon characteristic* to have such overweening confidence in his own power of induction that

there is no equation which he would acknowledge to be indeterminate, however many unknown quantities it may possess. . . .

. . . What I hope to see before I die is a black man honestly and appreciatively portraying both the Negro as he is, and the white man, occasionally, as seen from the Negro's standpoint.

There is an old proverb "The devil is always painted *black*—by white painters." And what is needed, perhaps, to reverse the picture of the lordly man slaying the lion, is for the lion to turn painter.

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