



A Historiography of African American Business

Shennette Garrett-Scott

While scholars are certainly aware that African American businesses existed, few are aware of the established and growing body of scholarship focused on this important field of business history. Since the late 1890s, scholars have interrogated the complex intersections of race and business. African American business historiography has taken a circuitous route; this essay attempts to periodize that historiography. It identifies five major periods and the major themes and points of contention within and between each period: Black Self-Determination, 1890s-1915; Golden Age of the Black Economic Nationalism, 1915-1935; Progressive Critique of Black Business, 1935-1960s; Black Political Economy, 1970-1980s; and Revisionist Period, 1990s to Present. The essay considers why African American business has been slower to materialize in relation to other areas of scholarship outside the field of business history—and within it. Finally, it offers conjectures about the future of the historiography of African American business.

In 1899, W. E. B. Du Bois turned his intellectual attention to African American entrepreneurship. He organized an Atlanta University Conference (AUC) on “The Negro in Business,” the first comprehensive analysis of African American business.¹ As chair of the Committee on

¹ Between 1898 and 1913, Du Bois organized a series of sociological conferences at Atlanta University in conjunction with the Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems (started two years earlier) focused on issues confronting blacks. For more on the conferences, see W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Laboratory in Sociology

Shennette Garrett-Scott <sgarrett@mail.utexas.edu> is a doctoral student in history at the University of Texas, Austin.

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Resolutions, Du Bois suggested the formation of “local Negro business men’s leagues.”² Enthusiasm for Du Bois’ ideas about forming local business leagues attracted attention, including that of Booker T. Washington.

Washington had quickly risen to national prominence after the New South business and political elite enthusiastically lauded his speech at the International and Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta in 1895. There, Georgia’s governor Rufus Bullock introduced him as “a representative of Negro enterprise and Negro civilization.”³ Washington was always ready to capitalize on opportunities to extend and strengthen his influence. Du Bois was becoming a formidable rival; Washington intended to bring the league idea to fruition. In this way he, and no one else, could demonstrate the efficacy of the Negro self-help philosophy. In 1900, Washington asked Du Bois for the list of over 1,500 black entrepreneurs surveyed for the AUC. After much hesitation, Du Bois eventually provided Washington his list. Washington wasted no time in using it to court hundreds of African American entrepreneurs and professionals for the first meeting of the National Negro Business League (NNBL), held in Boston in August 1900.⁴

at Atlanta University,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois on Sociology and the Black Community*, ed. Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver (1903; Chicago, 1978), 61-69, and Elliott Rudwick, “W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro,” *Journal of Negro Education* 26 (Fall 1957): 466-76.

² W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro in Business; A Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Fourth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 30-31, 1899*, Atlanta University Publication no. 4 (Atlanta, Ga., 1899), 50.

³ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (1901; Boston, Mass., 2000), 153.

⁴ Du Bois to Washington, 16 May 1900, in Louis Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers* (Urbana, Ill., 2000 [1972]), vol. 5 (1899-1900): 526; viewed on 22 May 2005. URL: <http://www.historycooperative.org/btw/index.html> (hereafter cited as *BTW Papers*). Washington cemented his dominance of national African American business leadership when his secretary, Emmett Scott, unseated Du Bois as director of the Afro-American Council’s Negro Business Bureau a week after the NNBL meeting. Also, in *BTW Papers*, see 5:526n1 for an explication of Du Bois’ thwarted efforts to form a national association of black business people and Ida B. Wells’s attack on Washington for his treatment of Du Bois, 5:589n1. For more information on the formation of the NNBL, see James A. Bochert, “The National Negro Business League, 1900-1915: Business as a Solution to the Negro Problem” (M.A. Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1966), provided courtesy of the author; John H. Burrows, *The Necessity of Myth: A History of the National Negro Business League, 1900-1945* (Auburn, Ala., 1988), 29-47; Louis Harlan, “Booker T. Washington and the National Negro Business League,” in *Seven on Black: Reflections on the Negro Experience in America*, ed.

Washington did not give Du Bois any credit, either for the league idea or for his invaluable contact list. In his inaugural address before the delegates, Washington insisted that he came up with the league idea as he traveled throughout the country, during which time he became increasingly aware of the large numbers of Negro men and women in business. Despite some African American businesses being very small, and others larger and more established, Washington recognized the potential of advancing the race in the direction of entrepreneurship. He told the delegates, “material prosperity will greatly hasten . . . recognition [of the Negro race] in other directions.”⁵

Washington’s goals in calling the meeting included providing opportunities for networking and trading information among Negro businesspeople. For business historians, the surviving NNBL records provide a unique view into the diversity of Negro enterprises. Early twentieth-century African American entrepreneurs were supremely confident in their ability to affect the nation’s fortunes as they increased their own, and the NNBL embodied their hopes and aspirations.

Though entrepreneurs realized some of those hopes and ambitions, most remained unfulfilled. African American business represents a rich area for scholarly attention. While scholars are aware that African American businesses existed, few are aware of the established and growing body of scholarship focused on this important field of business history. Since the late 1890s, scholars have interrogated African American entrepreneurship to consider the strategies upon which enterprising African Americans relied to negotiate the complex intersections of race and business.

African American business historiography has taken a circuitous route, and I attempt to periodize that historiography.⁶ I identify the major themes and points of contention within and between each period. I consider why African American business has been slower to materialize in relation to other areas of scholarship outside and within the field of business history and conjecture about the future of African American business historiography.

William G. Shade and Roy C. Herrenkohl (New York, 1969), 73-91; and Juliet E. K. Walker, ed., “National Negro Business League,” in *Encyclopedia of African American Business History* (Westport, Conn., 1999), 416-19. For a balanced, contemporary assessment of the NNBL’s influence, see Vishnu V. Oak, “National Negro Business League: An Evaluation,” in *The Negro’s Adventure in General Business*, ed. Larry L. Martin (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1949), 104-23.

⁵ Booker T. Washington, “Introduction,” *Proceedings of the National Negro Business League, Its First Meeting Held in Boston, Massachusetts, August 23 and 24, 1900* (Boston, 1901), 1-2.

⁶ Although there are a number of popular published works on African American entrepreneurs, in this paper I limit myself to scholarly books and articles.

The Period of Black Self-Determination, 1890s-1915

The historical scholarship on African American business during this period reflects efforts to demonstrate African Americans' ability to adjust and adapt to U.S. society. From the mid-nineteenth century to the first two decades of the twentieth, the rise of big business galvanized the U.S. imagination. An ethos focused on the self-made man and entrepreneurial skill characterized the phenomenal growth in the number and wealth of corporations, coupled with their growing influence on politics, society, and culture. Critics and champions of the rapid industrialization and "corporatization" of U.S. society debated whether capitalists and entrepreneurs were essential to progress or were "robber barons" inflicting unprecedented social ills.⁷

For African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, business achievement spotlighted the monumental material and moral progress the race had made within a few decades following the abolition of slavery. The specter of slavery loomed large in the minds of African American intellectuals and leaders, and it haunted African Americans' efforts to improve their status at the turn of the century. Business provided incontrovertible evidence of self-mastery for a people less than two generations out of chattel slavery. Through catalogs of African Americans' achievement in business, property ownership, and wealth accumulation, many hoped to do more than merely counter negative racial stereotypes. They also hoped to legitimize African Americans' claims to every right of U.S. citizenship.

Two of the earliest works on African American business came out of the sociological laboratory at Atlanta University.⁸ Du Bois' Atlanta University Conferences for the Study of Negro Problems, unlike the annual conferences held at Hampton and Tuskegee, focused on sociological and economic issues in African American urban communities with the goal of supporting state and philanthropic policymaking. The AUC subsequently published its research and proceedings for distribution to government agencies, foundations and philanthropists, and the academic community.

⁷ See Mansel G. Blackford and K. Austin Kerr, *Business Enterprise in American History*, 2d. ed. (New York, 1990); and Glenn Porter, John Hope Franklin, and A. S. Eisenstadt, *The Rise of Big Business, 1860-1920*, 3d. ed. (New York, 2006).

⁸ For Du Bois' vision of the conferences, see Du Bois, "The Laboratory in Sociology at Atlanta University," 61-69. A generally negative assessment of the conferences' contribution to the sociological profession can be found in Rudwick, "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro." Subsequent revisions to Rudwick's assessment can be found in Earl Wright, Jr., "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory," *Sociation Today* 3 (Spring 2005), the online academic journal of the North Carolina Sociological Association; viewed 6 June 2007. URL: <http://www.ncsociology.org/sociationtoday/v31/wright.htm>.

In 1898, the topic “Some Efforts of American Negroes for Their Own Social Betterment” focused on African American organizations and institutions created to promote and demonstrate racial advancement.⁹ The study prominently featured schools, reform groups, and charities, but it also noted efforts in industry and small business.

In particular, Du Bois discussed secret societies, “beneficial and insurance societies,” and “cooperative” businesses. Du Bois characterized secret societies as “business enterprises” primarily because of their “quiet, business-like persistence along selected lines of effort. . . . They represent the saving, banking spirit among the Negroes and are the germ of commercial enterprise of a purer type.”¹⁰ Definitions of “business” were quite fluid in this period, as educators, clubwomen, and ministers were included among Du Bois’ brief catalog of African American business achievement.

For example, Du Bois characterized “cooperatives” as either proprietorships or groups of individual companies combined into a single corporation, a “joint stock company,” or multiple individuals joined for a specific business purpose under a loose directorship.¹¹ Examples of cooperative businesses in the study included banks, building associations, a cotton mill, retailers, real estate investment firms, and one trade union. Du Bois believed cooperatives enhanced the mainstream corporate model, and were especially important because the communal aspect mitigated what he saw as the pernicious element of personal interest.¹²

The 1899 conference focused specifically on “The Negro in Business” and represented the first academic study of African Americans and capitalism. In this sociological study, Du Bois’ definition of “business man” grew more precise. Criteria included merchants with stock for sale and

⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *Some Efforts of American Negroes for Their Own Social Betterment. Report of an Investigation under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Third Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University, May 25-26, 1898* (Atlanta, Ga., 1898); viewed 22 May 2005. URL: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/DuBoisau/menu.html>. Du Bois continued his interest in cooperative business with another conference in 1907, *Economic Co-operation among Negro Americans . . .* (Atlanta, Ga., 1907). A related conference touched on African American business in 1902; see *The Negro Artisan . . .* (Atlanta, Ga., 1902).

¹⁰ Du Bois, *Some Efforts*, 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹² For a provocative account of Du Bois’ philosophy on the role of business within the African American community and in society, see Juliet E. K. Walker, “Racial Capitalism in a Global Economy: The ‘Double Consciousness’ of Black Business in the Economic Philosophy of W. E. B. Du Bois,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois and Race*, ed. Chester J. Fontenot, Jr., and Mary Alice Morgan, with Sarah Gardner (Macon, Ga., 2001), 70-96.

other types of businesses with a minimum capital investment of \$500. Capital invested represented the key measure and determinant for serious consideration of business success, and the investigators went through some trouble to secure third-party confirmation of amounts reported.¹³ Du Bois' contribution during this period is unique because of its social-scientific aspect. The conference proceedings shared similar characteristics of other scholarship during this period not only on business, but also on social, economic, and political questions. Specifically, it used short sketches, personal interviews, and commentaries by prominent intellectuals and civic leaders. However, it outdistanced all others in its systematic attempt not only to quantify largely anecdotal evidence of African American business achievement, but also to correct methodological errors in census data that frequently underreported African American enterprises.

Other key early works during this period include the "debate" between Du Bois and Washington about the state of U.S. and regional business and its relation to the moral and social development of the Negro. Starting in 1904, William Levi Bull, past president of the New York Stock Exchange, sponsored a number of lectures about industrialization in U.S. society. In 1907, Du Bois and Washington spoke before a group of business people, intellectuals, and civic leaders assembled at the Philadelphia Divinity School. The lectures included a rare recounting of the history of African American business development since slavery. Ironically, Washington, not Du Bois, provided the historic background in two lectures on the economic condition of the Negro in slavery and since Emancipation. Du Bois discussed the general economic development of the South, which he characterized as a "revolution."¹⁴

The same year, Washington (with the help of a handful of ghost-writers) penned *The Negro in Business*, which included largely biographical sketches of the most successful African American business people, and a few essays about African Americans' progress in various industries. The work fell far short of any serious historical analysis. Its tone is largely moral; Washington linked an entrepreneur's personal life and character with his or her potential success. Washington saw business as the solution to the struggle for racial equality. He stressed that business achievement demonstrated African Americans' capacity for self-government. Once African Americans proved their fitness for citizenship, the privileges of citizenship would quickly follow. *The Negro in Business* is

¹³ Du Bois, *The Negro in Business*, 5-15.

¹⁴ Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro in the South: His Economic Progress in Relation to His Moral and Religious Development; Being the William Levi Bull Lectures for the Year 1907* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1907). Bull had been president of the New York Stock Exchange from 1890 to 1892.

significant because it provides a photographic record of African American businesses; it includes pictures of successful African American entrepreneurs and African American–owned businesses, as well as pictures of prosperous communities, churches, and schools.¹⁵

More numerous in this period were compendia, encyclopedias, and dictionaries of African American achievement. They often included short essays on a variety of topics, such as mortality and health, status of the family, the elevation of Negro womanhood, and profiles of educational institutions. Business represented only a part of the cavalcade of Negro successes. Some examples include national encyclopedias such as *The Colored American from Slavery to Honorable Citizenship* (1902), edited by John W. Gibson, William H. Crogman, and Booker T. Washington, and local encyclopedias such as *The Black Side: A Partial History of the Business, Religious, and Educational Side of the Negro in Atlanta, G[eorgi]a* (1892) by Edward R. Carter.¹⁶ A short-lived black business serial also appeared during this period of African American self-determination. The local Negro Business League in Washington, D.C., led by Booker T. Washington's son-in-law, architect William Sidney Pittman, started publication of *The Negro Business League Herald* in 1909.

By the 1910s, scholars' academic interest in African American business increased, though entrepreneurship remained a lower priority than documenting achievements in education or analyzing labor conditions. Giles B. Jackson and D. Webster Davis published *The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States* (1911), which included a chapter on the "Negro in Business." George Haynes published *The Negro at Work in New York City: A Study in Economic Progress* (1912) and devoted Part Three to "Negro Business in New York City." In 1914, Howard University's Commercial College began publishing a serial dedicated to intensive research about various African American business sectors. It published its first study, "Negro Banks," in 1914, and the second on "Negro Insurance," in 1915.¹⁷ These studies endeavored to provide objective evidence of African American business development and progress. Few authors acknowledged failure.

¹⁵ Booker T. Washington, *The Negro in Business* (Chicago, 1907).

¹⁶ John W. Gibson, William H. Crogman, and Booker T. Washington, *The Colored American from Slavery to Honorable Citizenship* (Atlanta, Ga., 1902); and Edward R. Carter, *The Black Side: A Partial History of the Business, Religious, and Educational Side of the Negro in Atlanta, Ga.* ([Atlanta?], 1894).

¹⁷ Giles B. Jackson and D. Webster Davis, *The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States* (Richmond, Va., 1911); George Haynes, *The Negro at Work in New York City: A Study in Economic Progress* (New York, 1912); and George W. Hines and George Wm. Cook, eds., *Commercial College Studies of Negroes in Business* (Washington, D.C., 1914-?).

The realities of African American business, however, were much more guarded than these works acknowledged. African Americans certainly deserved to stress the significant achievements made during this period, considering the formidable odds against them. It was difficult for any person to make a going concern at this time, particularly small businesses outside niche markets upon which big businesses depended. For African Americans, the problems of racism compounded the challenges of entrepreneurship. Banks refused to extend credit to most African American entrepreneurs. White flight from service sectors in which African Americans predominated and hardened lines of segregation made it even more difficult for African American entrepreneurs to grow their small businesses, expand into new business sectors, and compete effectively in the cities' business centers. During this same period, blacks migrated to urban areas in the South and North, forcing many traditional and new African American businesses to depend exclusively on an African American clientele. Thus, service and retail businesses such as funeral parlors, newspapers, and grocery stores increased exponentially.¹⁸

The pages of scholars' books did not reflect the tacit debate about the feasibility and efficacy of maintaining a separate African American economy within the larger U.S. economy. Indeed, the proliferation of African American towns in this period in part reflected the desire to create autonomous communities, but also symbolized African Americans' cautious embrace of the ideals of U.S. capitalism and the desire to become part of the mainstream of U.S. society, economy, and politics.¹⁹ African American entrepreneurs conflated communal uplift and individual striving, and they envisioned themselves as architects of a public image that knitted individuals together up and down class hierarchies and across racial lines. This philosophy influenced the historiography of the period. The works seldom focused on the problems of racial prejudice. They more often presented conflicting assessments, often expressing a similar sentiment: that white prejudice had forced African Americans to fall back on their own resources, but once African Americans demonstrated business achievement and, with it, the capacity for self-government, the full privileges and benefits of citizenship would quickly follow.

¹⁸ For information on the separate African American economy in this period, see Juliet E. K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship* (New York, 1998), chaps. 4-6, and August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1963), 126-27 and 139-46.

¹⁹ Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915* (Urbana, Ill., 1991).

The Golden Age of Black Economic Nationalism, 1915-1935

Booker T. Washington died in 1915, but his influence on African American entrepreneurship and business continued. The two decades after his death represented a golden age of racial economic nationalism marked by a flowering of African American business, institutional cooperation, and a generally supportive consensus on African American business by scholars. Black economic nationalism, or the creation of a separate African American economy within the larger U.S. economy, had been an integral philosophy in nationalist movements since the eighteenth century. It extended beyond debates about emigration outside the United States or creating separate territories within the United States. Shaped by the social, political, and economic contexts, it stressed economic self-determination as one strategy for challenging racism and segregation. Black economic nationalism emphasized racial uplift, self-help, civic responsibility, and economic development. These ideas percolated through African American political and economic thought during the period.

The decades from 1915 to 1935 were years of marked achievement in all areas of African American life. The crystallization of Jim Crow lines in the first decade, quickly followed by the First World War and the Great Migration in the next, led to increased cooperation among national black organizations, such as the NNBL, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACW), the National Urban League (NUL), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).²⁰ Also, blacks made highly visible, though politically negligible, inroads into advisory positions in state and federal government as part of World War I war work committees in the decades before Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal "Black Cabinet" in the 1930s. The women's suffrage movement further politicized both men and women. Most important, no one person stepped into the leadership vacuum left after Washington's death, which allowed a greater diversity of opinions and ideologies to circulate. These dynamics worked in cooperation and in tension with each other, and allowed the African American entrepreneurial leadership to articulate a

²⁰ For more about African American history, the South, and Jim Crow during this period, see Jane Elizabeth Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, eds., *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton, N.J., 2000); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York, 1998); Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York, 1998); Meier, *Negro Thought in America*; Nicholas Patler, *Jim Crow and the Wilson Administration: Protesting Federal Segregation in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder, Colo., 2004); Charles M. Payne and Adam Green, eds., *Time Longer than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950* (New York, 2003); and C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1955).

more coherent strategy for building an economically independent nation within the nation.

By Washington's death in 1915, hope for truly equal footing with whites had waned. Even Washington himself expressed grave disappointment at the failure to bridge racial divides.²¹ Scholars, too, moved away from a focus on seeking white approval or legitimating African American business achievement. Instead, the relationship among business, consumers, and building a separate economy dominated the historiography of this period. Millions of African Americans migrated to the urban North and Midwest around World War I to feed the insatiable appetite of industries and factories. These industrial jobs paid more than agricultural work in the South. African American urban workers had more money in their pockets and more opportunities and freedom to spend it, and African American merchants and businesses were eager to have much of it flow into their coffers. A national focus on racial uplift and elevation emerged from mature national groups such as the NACW, and fast-growing organizations such as the NUL and NAACP. They joined with the NNBL in seeing African American business as one promising area for achieving a broader set of economic, social, and political goals.

Many of the most successful and visible African American businesses, like insurance companies, ethnic beauty aids manufacturers, banks, and newspapers, openly rejected any hint at integration of their offices and storefronts. The clarion call of African American business appealed to race loyalty to build a strong consumer base, not as a show of fitness, but for the benefit of the African American community. Strong African American businesses, advocates argued, translated into stronger schools, hospitals, and churches. It also meant better job opportunities for black youth and black professionals. By the end of World War I, two clear variants of how to achieve an independent black economic nation dominated the historiography. The first focused on African American business development and entrepreneurial leadership and the second on leveraging African American consumer buying power and grassroots leadership. In practice, however, the two strains often overlapped; people spent their money and participated in the separate group economy in ways that crossed such intellectual categories.

Foundations published a handful of local investigations into African American business, but social scientists predominated in the historiography of this period.²² Most information about African American

²¹ Booker T. Washington, "My View of Segregation Laws," *New Republic* 5 (4 Dec. 1915): 113-14.

²² Local surveys included *The Negro in Business in Philadelphia, an Investigation* by the Armstrong Foundation (Philadelphia, 1917), and Benjamin Guy Childs, "Instances of Negro's [sic] Progress in Business," in *The Negro of*

business appeared in periodicals and journals that largely focused on African Americans, particularly *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, *Southern Workman*, and the *Journal of Negro History*. Students in African American colleges also studied African American business.²³ The most important source for statistical information on African American business appeared in the *Negro Yearbook*, compiled by Monroe Nathan Work, head of the Department of Records and Research at Tuskegee. Work periodically published yearbooks, all of which devoted considerable space to African American businesses.²⁴

Sociologists and historians published only a few monographs on these topics during the period. However, this small body of monographs had a major impact on academic and professional attitudes about African American business in the period and beyond. In 1929, sociologist John Harmon, Jr., and historians Arnett Lindsay and Carter G. Woodson published *The Negro as a Business Man*.²⁵ The authors focused mainly on the banking industry, including several case studies of African American-owned banks, with a small section on insurance companies. They included a short history that traced the roots of African American business from before slavery to the 1920s.

Lynchburg, Virginia (Charlottesville, 1923), part of the Phelps-Stokes Foundation's report about African American economic development in Virginia. The Rosenwald Fund sponsored proceedings of the Conference on the Economic Status of the Negro held in Washington, D.C., in 1933; the fund published sociologist Charles Johnson's summary and analysis of the conference in *The Economic Status of Negroes* (Nashville, 1933).

²³ Black college students conducted historical research on African American business during the period, but it is difficult to find precise information. Obscure references about theses and dissertation research on African American business hint at the scholarship done in college classrooms. For example, Tinsley Spraggins finished a master's thesis at Howard in 1935 that focused on the history of African American business before 1860. A couple of college serials appeared as well. George Hines published the short serial *Negro Banking Institutions in the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1924) for the Howard University Studies in History, and Ellie Walls Montgomery published *Possibilities of Improving Negro Business through Better Business Methods* (Houston, 1935) for the Houston College for Negroes (later Texas Southern University) series. It is unclear whether the college published further serials. The Omaha Urban League and Omaha Municipal University teamed together to produce *Industrial and Business Life of Negroes in Omaha* (Omaha, 1932).

²⁴ Tuskegee Institute published *The Negro Year Book* in 1913, 1916-1917, 1918-1919, 1921-1922, 1925-1926, and 1931-1932.

²⁵ John Harmon, Jr., Arnett Lindsay, and Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro as a Business Man* (1929; College Park, Md., 1969).

In 1934, Woodson published *The Negro Professional Man and the Community*.²⁶ Woodson included educators and ministers, but he focused most of his attention on professional practices. Dentists, physicians, lawyers, newspaper editors, and the like drew their livelihood and consumer base almost exclusively from the African American community. Relying on census data, surveys, and personal interviews, Woodson proposed that structural handicaps limited professionals' social capital. Most professionals come from lower socioeconomic, non-professional backgrounds, and they faced significant barriers to adequate education and continuing professional instruction. Racism limited their clientele to African Americans, except in rare circumstances such as sparsely populated rural areas. Despite these handicaps, African American professionals were becoming an important social and economic class because they were dominating leadership in cultural, social, and civic institutions. Thus, Woodson predicted that the Negro professional class's social visibility and significance would only increase within the African American community and in U.S. society.

Paul K. Edwards' *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer* broke new ground on the subject of the African American consumer.²⁷ An economist by training, Edwards moved beyond previous studies that compiled surveys and tables. He conducted surveys that measured consumer attitudes about, and assessments of, not only African American businesses, but also mainstream products and advertising. He also documented African American consumer behavior. His work systematically detailed African American consumers' negative reactions to white mainstream advertising images, their limited knowledge of mainstream brands, and their buying power. He included analyses of African American businesses, particularly their marketing activities and use of credit.

Using Edwards' work as its inspiration, the white advertising firm W. B. Ziff and Company published *The Negro Market* in 1932, and devoted an entire Rate Book to the subject *The Negro Field* in 1934. Beginning in the 1920s, advertising executive William Ziff worked closely with major African American newspapers. He also encouraged white-owned companies to capitalize on Negro buying power and to increase their volume of advertising in the African American press.²⁸

²⁶ Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Professional Man and the Community* (Washington, D.C., 1934).

²⁷ Paul K. Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer* (New York, 1932).

²⁸ W. B. Ziff and Company, *The Negro Market* (n.p., 1932) and *The Negro Field*, Rate Book no. 32 (15 Nov. 1934) (n.p., 1934). William Bernard Ziff started his company in 1920. According to a *Time* magazine article (5 Dec. 1932):

The most ambitious endeavor during this period was a 1928 national survey directed by the National Negro Business League. The survey noted a “veritable revolution” in retailing among merchants of all races and ethnicities.²⁹ It reinforced reliance on the African American consumer market, but admonished business owners to do more to protect their market position. Faced with an attenuated economic and social position, the “small store-keeper” needed fresh strategies to increase his profit margin and to maintain a quality of life commensurate with his entrepreneurial ambition.

According to the survey results, the need was especially urgent among merchants because retail represented a near majority (47 percent) of all the African American businesses surveyed. The future viability of African American business, the authors stressed, lay not only in appeals to racial unity, but also in modernization and efficiency: in methods, merchandising, and advertising. The cooperative ethos of black economic nationalism is especially prominent in the survey. Increased competition from chain stores and immigrant retailers in segregated, urban black enclaves necessitated that African American merchants, in particular, and African American business, in general, work together to raise capital, decrease fixed costs, and improve profitability.

Local and state governments also took an interest in compiling statistical profiles of black business. It is likely that the political pressure that swelling African American urban populations placed on municipal and state governments for better and more equitable services forced them to pay closer attention to their African American constituencies. For

Starting with the *Chicago Defender* he built up a large clientele of Negro publications whose efforts to solicit national advertising are hampered by ‘Jim Crow’ rules in some Southern office buildings, tacit prejudice elsewhere. Most Negro newspapers are too indigent to maintain traveling representatives. One of Adman Ziff’s first tasks was to persuade Negro publishers to audit their circulations accurately. In some cases he paid for the auditing himself. When William Ziff first entered the field Negro papers carried little national advertising except hair-straightener[s], a few cosmetics, [and] patent medicines. Now the list includes Camel cigarettes [sic], Bond Bread, Rumford Baking Powder, Bayer’s Aspirin, Blue Ribbon Malt, Gillette Razors, [and] Lifebuoy Soap” (“Dark Market”).

Viewed 3 May 2009. URL: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,882447,00.html>.

²⁹ National Negro Business League, *Report of the Survey of Negro Business Conducted by the National Negro Business League, 1928* (n.p., 1928). The survey is unpaginated, but summary and quote appear on the third page and retail data on the tenth page.

example, in 1926 the Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research prepared a 12-volume work entitled *The Negro in Detroit*, with volume 4 devoted to “Thrift and Business.” The same year, the West Virginia State Bureau of Welfare and Statistics compiled a report on its Negro population and devoted a small section to “Business.”³⁰ However, these studies may have been self-serving. Highlighting African Americans’ business successes provided evidence of the effectiveness of segregation. It also promoted the “progressive mystique”: social and political civility preserved the appearance of racial harmony and progress while racist power structures remained intact.³¹

By the 1930s, the study of African American business made inroads with federally sponsored analyses and compilation of African American business statistics. A cadre of highly placed African American appointees in the federal government was at the forefront of this new scholarship.³² The cadre was linked in a network formally called the Federal Council on Negro Affairs, but informally known as the president’s “Black Cabinet” or “Black Brain Trust.” This committed group of highly trained and politically astute African American intellectuals, professionals, and entrepreneurs had an impact on federal and state New Deal policies and programs for the African American community. Their influence began to bear fruit by the mid-1930s.

For example, federal agencies, particularly the Department of Commerce and the Bureau of the Census, published a small number of booklets and pamphlets on African American business.³³ Census publications highlighted business pursuits. Charles E. Hall, specialist in Negro statistics for the Bureau of the Census, worked under the nominal direction of a chief statistician to compile *Negroes in the United States*,

³⁰ The Missouri Negro Industrial Commission’s *Biennial Report, 1921-1922* (1922) saw fit to include only one page on African American business, but that small concession highlights how the culture could no longer ignore black business in assessments of the social and economic condition of African Americans.

³¹ For more on the “progressive mystique” as applied to African American and white Southern political accommodation, see William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York, 1991), 7-10 and passim.

³² For more information on one particularly influential member of this cadre of black professionals, see Robert H. Weems and Lewis A. Randolph, “The Right Man: James A. Jackson and the Origins of U. S. Government Interest in Black Business,” *Enterprise and Society* 6 (June 2005): 254-77.

³³ These included *Purchasing Power of Negroes in the U.S. Estimated at Two Billion Dollars* (1935), *Distribution of Hotels Operated by Negro Proprietors* (1935) and *Negro Chambers of Commerce* (1936).

1920-1932, published in 1935, which featured a chapter on “Retail Business.”³⁴

Some believed a market existed for information about African American business. A few entrepreneurs created periodicals devoted to African American business, but the periodicals were short-lived. Frank Howard Hallion of Richmond published the magazine *Method: The Magazine of Negro Business* in late 1920. The magazine’s slogan was: “Pledged to help keep America the leading nation of the world by diligent effort to further the economic status of its colored citizenry.” The Virginia Negro Business League published *The Bulletin*. Students in the School of Commerce and Finance at Howard University published four volumes of *The Commercial Outlook* beginning in 1923. In 1932, The National Negro Business League, in cooperation with the Colored Merchant Association and Housewives League, briefly published a magazine entitled *The Negro Market*.³⁵

Thus, the period from 1915 to the mid-1930s represented one of the most dynamic periods in African American business thought and development. Social and cultural movements like Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association and peace movements like Father Divine’s Universal Peace Mission Movement placed business development and economic self-help at the center of African American political and community life.³⁶ Though open debate about the efficacy of black economic nationalism diminished, other issues came to the fore. Class conflict and the politics of respectability reflected in the historiography underscored real tensions in African American communities across the country. These tensions were not new, nor did they diminish over time. Around the mid- to late 1930s, scholars queried the implications of these changes beyond the paradigm of the “Negro

³⁴ Charles E. Hall, *Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932* (Washington, D.C., 1935; rpt., New York, 1969).

³⁵ *Method* (Richmond, 1920; *The Bulletin* (Norfolk, 1918); *The Commercial Outlook* (Washington, D.C., 1923); and *The Negro Market* (New York, 1932).

³⁶ For works on Garvey and the UNIA that pay some sustained attention to the economics of the movement, see Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, Conn., 1976); Mary G. Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007); and Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge, La., 1986). For discussion of the movement in the South, see Claudrena N. Harold, *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban South, 1918-1942* (New York, 2007), and Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism*. On Father Divine, see Jill Watts, *God, Harlem U.S.A.: The Father Divine Story* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992).

Problem.” The growth and diversity of African American business was not incidental to other areas of African American progress.

Progressive Critique of Black Business, 1935-1960s

Academic interest in African American business increased dramatically after the mid-1930s, which was incidental in some respects. The political experiments of the New Deal made government and academia more receptive to research about African Americans. There were more organizations devoted to the study of African American history, such as the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), organized in 1915, and there were more outlets for the increased volume of scholarship from the explosion in African American doctorates, such as the ASNLH’s popular journal, *The Journal of Negro History*.³⁷

Intensified consumer activism for social, political, and civil rights from the 1930s to the postwar period also drove the dramatic increases in academic interest in all aspects of African Americans’ lives. In the 1930s, African Americans boycotted major retailers and local businesses in cities including New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago.³⁸ Double-Duty Dollars campaigns flourished in the 1930s and into World War II, as business, civic, and religious leaders promoted movements to spend money in African American businesses as a way to increase profits and jobs for African Americans.³⁹ Such campaigns worked in tandem with “Double V” campaigns, which gained popularity shortly before, and well after, World War II as African Americans hoped to gain a double victory: a victory abroad against fascism and a victory at home against racial injustice.

However, most of the scholarship during this period painted a grim picture of African American business. In a radical departure from the previous historiography, scholars went beyond describing and quantifying African American business development. Building on the pioneering works of Woodson and Edwards, scholars explored the social ramifications of African American business. Social scientists other than historians

³⁷ In the 1930s, nearly two hundred African Americans received Ph.D.s. Only about fifty had received Ph.D.s in the previous three decades combined; see Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J., 2008), 493.

³⁸ For more on the urban boycotts, see Cheryl Greenberg, “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work,” in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999), 241-73, and Gary Jerome Hunter, “‘Don’t Buy From Where You Can’t Work’: African American Urban Boycott Movements during the Depression, 1929-1941” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1977).

³⁹ See the section “Black Power of the Purse,” in Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003), 41-53; and Walker, *History of Black Business*, 226-30.

continued to dominate. Socialist movements and Marxist ideology strongly influenced their views. In drawing links among business, the economy, and politics, these scholars saw themselves as a corrective to the functional, structural approaches of previous scholars. They rejected top-down analyses, which had focused primarily on individual entrepreneurial achievement. Qualitative assessments, rather than quantitative analyses, moved to the fore. Utilizing a variety of sources, these scholars centered on the masses of African American consumers and, in so doing, underlined material inequalities, ideological class differences, and social conflict.

The Great Depression had forced African American business to focus on cooperation to ensure its long-term viability and survival. Thousands of African American businesses failed while others thrived. The latter included the press, insurance companies, and service businesses like restaurants, funeral parlors, and beauty and barber shops. These businesses were highly dependent on African American consumers. Effective grassroots activism in the labor movement and through consumer boycotts moderated the commitment to an insular black economic nation within a nation. Support for African American business remained a marker of commitment to racial progress, but many African Americans also supported pressing for greater opportunities in the mainstream economy.

Support of African American business coupled with demands for civil rights, better job opportunities, and improved working conditions constituted the democratic appeals of the African American community. Mainstream appeals for a “Double V”—winning victory at home and abroad—rang hollow for many African Americans suspicious of empty promises. Most supported the “Double V” in principle, but placed their confidence in “Double-Duty Dollar” campaigns to unify the community, strengthen businesses, and provide job and educational opportunities. Beginning during the Depression and continuing into the 1940s, the logic held that dollars spent with African American businesses would do “double duty”: enhance the profits and, therefore, the stability of African American business so that they could do more for the community. In turn, businesses could offer a broader array of services, better quality products, and more job opportunities. In this way, African American business and the African American consumer mutually reinforced each other. The “Double Duty” campaigns were not limited to African American businesses. African Americans expected the money they spent in white stores to translate into more and better jobs and services for African Americans in those establishments.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See Cohen, “Black Power of the Purse,” 41-53; Raymond Gavins, “Gordon Blaine Hancock: A Black Profile from the New South,” *Journal of Negro History* 59 (July 1974): 222-23; Hunter, “‘Don’t Buy from Where You Can’t Work’”;

Yet scholars questioned whether the dollar could do such double duty. One of the earliest and most influential works, whose author took a hostile view of African American business and black economic nationalism, was Abram Harris' *Negro as Capitalist*, published in 1936.⁴¹ A committed socialist, Harris criticized African American entrepreneurs for their emulation of the "white world," egoistic self-interest, and creation of a "racial tariff." Consumers, he argued, paid "higher prices for inferior goods and services" at black African American businesses. The apparent failure of African American entrepreneurs to match the kinds of large corporate and industrial empires of capitalists like Andrew Carnegie and Henry Ford made it impossible for them to create the foundation upon which to sustain the prosperity and vitality of every other kind of African American business.⁴² In *The Black Metropolis*, anthropologist St. Clair Drake and sociologist Horace Clayton took a more balanced view of such campaigns and of black economic nationalism. Drake and Clayton explored the pulse of African American consumers and businesses in Chicago in their chapter "Negro Business: Myth and Fact."⁴³

Invectives against the African American entrepreneurial class and pointed criticisms of racism in U.S. society characterized the historiography in the 1940s. Merah S. Stuart stressed the role of segregation in "detouring" African American entrepreneurship in her book, *An Economic Detour*. Joseph Pierce's *Negro Business and Business Education* and Vishnu Oak's *The Negro's Adventure in General Business* both stressed that the structural problems African American businesses faced—particularly limited access to credit and capital, white and immigrant competition, and a hostile racial climate—adulterated any possible communal benefit African American entrepreneurship could offer.⁴⁴ Pierce

Robert Mark Silverman, "Ethnic Solidarity and Black Business: The Case of Ethnic Beauty Aids Distributors in Chicago," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 58 (Oct. 1999): 835-39; and Walker, *History of Black Business*, 226-30.

⁴¹ Harris, *Negro as Capitalist: A Study of Banking and Business among American Negroes* (1936; College Park, Md., 1968).

⁴² *Ibid.*, ix-x, 1-45, 54, 59-61, 165-74, 177-78, and 184, quote on p. 178. For an overview of his political views, see Abram L. Harris, *Race, Radicalism, and Reform: Selected Papers*, edited with an introduction by William Darity, Jr. (New Brunswick, N.J., 1989).

⁴³ St. Clair Drake and Horace Clayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945; New York, 1970), 430-69.

⁴⁴ Merah S. Stuart, *An Economic Detour* (New York, 1940); Joseph Pierce, *Negro Business and Business Education: Their Prospect and Prospective Development* (New York, 1947); and Vishnu Oak, *The Negro's Adventure in General Business* (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1949). Stuart, an insurance executive, mostly praises African American business accomplishments. Oak, though generally critical of

attacked the popular rhetoric of black economic nationalism. He charged that African American entrepreneurs were not interested in racial uplift, providing occupational mobility, or developing the community. Their primary agenda was to advance the interests of the African American middle and elite classes over the working and poor classes.⁴⁵

Two white social scientists turned their attention to African American business in a full-length monograph rather than smaller college studies or journal articles. Robert H. Kinzer and Edward Sagarin explored the achievements and failures of black economic nationalism in *The Negro in American Business*.⁴⁶ Their synthetic treatment focused on the viability of sustaining a separate economy versus integration into mainstream U.S. business. As with other works during this period, they included a cursory historical description of African American business. Their work is most important, however, because it synthesizes much of the African American business historiography up to the mid-twentieth century. Washington, Du Bois, Woodson, and others appear in their bibliography. In Kinzer and Sagarin's final assessment, they suggest integration as the best direction for the future of African American business, but note the compelling benefits associated with a separate economy.

Sociologist Edward Franklin Frazier's youthful Marxist views had not faded by the 1950s, when he penned the classic work, *Black Bourgeoisie* (published in France in 1953 and in the United States in 1955). Frazier laid out a sustained criticism of African American middle-class leadership and launched a pointed attack against African American business.⁴⁷ Frazier's work extends both Harris's and Pierce's earlier observations about the degraded class status of African American poor and working classes. However, Frazier's focus is not class struggle, but internalized conflict: racial self-hate and social isolation at the psychosocial level. He links the "deep-seated inferiority complex" of the African American middle class to its false sense of pride in its "insignificant" entrepreneurial class.⁴⁸ For these scholars, black economic nationalism and African American business

African American business, does cite several examples of small business successes.

⁴⁵ Pierce, *Negro Business*, 15, 23, and 25-26. Also, see Harris, *Negro as Capitalist*, 49-53.

⁴⁶ Robert H. Kinzer and Edward Sagarin, *The Negro in American Business: The Conflict Between Separatism and Integration* (New York, 1950).

⁴⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York, 1962). For more on Frazier's personal politics, see Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Durham, N.C., 2002); Anthony M. Platt, "Between Scorn and Longing: Frazier's 'Black Bourgeoisie,'" *Social Justice* 20 (Spring-Summer 1993): 129-40; and Anthony M. Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1991).

⁴⁸ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 27-28.

represented, at best, naïve optimism by the African American aspiring and working classes and, at worst, pernicious self-interest by the African American elite.

The legacy of the socialist movement bore fruit in a generation of young scholars in the civil rights and Black Power movements of the late 1950s and 1960s. As well-educated members of the African American community with new opportunities opening to them as a result of integration, many took it as their mandate to be self-critical of their upward mobility and to re-evaluate the relationship of African Americans to U.S. society. They were convinced that the elite leadership model of African American business had only compounded the African American community's miseries, and it had utterly failed to advance a viable strategy for African Americans' collective benefit. For scholars during the 1960s, concerns about the economics of African American progress fell away in the political and cultural concerns of Black Power and Black Nationalism movements.

Taking a cue from Frazier's criticisms of the African American middle class, Harold Cruse issued a "polemical call to arms" to black intellectuals in *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967).⁴⁹ He did not see African American business merely as a political or economic question, but explored its contours and ramifications at the cultural level. Harold Cruse critiqued integration and Black Nationalism, arguing that African American intellectuals were at a propitious juncture in articulating and directing the relationship of African Americans to U.S. society. He criticized black economic nationalism as a misguided cultural revolution that had been "late, limited, and marginal." Its lack of cultural imagination limited its efficacy for developing a distinctive, Afro-centric economic base in both the black community and the larger society.⁵⁰

The 1970 publication of Earl Ofari's *The Myth of Black Capitalism* bookended the period in African American business historiography focused on socioeconomic and cultural ideology. Ofari argued that white corporate capitalism fractured African American communities and institutions. He meted out criticism of organizations, social movements, institutions, and individuals. The nefarious influence of white corporate

⁴⁹ Quote in Jerry G. Watts, "Introduction," in *Harold Cruse's The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual Reconsidered*, ed. Harold Cruse and Jerry Gafio Watts (London, 2004), 1-16, quotation at p. 2; and Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (1967; New York, 1984); see specifically his essays on "Individualism and the Open Society" (3-10), "Harlem Background—The Rise of Economic Nationalism and Origins of Cultural Revolution" (11-63), and reprints of articles from *Freedomways*: "Black Economy: Self-Made Myth" (305-18) and "Capitalism Revisited" (319-36).

⁵⁰ Cruse, "Harlem Background," 24.

capitalism pervaded African American business organizations, such as the National Negro Business League, and civil rights organizations like the NAACP. Ofari left almost no stone unturned. He criticized movements such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association and “Double Duty Dollars” campaigns; institutions such as the African American church and policy banks; and African American entrepreneurial icons such as Madame C. J. Walker, for psychologically and economically exploiting African Americans in urban communities.⁵¹

The historiography in this period more accurately reflects the conflicts between African American entrepreneurs and their communities. The failure of organizations like the NNBL to build interracial consensus around entrepreneurship did not represent a failure of black economic nationalism as a philosophy, but the failure of U.S. society to live up to its liberal ideals. The period was one of both change and continuity. Some businesses, including the press and music industries, continued to fare well by concentrating on products and services that appealed largely to African Americans, but also attracted the interest of whites.⁵²

Works like Ofari’s and Cruse’s continued to appear periodically in African American business historiography through the end of the twentieth century.⁵³ However, the 1970s and 1980s ushered in a new focus that abandoned pedestrian, Marxist analyses to offer more than banal calls for radical social change or an overthrow of capitalist economies. This new generation of scholars sought to do more than criticize African American business and galvanize intellectuals and civic leaders. The post-World

⁵¹ Earl Ofari, *The Myth of Black Capitalism* (New York, 1970), 25 and 31-65.

⁵² For historical examples, consider Claude Barnett’s Associated Negro Press news service; millionaire hotelier, banker, and developer A. G. Gaston; and music mogul Berry Gordy. On Barnett, see Lawrence D. Hogan, *A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1919-1945* (Cranbury, N.J., 1984). On Gaston, see A. G. Gaston, *Green Power: The Successful Way of A. G. Gaston* (Carbondale, Ill., 1968); Carol Jenkins and Elizabeth Gardner Hines, *Black Titan: A. G. Gaston and the Making of a Black American Millionaire* (New York, 2004); and Walker, *History of Black Business*, 298-99. On Gordy, see Nelson George, *Where Did Our Love Go? The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound* (Urbana, Ill., 2007); and Walker, *History of Black Business*, 301-2.

⁵³ For example, Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society*, rev. ed. (Boston, 2000) criticizes the effort to knit together “isolated instances” of business success into a “general theory of group upward mobility via capitalism” (p. 141). Marable offers a historical critique of Booker T. Washington, arguing that Washington’s economic philosophy proved hopelessly anachronistic because it ignored a number of serious deficiencies in building a black business class, including lack of training in business methods, especially advertising, managing employees, and record-keeping; illiteracy; and the dwindling numbers of skilled black artisans.

War period convinced many entrepreneurs that the solution to their chronic problems of capital and local discrimination lay in federal intervention. In the following decades, African Americans focused on marshalling federal resources to place the power of enterprise in the hands of the masses.

Black Political Economy, 1970-1980s

In the 1970s, appalling poverty in urban ghettos and rural communities, the disintegration of established black neighborhoods in the name of urban renewal, and disparate gaps in wealth and opportunity shifted attention back to African American business as a panacea for alleviating social ills. In an environment promoting the benefits of integration, the new strain of African American business historiography focused on how African Americans could leverage the federal government to address abuses of the past and open up opportunities for more African Americans to acquire the elusive “American Dream.” For example, many African Americans hoped that Lyndon B. Johnson’s Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), created in 1964, would provide more opportunities than the limited success African American businesses met with the Small Business Administration (SBA) in the late 1950s. By 1968, however, the OEO experienced a number of defaults and fell under the SBA, which continued to discriminate in lending to minorities. In addition, the OEO primarily focused on employment, not economic or business development.⁵⁴ By contrast, Richard Nixon advanced a black capitalism initiative focused specifically on economic development in black communities. Subsequent scholars have argued that the initiative’s primary aims were not economic development, but to reduce African American competition with white businesses and to neutralize political militancy.⁵⁵

Much of the African American business historiography of the 1970s addressed policy initiatives and focused on urban areas. Social historians stepped to the fore, utilizing some of the paradigms of the sociologists who had dominated the scholarship. For social historians, economic development served as the idiom to discuss African American entrepreneurship in less individualistic terms and to encompass broader aspects of the black political economy. More interdisciplinary in focus, the black political

⁵⁴ Walker, *History of Black Business*, 268-70.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 276-77. Also see Robert E. Weems, Jr.’s considerable body of work on African American entrepreneurship and the government: with Lewis A. Randolph, “The National Response to Richard M. Nixon’s Black Capitalism Initiative: The Success of Domestic Détente,” *Journal of Black Studies* 32 (Sept. 2001): 66-83; “The Right Man”; and *Business in Black and White: American Presidents and Black Entrepreneurs in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2009). Also, see Thomas Boston, *Affirmative Action and Black Entrepreneurship* (London, 1999).

economy involves not just individual businesses, but their relationship to politics, law, economy, and society. These scholars continued to produce and rely on statistical data, as sociologists had done, but they also used the tools of business historians—anecdotal evidence and case studies—to measure and gauge the successes, failures, and limitations of the federal government's black enterprise initiatives in urban, or more accurately, ghetto communities.

Works characteristic of the period include national analyses, case studies, and surveys. An example of national analysis is Timothy M. Bates' *Black Capitalism: A Quantitative Analysis and Trends in Government Promotion of Black Entrepreneurship*. Case studies include Alan R. Andreasen's *Ghetto Business: A Study of Inner City Businesses and Businessmen in Buffalo, New York*; Frederick E. Case's *Black Capitalism: Problems in Development: A Case Study of Los Angeles*; and David Caplovitz's *The Merchants of Harlem: A Study of Small Business in a Black Community*. General contemporary surveys include Theodore Cross' *Black Capitalism: Strategy for Business in the Ghetto* and Alvin Puryear's *Black Enterprise, Inc.: Case Studies of a New Experiment in Black Business Development*.⁵⁶ By the late 1970s, the conclusions most had reached reflected a mixed future for African American business. Black capitalism provided an avenue of opportunity for only a limited number of African Americans, ghetto revitalization had largely failed, and the most promising path for business-minded African Americans lay in integrating corporate America.⁵⁷

In the mid-1970s to 1980s, many historians shifted back to the craft of telling stories. Historians wrested African American business historiography from the inordinate influence of other social sciences during this period, especially sociologists and economists. Their influence would continue to dominate the subsequent decade. The focus on providing academic fodder for government policy initiatives only partly reflected the strides African Americans made in corporate ventures. Rather than focus on policy or assessments of the relative merits or shortcomings of African

⁵⁶ Timothy M. Bates, *Black Capitalism: A Quantitative Analysis* (New York, 1973) and *Trends in Government Promotion of Black Entrepreneurship* (Madison, Wisc., 1975); Alan R. Andreasen, *Ghetto Business: A Study of Inner City Businesses and Businessmen in Buffalo, New York* (New York, 1970); Frederick E. Case, *Black Capitalism: Problems in Development: A Case Study of Los Angeles* (New York, 1972); David Caplovitz, *The Merchants of Harlem: A Study of Small Business in a Black Community* (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1973); Cross, *Black Capitalism: Strategy for Business in the Ghetto* (New York, 1970); and Alvin Puryear, *Black Enterprise, Inc.: Case Studies of a New Experiment in Black Business Development* (Garden City, N.Y., 1973).

⁵⁷ Edward D. Irons, "Black Entrepreneurship: Its Rationale, Its Problems, Its Prospects," *Phylon* 37, no. 1 (1976): 12-25.

American business, they focused on African American business as an object worthy of historical study.

The rise of Black Studies programs and the increased numbers of African Americans on college campuses fueled a renaissance in historical writing about successful African American entrepreneurs and companies. A number of theses and dissertations focused on African American entrepreneurs, business sectors, and comparative analyses in the 1980s.⁵⁸ Some prosopographies and individual biographies also appeared. Biographies included works about twentieth-century African American entrepreneurs like Mississippi barber Robert Weir and Chicago banker P. W. Chavers, and about earlier entrepreneurs such as former slave, manufacturer, and town founder Free Frank McWorter and slaveholder Andrew Durnford.⁵⁹

In addition, histories of African American companies, enterprises, and organizations appeared, whose authors mined archival material to present a historical assessment of African American business rather than a laudatory account of African American progress. In *The Pursuit of a Dream*, Janet Sharp Hermann provided a history of former slave Benjamin Montgomery's efforts to create an interracial cooperative

⁵⁸ For example, Herbert Leon Clark, "The Public Career of James Carroll Napier: Businessman, Politician, and Crusader for Racial Justice, 1845-1940" (Ph.D. diss., Middle Tennessee State University, 1980); McClezon K. Alexander. "The Black Entrepreneur in the Trucking Industry" (M.A. Thesis, Ball State University, 1986); Michael Andrew Fitzpatrick, "Shaw, Washington's Premier Black Neighborhood: An Examination of the Origins and Development of a Black Business Movement, 1880-1920" (M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1989); and Robert L Boyd, "Ethnic Entrepreneurs in the New Economy: Business Enterprise among Asian Americans and Blacks in a Changing Urban Environment" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 1989). A dissertation later published as a book is Robert Everett Weems, "The History of the Chicago Metropolitan Mutual Assurance Company: An Examination of Business as a Black Community Institution" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987).

⁵⁹ Some prosopographies include John W. Seder and Berkeley G. Burrell, *Getting It Together: Black Businessmen in America* (New York, 1971); and Jean Marie Thomas, *The Legacy of Black Pioneers* ([Anderson, S.C.], 1982). Their biographies are Sadye H. Wier and John F. Marszalek, *A Black Businessman in White Mississippi, 1886-1974* (Jackson, Miss., 1977); Madrue Chavers-Wright, *The Guarantee: P. W. Chavers, Banker, Entrepreneur, Philanthropist in Chicago's Black Belt of the Twenties* (New York, 1985); Juliet E. K. Walker, *Free Frank: A Black Pioneer on the Antebellum Frontier* (Lexington, Ky., 1983); and David O. Whitten, *Andrew Durnford: A Black Sugar Planter in the Antebellum South* (1981; New Brunswick, N.J., 1995). A few autobiographies appeared as well, including Willie Lee Morrow, credited with creating the "curly perm," *How I Created a Billion Dollar Industry* (Newport Beach, Calif., 1984).

community in Mississippi, and the eventual founding of the black town Mound Bayou by Montgomery's son, successful entrepreneur Isaiah Montgomery. In *Black Business in the New South*, Walter B. Weare traced the history and influence of North Carolina Mutual, one of the largest and most successful early twentieth-century African American businesses in the United States.⁶⁰

The period of the black political economy in African American business historiography represents a time when blacks expressed both hope and frustration with political and economic institutions in U.S. society and economy. The victories of the civil rights movements yielded some fruit, but they also revealed the need to accomplish much more for African Americans to achieve full equality in the United States. African American business failed to alleviate the plight of the poor isolated in ghettos, even as it provided unmatched opportunities for a new generation of entrepreneurs to capitalize on government initiatives and expanding opportunities in a growing corporate and global marketplace. The social critique of African American business faded as the historiography left policy concerns to specialists and further turned to uncovering the rich historical legacy of African American business.

Revisionist Period, 1990s to the Early Twenty-First Century

The authors of a handful of general works revisited the question of the historical relevancy of the separate black economy and the future of African American business as the new millennium approached. In *Black Entrepreneurship in America* (1990), Shelley Green and Paul Pryde identified the structural, social, psychological, and cultural combination of factors that limited African American entrepreneurship and, in their opinion, bifurcated the African American middle from the "underclass." They reiterated themes from the previous two decades, especially the crippling effect of racism, which dealt African American entrepreneurs a double blow. First, racism exacerbated chronic social problems such as poverty, and second, it handicapped "entrepreneurial approaches" designed to alleviate those problems. The two themes coalesced in a vicious cycle: African American entrepreneurs possessed few business skills and even fewer dollars. In addition, they charged, African American culture and social life lacked "opportunity structures," and only a small

⁶⁰ Janet Sharp Hermann, *The Pursuit of A Dream* (New York, 1983), and Walter B. Weare, *Black Business in the New South: A Social History of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company* (Urbana, Ill., 1973). Also see Donald F. Joyce, *Gatekeepers of Black Culture: Black-Owned Book Publishing in the United States, 1817-1981* (Westport, Conn., 1983). For an organizational history, see John H. Burrows, *The Necessity of Myth: A History of the National Negro Business League, 1900-1945* (Auburn, Ala., 1988).

percentage of enterprising African Americans could take advantage them.⁶¹

The major shortcoming of Green and Pryde's work is its victim-centered, reactionary rhetoric that hopes to refute claims of African American biological and cultural inferiority, but often reinforces them. They fail to engage seriously with African American businesses at all; instead, they look at the development of an ill-defined entrepreneurial culture within African American social institutions such as voluntary associations and schools and in nuclear and extended families. They do not explore why black economic nationalism continues as a viable ideology among African American business to address racism and poverty in the African American community. However, they go further than previous efforts to link structural processes and historic contexts to cultural and social effects.

John Sibley Butler, in the recently revised edition of his *Entrepreneurship and Self-Help among Black Americans* (first published in 1991), endeavors to make linkages among structures, contexts, and effects.⁶² Butler foregrounds objective, quantifiable "group factors" to draw qualitative conclusions and analyses about the development of African American business over time. Going beyond conventional assimilation-marginalization models of racial and ethnic group business activity, Butler centers racial and ethnic enterprises as phenomena with their own internal logics. Therefore, factors that seem anomalous in traditional business analyses emerge as sets of viable, distinct, and legitimate institutions, practices, and strategies for survival in the marketplace.

Butler's work reinforces that of previous scholars in acknowledging the structural and social factors that attenuated African American business success. However, he goes far beyond them by focusing on the importance of African American business achievements to local communities, particularly the development of African American business enclaves. Butler's primary interests lay in formulating and implementing policy strategies for current and future African American and ethnic businesses, rather than a detailed historical analysis of African American business.⁶³

⁶¹ Shelley Green and Paul Pryde, *Black Entrepreneurship in America* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1990).

⁶² John Sibley Butler, *Entrepreneurship and Self-Help among Black Americans: A Reconsideration of Race and Economics*, rev. ed. (1991; Albany, N.Y., 2005).

⁶³ In recovering race as an integral element in business development, especially in business enclaves, he stresses the limitations of ethnicity in fully understanding and evaluating the role of race and racism. He also criticizes the limitations of strict class analyses, particularly Marxism, in understanding the role of race in business. Also, see Ivan H. Light, *Ethnic Enterprise in America: Business and Welfare among Chinese, Japanese and Blacks* (Berkeley, Calif., 1972). See

Therefore, Butler only sketches the impact of race in the development of African American business.

In her germinal survey of black business, *The History of Black Business in America*, Juliet E. K. Walker foregrounds the impact of race and the limitations it imposed on African American business development.⁶⁴ Walker's is the first and only comprehensive history of African American business from its African origins to the late twentieth century.⁶⁵ In her introduction, Walker argues that racism, rather than class, accounted for the apparent historical and contemporary disparities in black entrepreneurial development. Racism has also obscured African Americans' rich entrepreneurial tradition. With regard to traditional business scholarship, the overemphasis on capital and markets, technology, federal policy, and the firm marginalized African American business. African American, white, and ethnic entrepreneurs shared a similar business ethos, and Walker demonstrates that African Americans have always participated (or tried to participate) in the same business activities as whites. Though racism seriously hindered their efforts to enter and sustain themselves in certain fields, it never stopped them from forming small businesses, corporations, manufacturing concerns, or cooperatives.

Walker also takes U.S. and African Diaspora historiography to task for downplaying or ignoring the historical significance of African American business. African American businesspeople, she argues, who ". . . forg[ed] their own economic liberation through business activities and entrepreneurship since the 1600s . . . evoke only limited historical interest, compared to that given to the servile-labor contributions of blacks in the development of the American economy."⁶⁶ African American entre-

Butler's related works, including "Entrepreneurship and the Advantages of the Inner City: How to Augment the Porter Thesis," in *The Inner City: Urban Poverty and Economic Development in the Next Century*, ed. Thomas D Boston and Catherine Laverne Ross (New Brunswick, N.J., 1997), 39-50. On African American business enclaves and business districts, see John Sibley Butler and Kenneth L. Wilson, "Entrepreneurial Enclaves in the African American Experience," *National Journal of Sociology* 2 (Winter 1988): 128-66.

⁶⁴ Walker, *History of Black Business in America*, xvii-xxvi. The University of North Carolina Press will publish the revised and expanded history in two volumes: volume 1 (up to 1865) in 2009 and volume 2 (from 1865 to the present) in 2010.

⁶⁵ Alusine Jalloh and Toyin Falola, eds., *Black Business and Economic Power* (Rochester, N.Y., 2002), 484-525, and Cheryl Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport, Conn., 2005). Also, consider John N. Ingham and Lynne B. Feldman, *African-American Business Leaders: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport, Conn., 1993).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Walker, *History of Black Business*, xviii-xx, quotation at p. xx.

preneurs took advantage of ambivalences about how far *de facto* and *de jure* segregation would extend in the market. Enthusiasm for the business spirit and the desire to pursue personal ambitions motivated African Americans to push for economic liberation, despite formidable odds.

Recently revised editions of African American history textbooks include more examples of African American entrepreneurs and discuss the role of black business and black economic activities from the seventeenth century to the present as an important aspect of African American history.⁶⁷ Academic and mainstream presses have published a number of autobiographies, prosopographies, and biographies of African American entrepreneurs since 1990.⁶⁸ Autobiographies include those of financier Reginald Lewis, publisher John H. Johnson, and insurance executive Truman K. Gibson, Jr.⁶⁹ Biographies explore the historical legacy of early African American entrepreneurs and place contemporary ones in historical context. These works include slaveholder Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley, sailmaker James Forten, and investor Mary Ellen “Mammy” Pleasant.⁷⁰ Twentieth-century figures have figured most prominently, such as publisher Richard Boyd, banker Maggie Lena Walker, beauty mogul

⁶⁷ For example, see the indexes of John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom, A History of African Americans*, 8th ed. (New York, 2000), and Hine, et al., *African American Odyssey*.

⁶⁸ For example, Ingham and Feldman, *African-American Business Leaders*, and Michael D. Woodward, *Black Entrepreneurs in America: Stories of Struggle and Success* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1997).

⁶⁹ Reginald F. Lewis and Blair S. Walker, *Why Should White Guys Have All the Fun? How Reginald Lewis Created a Billion-Dollar Business Empire* (New York, 1995); John H. Johnson, and Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Succeeding against the Odds* (New York, 1989); and Truman K. Gibson and Steve Huntley, *Knocking Down Barriers: My Fight for Black America* (Evanston, Ill., 2005).

⁷⁰ Daniel L. Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slaveowner* (Gainesville, Fla., 2003); Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York, 2003) and “‘You Know I Am a Man of Business’: James Forten and the Factor of Race in Philadelphia’s Antebellum Black Community,” *Business and Economic History* 26 (Fall 1997): 213-28; and Lynn M. Hudson, *The Making of “Mammy” Pleasant: An African American Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Urbana, Ill., 2003). Also see Loren Schweninger, “Doctor Jack: A Slave Physician on the Tennessee Frontier,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1998): 36-41; and Juliet E. K. Walker, “Promoting Black Entrepreneurship and Business Enterprise in Antebellum America: The National Negro Convention, 1830-1880,” in *A Different Vision: Race and Public Policy*, ed. Thomas D. Boston (New York, 1997), 280-318.

Madame C. J. Walker, oil tycoon Jake Simmons, barber and insurance company founder Alonzo Herndon, and manufacturer S. B. Fuller.⁷¹

Monographs on black business have also grown appreciably.⁷² Indeed, museums and federal and state agencies and governments have seen the value of highlighting and analyzing the African-American business past.⁷³

⁷¹ Bobby L. Lovett, *How It Came to Be: The Boyd Family's Contribution to African American Religious Publishing from the 19th to the 21st Century* (Nashville, Tenn., 2007); Gertrude W. Marlowe, *A Right Worthy Grand Mission: Maggie Lena Walker and the Quest for African American Economic Empowerment* (Washington, D.C., 2003); A'Lelia P. Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C. J. Walker* (New York, 2001); Jonathan D. Greenberg, *Staking a Claim: Jake Simmons and the Making of an African American Oil Dynasty* (New York, 1990); Carole Merritt, *The Herndons: An Atlanta Family* (Athens, Ga., 2002); and Mary Fuller Casey, *S. B. Fuller: Pioneer in Black Economic Development* (Jamestown, N.C., 2003). Also, see Jenkins and Hines, *Black Titan* [biography of A. G. Gaston]. Also, see Wendell P. Dabney, *Maggie L. Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke: The Woman and Her Work* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1927).

Madame C. J. Walker is arguably the most well-known African American entrepreneur, and she dominates the scholarship. See biographies by Bundles, *On Her Own Ground* and Beverly Lowry, *Her Dream of Dreams: The Rise and Triumph of Madam C. J. Walker* (New York, 2003). Also see Jeffrey L. Decker, "Reconstructing Enterprise: Madam Walker, Black Womanhood, and the Transformation of the American Culture of Success," in *Seductions of Biography*, ed. Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff (New York, 1996), 99-112; and Tiffany M. Gill, "'I Had My Own Business . . . So I Didn't Have to Worry': Beauty Salons, Beauty Culturists, and the Politics of African American Female Entrepreneurship," in *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*, ed. Phillip Scranton (New York, 2001), 169-94, especially her detailed discussion of Madame Walker, 172-80.

⁷² Gregory Bell, *In the Black: A History of African Americans on Wall Street* (New York, 2002); Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, *America's First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830-1915* (Urbana, Ill., 2000); Bessie House-Soremekun, *Confronting the Odds: African American Entrepreneurship in Cleveland, Ohio* (Kent, Ohio, 2002); Alexa B. Henderson, *Atlanta Life Insurance Company: Guardian of Black Economic Dignity* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1990); Brett Pulley, *The Billion Dollar BET: Robert Johnson and the Inside Story of Black Entertainment Television* (New York, 2004); Smith, *Market Women*; and Robert E. Weems, Jr., *Black Business in the Black Metropolis: The Chicago Metropolitan Assurance Company, 1925-1985* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996) and *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1998).

⁷³ For example, Ralph D. Christy and Wylin Dassie, *Entrepreneurship-Centered Economic Development: An Analysis of African American Entrepreneurship in the Southern Black Belt* (Lexington, Ky., 2000); State of Arkansas, *A Century of Culture and Commerce: Remembering the Black Experience around Little Rock, 1870-1970* (Little Rock, Ark., 2003); and Dianne Swann-Wright, *Mindin' Our*

In addition, scholars pursue specific questions about African American businesses, industries, and business people within academic journals and edited collections.⁷⁴ Local and community studies are popular.⁷⁵ Scholars have also revisited popular topics in African American history, such as mutual aid societies, all-black towns, and free blacks, to underline their economic and business aspects.⁷⁶ In addition, insurance, manufacturing, and banking have always featured prominently, but historians have also added other sectors, particularly informal businesses like conjure and policy.⁷⁷ They also reexamine business sectors in which scholars

Own Business: African American Business Enterprise in Central Virginia, 1820-1970 [For Legacy Museum of African American History] (Lynchburg, Va, 2005).

⁷⁴ Examples include Rayvon Fouche, "The Exploitation of an African American Inventor on the Fringe: Granville T. Woods and the Process of Invention," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 21 (Fall 1997): 190-98; Walter A. Friedman, "The African-American Gospel of Business Success," in *Black Conservatism Essays in Intellectual and Political History*, ed. Peter R. Eisenstadt (New York, 1999), 133-50; Margaret Levenstein, "African American Entrepreneurship: The View from the 1910 Census," in *Immigrant and Minority Entrepreneurship: The Continuous Rebirth of American Communities*, ed. John Sibley Butler and George Kozmetsky (Westport, Conn., 2004), 1-18; and Xiomara Santamarina, "Black Hairdresser and Social Critic: Eliza Potter and the Labors of Femininity," *American Literature* 77 (March 2005): 151-77.

⁷⁵ Robert Bussel, " 'The Most Indispensable Man in His Community': African-American Entrepreneurs in West Chester, Pennsylvania, 1865-1925," *Pennsylvania History* 65 (Summer 1998): 324-49; Douglas Flamming, "The Business of Race," in *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley, Calif., 2005); and Gilles Vandal, "Black Utopia in Early Reconstruction New Orleans: The People's Bakery as a Case Study," *Louisiana History* 38 (Fall 1997): 437-52.

⁷⁶ Brian J. Glenn, "Understanding Mutual Benefit Societies, 1860-1960" *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 26 (June 2001): 638-51; Lois F. Horton and James Oliver Horton, "Power and Social Responsibility: Entrepreneurs and the Black Community in Antebellum Boston," in *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850*, ed. C. E. Wright and K. P. Viens (Evanston, Ill., 1997), 37-51; Juliet E. K. Walker, "Free Black Women Enterprises and Entrepreneurship: The Intersection of Business, Race, Sex, Color and Gender in the Antebellum South," in *Black Women's History at the Intersection of Knowledge and Power: Association of Black Women Historians' Twentieth Anniversary Anthology*, ed. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Janice Sumler-Edmond (Acton, Mass., 2000), 49-63; and Craig Steven Wilder, " 'The Guardian Angel of Africa': A Financial History of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, 1808-1945," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 26 (July 2002): 67-94.

⁷⁷ Jeffrey E. Anderson, *Conjure in African American Society* (Baton Rouge, La., 2005); and Nathan Thompson, *Kings: The True Story of Chicago's Policy Kings and Numbers Racketeers: An Informal History* (Chicago, 2003).

traditionally focused on social and cultural dimensions to underscore entrepreneurial aspects, particularly sports, music, and beauty culture.⁷⁸

Black investment, franchising, manufacturing, and investment firms relied on the corporate model to build multimillion and even billion-dollar corporations. Some of these entrepreneurs, like Reginald Lewis of TLC Beatrice, Robert Johnson of BET, and Thomas J. Burrell of Burrell Advertising, created business in the post–Civil Rights era without the *de jure* racial limitations on their business participation. They grew their businesses and portfolios through acquisitions. They improved on the model set in the 1940s and 1950s by entrepreneur S. B. Fuller, who built a formidable empire acquiring white-owned corporations, and they reflected the mainstream trend in U.S. postindustrial business toward diversification, international markets, and corporate takeovers. However, racist customs permeated the business environment and posed difficulties for black entrepreneurs, who constantly had to prove their business intelligence and acumen.⁷⁹

A number of black entertainers and sports figures bridge the transition from the traditional cult of personality that drove the business success of women like Madame C. J. Walker, whose product was synonymous with her image and personality, and the rise of corporate and international business. Global icons Oprah Winfrey and Irving “Magic” Johnson epitomize the commodification of their image within a corporate structure. They are the product, and they have used their fame to launch a number of successful offshoot businesses and philanthropic ventures.⁸⁰

The Future of Black Business Historiography in the Twenty-First Century

The phenomenal business success of a number of black entrepreneurs, the emergence of the United States’ first two black billionaires, and the diverse racial makeup of companies owned by, and geared toward, blacks in the

⁷⁸ Michael E. Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs, 1860-1901: Operating by Any Means Necessary* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2003); and Douglas Bristol, “From Outposts to Enclaves: A Social History of Black Barbers from 1750 to 1915,” *Enterprise and Society* 5 (Dec. 2004): 594-606; Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies’ Pages: African American Women’s Magazines and the Culture That Made Them* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2004); Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: Beauty Culturists and the Politics of African American Female Entrepreneurship, 1900-1965* (Urbana, Ill., forthcoming 2010); and Gill, “‘I Had My Own Business,’” 169-94.

⁷⁹ Walker, *History of Black Business*, 325, 333, 338-39, 345-47, and 351.

⁸⁰ On Winfrey, see Juliet E. K. Walker, “Oprah Winfrey, the Tycoon: Contextualizing the Economics of Race, Class, Gender in Black Business History in Post-Civil Rights America,” in Jalloh and Falola, eds., *Black Business and Economic Power*, 484-525. Winfrey owns 90% of all stock in the privately held Harpo Entertainment Group.

twenty-first century highlight the ways scholars will have to change to understand the future and past of black business. Racism will certainly shape the vision and strategy of black-owned businesses, but just how much will race continue to influence the potential of black business in the global marketplace and the world of transnational corporations? How will black business contribute to institution building, community development, and public policy relating not only to the black community, but also to more diverse ethnic, racial, and international markets? The field of black business in the global economy offers more questions than answers.

In the twenty-first century, black business historiography will take the “cultural turn” now popular in the field of history. Political and cultural constructions of difference within the marketplace will gain even greater currency as black business historians pay closer attention to issues of meaning, perception, and identity. Scholars will revisit and reassess the role of black entrepreneurs in black community-, institution-, and nation-building. Intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, and place with entrepreneurship will inform the new historiography.

Notably, scholars will place greater emphasis on black women entrepreneurs, whose stories the historiographies of blacks, women, and business have largely elided. In addition, scholars will contextualize the entrepreneurial dimension of black women’s economic, social, and political activities, which will reinvigorate traditional histories of black women’s club work, professionalization, and labor activism. Labor historians are already on the cusp of this kind of scholarship. Instances of women’s entrepreneurship, either in the informal or extralegal economy of leisure businesses, as sex workers and spiritualists, or marginalized in the formal economy as laundresses, entertainers, or service providers, make up a significant part of the scholarship about black working women.⁸¹ However, entrepreneurship is not the focus of these works. Nor do their authors discuss women in more formal business settings, or look specifically at entrepreneurship as part of the uplift tradition in the black community, or as a strategy to gain political and civil rights. While labor and elaborations on the contours of working-class life and communities take center stage, the numerous examples of African American women engaged in formal and informal entrepreneurial activities evince both the

⁸¹ See Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York, 1998); Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); Psyche A. Williams-Forsom, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (Durham, N.C., 2006); and Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Durham, N.C., 2001).

breadth and vitality of women's entrepreneurship in the future of African American business historiography.

The new historiographers will move beyond the prosaic debates about the efficacy of African American business and black economic nationalism that characterized much of the twentieth-century historiography. They will continue to interrogate how African American entrepreneurs and business interacted with the material and cultural dimensions of the political economy. Their focus will turn from successful individuals toward lesser-known individuals. They will also focus on more diverse business sectors. Interracial cooperation and conflict in African American business will also figure prominently, as historiographers move toward the ways race functioned as a discourse.⁸² By privileging blacks' struggles for economic liberation, the new historiography will immeasurably contribute to and enhance our understanding of the many ways blacks relied on entrepreneurship to strike a tenable balance among personal agency, communal interests, and structural constraints.

⁸² See, for example, John Sibley Butler and George Kozmetsky, eds., *Immigrant and Minority Entrepreneurship* (Westport, Conn., 2004); Meta G. Carstarphen and Tae Guk Kim, "Who's the Victim? Intercultural Perceptions between African American and Korean American Business People in Dallas," in *Cultural Diversity and the U.S. Media*, ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour and Theresa Carilli (Albany, N.Y., 1998), 217-30; Douglas R. Egerton, "Slaves to the Marketplace: Economic Liberty and Black Rebelliousness in the Atlantic World," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26 (Winter 2006): 617-39; Shennette Garrett, "He Ran His Business like a White Man': Race, Entrepreneurship, and the Early National Negro Business League in the New South" (M.A. Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2006); Katherine Inman, *Women's Resources in Business Start-Up: A Study of Black and White Women Entrepreneurs* (New York, 2000); Jennifer Lee, "The Significance of Small Business and the Nature of the Niche," in *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews, and Koreans in Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 48-70; and Light, *Ethnic Enterprise in America*.