



Race, power, and knowledge: tracing the roots of exclusion in the development of political science in the United States

Paula D. McClain, Gloria Y. A. Ayee, Taneisha N. Means, Alicia M. Reyes-Barriéntez & Nura A. Sedique

To cite this article: Paula D. McClain, Gloria Y. A. Ayee, Taneisha N. Means, Alicia M. Reyes-Barriéntez & Nura A. Sedique (2016): Race, power, and knowledge: tracing the roots of exclusion in the development of political science in the United States, *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, DOI: [10.1080/21565503.2016.1170704](https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1170704)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1170704>



Published online: 27 Apr 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)

DIALOGUE: DIVERSITY IN THE DISCIPLINE

Race, power, and knowledge: tracing the roots of exclusion in the development of political science in the United States

Paula D. McClain, Gloria Y. A. Ayee, Taneisha N. Means, Alicia M. Reyes-BarriénteZ and Nura A. Sedíqe

Department of Political Science, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA

ABSTRACT

Scholars of race, ethnicity, and politics have long questioned why the discipline of political science has taken so long to recognize the legitimacy of the study of the politics of America's racial minority groups. The answer to this question, we believe, lies in the historical roots of the discipline. This article examines the complex relationship between racial ideologies and the development of the discipline of political science in the United States. Using a genealogical analysis, we analyze the racist origins of the discipline that arose from the work and attitudes of one of the founders of American political science, John W. Burgess. In an effort to legitimize political science as an empirical field rooted in the scientific method, Burgess and other prominent early political scientists turned to existing "scientific" notions of race. The racial ideologies that spurred the early development of political science continue to influence the ways in which issues of race and ethnicity are embraced and understood within the discipline today and contribute to its lack of diversity.

KEYWORDS

Racism; race; ethnicity; politics; political science; racial ideologies

Concerning the statement made by Dr. Locke, I think we ought to devote some attention to actual possibilities for the publication of articles on the Negro utilizing present available media. In some fields this is relatively easy. Anthropologists deal with the Negro as a respectable topic, and the journals of anthropology take such articles without hesitation. In respect to my own field, which concerns the political status of the Negro, except in so far as papers having to do with colonial problems and the like are involved, there isn't a very cordial reception for papers dealing with the Negro ... – Ralph Johnson Bunche, 1940.

(Herskovits 1941, 108)

Introduction

The famous claim above by Ralph Johnson Bunche, the first black American to receive a PhD in political science (1934), the first black winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1950), and the first black president of the American Political Science Association (1955; APSA), was advanced at a panel at the 1940 Conference on the Interdisciplinary Aspects of Negro

CONTACT Paula D. McClain ✉ pmcclain@duke.edu 📍 Department of Political Science, Duke University, Box 90204, Durham, NC, USA

© 2016 Western Political Science Association

Studies, sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies (Herskovits 1941). Bunche made these comments during a roundtable discussion, as he attempted to address the receptivity to research and scholarship on blacks within the discipline of political science. The conference was held on March 29 and 30, 1940, at Howard University, with 23 scholars in attendance, of whom about half were black. The disciplines of physical and cultural anthropology, history, political science, sociology, economics, psychology, philosophy, literature, and the arts were represented. In addition to Bunche, the panel participants were, among others, anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits, philosopher Alain Leroy Locke, economist Abram L. Harris, historian W. Montague Cobb, and historian Eric C. Williams. Echoing Bunche's sentiments, Harris asked if anyone expected the *Journal of Economics* or *Political Science Quarterly* to publish articles on blacks or even articles that touched on issues related to blacks. If any of the scholars in attendance expected an affirmative answer, they would be sorely disappointed (Herskovits 1941, 108).

Bunche was not being hyperbolic when he identified the resistance of the discipline of political science to including the study of blacks as a legitimate area of study. He was stating a fact, one that was present in 1940 and, in many ways, persists in some segments of the discipline today (Dawson and Wilson 1991; Holden 1983; Katznelson and Milner 2002; Rich 2007a, 2007b; Wilson 1985; Wilson and Frasure 2007).

A few scholars have delved into the reasons why political science as a discipline might hold these attitudes about research on racial and ethnic minorities (Blatt 2014; Dawson and Wilson 1991; Smith 2004; Walton and McCormick 1997; Walton, Miller, and McCormick 1995; Wilson 1985). Matthew Holden, Jr. observed in the early 1980s that political scientists "did not perceive those black-white relationships in American society to raise *critical intellectual problems* for scholars, in contrast to raising 'social problems' for social activists" (1983, 34). Wilson (1985) felt that the focus on elites and elite behavior defined the politics of black Americans outside of the intellectual interests of the discipline. In the 1990s, Dawson and Wilson (1991, 192) referred to the study of black politics as the "step child of the discipline," and Walton and McCormick (1997, 230) argued that the "study of the black experience is seen by the larger culture as socially unacceptable and therefore socially dangerous". Walton and McCormick (1997, 240) further contended that "personal, political, and professional fears limit the discipline and its members in studying the African American experience".

Wilson and Frasure (2007, 19) found that between 1986 and 2003, research on blacks had not gained much prominence in the premier journals of the discipline, such as in the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, and *The Journal of Politics*. They saw the extant literature as an example of the power of long-standing and historical filters to exclude important political topics, and confirmed that political science has continued to resist including blacks as a legitimate area of study (Wilson and Frasure 2007, 19).

While the demographics of the United States have changed dramatically and the study of racial minority populations has expanded beyond black Americans, the attitudes toward this research by some in the discipline of political science are reminiscent of ideologies that existed in the time period before 1940 (Dawson and Wilson 1991; Rich 2007a). Scholars who study Race, Ethnicity and Politics (REP) still encounter dismissive comments from colleagues about the legitimacy of the field and, in many instances, we see this same dismissive attitude evolving in graduate students who diminish the value of the work done by

their colleagues who study REP.¹ Dawson and Wilson (1991, 190–191) assert that “[b]lack politics is marginalized in graduate studies programs”. As former APSA president Rodney Hero noted in his presidential address at the 2015 APSA annual conference,

Understanding the nexus between differences or hierarchies associated with class dynamics and race/ethnicity, and gender, is immensely important. Yet, with some notable exceptions, they are too often examined [entirely] separately, overlooked or not sufficiently engaged by research in our discipline. (Hero 2015, 1)

Furthermore, Rich (2007a, 42–43) argues that “black Assistant professors recruited after the civil rights era ... [face] much the same social isolation and alienation as did their predecessors of the sixties and seventies”. Hesli Claypool with Mershon in this issue provides new insights into how this experience of isolation and alienation varies across departments (Hesli, Claypool, and Mershon 2016); Smooth in this issue offers strategies for addressing it (Smooth 2016). Their research confirms that these conditions of marginalization are a continuing challenge for REP scholars and that the attitudes creating marginalization present obstacles in our goals of diversifying the discipline.

REP scholars have long wondered why it is taking the discipline of political science so much time to recognize the legitimacy of the study of the politics of America’s racial minority groups. While disciplines like sociology, history, and economics have focused extensively on the complex nature of the politics of race and class, political science, which is “uniquely suited” to explore these issues through “distinctive and comprehensive analytical lenses,” has not done so as comprehensively as it should (Hero 2015, 9). The historical roots of the discipline, we believe, are an underappreciated additional explanation for the problem. This article examines the complex relationship between racial ideologies and the development of the discipline of political science in the United States. We explore the racist origins of the discipline that arise from the work and attitudes of John W. Burgess, who is regarded as the principal founder of American political science and whose intellectual views set the agenda for the discipline.

We argue that the ideas and positions taken within the discipline of political science today, which might appear to have no history, have a history that is tightly linked to the influence of those founding scholars of the discipline and the power they wielded over the definition of what topics and people constituted legitimate subjects of study for the discipline. Although the truth about the foundations of political science has been recognized by some (Blatt 2014; Smith 2004), the origins have not been fully appreciated for how they have shaped what is valued in the discipline and what is not. We structure the article in a manner that will illuminate the connection between the origins of the discipline and what we see as the difficulty in the discipline of accepting REP scholarship. At the end of the article, we link this difficulty to the challenge of diversifying the people who comprise the discipline.

The genealogy of American political science

Foucault’s (1979) genealogical approach serves as the methodological framework through which we trace how discourses of power have been institutionalized within the discipline of political science. The principle set forth in his genealogical approach is that all knowledge is produced and sustained by specific systems of power. Foucault’s genealogical

method of inquiry is particularly useful for elucidating the ways in which discourse, power, and knowledge come together. Genealogy is a historical mode of inquiry that follows complex processes in order to understand or produce knowledge about the present with the goal of transforming the characteristics of the realities of the present. **Genealogical analysis involves the process of critically examining concepts, ideas, or events to generate alternative histories of knowledge that reveal the problems with, or undermine prevailing concepts of, widely accepted beliefs about how that knowledge came to exist.** This approach provides a useful lens through which we are able to gain new insights into the ways in which power structures operate within the academy generally, and the discipline of political science specifically. Foucault suggests that knowledge and power are co-produced; these two concepts are not distinct from each other, but are intertwined.

The creation of a distinct academic field through “the systematic study of a particular area of knowledge is a form of disciplining,” and what becomes widely accepted as the truth about the origins of a discipline is directly linked to who holds power (Anderson and Grinberg 1998, 335). As Foucault (1979, 27) explained, there is “no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations”. For example, all educational institutions “discipline the minds of students” by providing specific narratives and singular ways of thinking about a particular subject matter (Anderson and Grinberg 1998, 335).

Foucault’s genealogical analyses challenge traditional practices of history, as well as the established conceptions about the relationship between power and knowledge. They also reinforce our arguments that the founding fathers of the discipline, by virtue of their authority and power, played **a significant and enduring role in determining what modes of inquiry, or research themes, would be accepted as worthwhile in the discipline.** We attempt to show that “forms of subjectivity are created by institutions and power relations” (Bevir 1999, 354). Foucault believed that “power is a creative force that pervades all human activity,” thus power relations are an inherent element of all human discourse or knowledge (Littlejohn and Foss 2008, 343). Control over the discourses that are accepted as fundamental in a particular discipline is an example of the ways in which power is wielded. Power, as it relates to control of discourses, is “exemplified in the professional status of those who control it and in the loss of status to those who are defined by it” (Anderson and Grinberg 1998, 333). **In political science, those who control the discourse, by virtue of their race, class, gender, and so forth, tend to emphasize issues and concepts that are non-racial on the surface, although there may be racial undertones or implications that are ignored, while those who study issues and concepts that are explicitly connected to race are considered to be outside the conventional boundaries of the discipline.** Political science thus confirms what Anderson and Grinberg (1998, 329) claim is “a major implication of Foucault’s view of power,” namely “that educational practices that may appear more democratic, participatory, or progressive may in fact constitute forms of disciplinary power and thus result in more effective technologies of control,” in this case by marginalizing REP scholarship.

In short, the institutions and power relations within the discipline developed a point of view of nonwhites that put their study outside the realm of legitimate political science. While we do suggest that it is important to explore the historical foundations of political science to understand why there continues to be some resistance to REP scholarship

within the discipline, our claims go beyond simply stating that history matters. The genealogical approach enables us to critically examine the phenomenon of exclusion “by reconstructing it as the middle of a transformative process that has a previous and a subsequent manifestation” (Rasmussen 2011, 41). We argue that this control of the discipline has a long history and a continuing legacy, particularly when it comes to political science and the study of race in the United States. Retracing that history and following that legacy lead us to a new understanding of the place of race in the discipline today. In the next few sections, we discuss the racial origins of political science, explaining how they contributed to the troubling legacy of the marginalization of REP in the discipline.

Race and the origins of the discipline

Rogers Smith (2004) argues that since the founding of the United States, conflicts over race have been woven into the DNA of the nation. Yet, political science as a discipline, Smith says, has never viewed the study of race as important. That is, political scientists adopted the view of “race” as either a biological or sociological (or both) identity relevant primarily in social and cultural contexts, but not in the political arena:

[I]f race is thought to be fundamentally exogenous to politics, it makes sense to bring race into political analysis only on those occasions where it seems likely to help explain political behavior. And when the race of most political actors is homogeneous, as seems to be true in governing institutions and formal electoral politics throughout most of U.S. history, then it can seem pointless to include race as an independent variable. (Smith 2004, 44)

Moreover, Smith (2004) contends that political science’s treatment of race resembles Ralph Ellison’s notion of the “invisible man,” meaning, as did Ellison, that the dominant society sees blacks through the lenses of stereotypes, rather than as actual people with values, aspirations, intelligence, and other attributes that the dominant society sees in itself (Smith 2004, 41). This invisibility is part of the genealogy of the discipline and a form of subjectivity created by those with the power to define the boundaries of the discipline.

The period between 1881 and 1895 was a time when a quiet revolution occurred within American historical studies, when men trained in German universities returned to the United States with the goal of studying history “scientifically” and identifying the origins of societal institutions (Dyer 1980). These German-trained scholars argued that the origins of English civilization could be traced to the Teutons (Dyer 1980, 45; see also Rabban 2013, 89–90). Histories of constitutional liberty were tied to the achievements of Teutonic countries and the superiority of Teutonic societies. Smith (2004) identifies the early graduate programs in history and political science at Johns Hopkins University and Harvard University, and the programs combining political science, constitutional law, and history at Columbia University as imbued with Teutonic theory. The first volume of *Johns Hopkins Studies in Historical and Political Science*, published in 1883, contained such articles as “The Germanic Origin of New England Towns,” and others that identified Teutonic origins in local governments around the United States (Rabban 2013, 89). Individuals trained and teaching in these graduate programs included Woodrow Wilson, who was a student of Henry Baxter Adams, one of the foremost American advocates of Teutonic theory, at Johns Hopkins (Dyer 1980, 46). Wilson’s attitudes about race and black

Americans have been well documented by historians (Blumenthal 1963; Dennis 2010). Smith (2004, 42) states that Wilson, in his textbook *The State*, makes clear that it is important to know the political history of Greeks, Latins, Teutons, and Celts primarily, if not solely. One need only read Wilson's introduction to the film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) to recognize his belief in the superiority of whites, the inferiority of blacks, and his view that the film represented an accurate portrayal of Reconstruction.

Theodore Roosevelt, after graduating from Harvard, spent a year studying law at Columbia University, where he encountered John W. Burgess, professor of political science and "one of America's most committed 'Teutunist' exponents of white superiority" (Dyer 1980, 7). Dyer (1980, 8) notes that the influence of Burgess' racial theories runs throughout the histories that Roosevelt wrote before 1889, where he extolls the superiority of white Americans and the decadence of American Indians. By the late 1800s, when individuals such as Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, and institutions such as Hopkins, Harvard, and Columbia had exerted their influence, unquestioned racism was part of the bedrock of the political science discipline.

John W. Burgess' influence

Smith (2004, 41) states "One can debate how deeply racist the American profession of political science was at its inception, but no one can deny that there was a great deal of explicit racism in the writings of many of its key figures." Yet, racism at the foundations of the discipline set in motion a sequence of events that structured what the discipline would view as legitimate political science. In many scholarly works, the person most identified in the history of the development of the discipline in the United States is Charles Merriam, but it was Merriam's professor at Columbia University, John W. Burgess, who is actually considered the founder of the discipline of American political science (Walton and Smith 2007, 30–31). Burgess, as Blatt (2014, 1063) notes, "was central to political science's emergence as a distinct field". He founded Columbia's School of Political Science (1880), the first in the United States to grant PhDs in the field, and was the initiator of *Political Science Quarterly* (1886), the United States' first political science journal. On Burgess' importance to political science, Gunnell (2004, 73) writes that "more than anyone else, Burgess established the disciplinary, professional and intellectual foundations of modern political science".

Burgess' intellectual and personal views were formed by his upbringing and place of birth. These views were reinforced by his education, and became the foundation of many of the intellectual theories that he put forward. Burgess was born in 1844 in Tennessee (Blatt 2014; McKinley 2013), was a southerner first and foremost (McClay 1993, 57), and saw slavery as a positive institution, one that involved sympathetic masters and well-treated slaves (McKinley 2013, 49–50). Burgess believed that slave-owners took good care of their property, that slaves did not work long hours or very hard, and that blacks were an inferior race. His experiences during the Civil War reinforced his view that the South was not treated fairly, white Southerners' way of life and slavery had not been appreciated, and that war was not an appropriate way to settle governmental questions (McClay 1993, 56–58).

With his former student and Columbia colleague, William A. Dunning, Burgess also co-founded the Dunning School of Historiography, which was comprised of a group of scholars whose view of Reconstruction was sympathetic to white Southerners. These

scholars also viewed blacks as inferior and the rights granted them during Reconstruction as a colossal error. They saw Reconstruction “as a dangerous period in American history, a political and social revolution whereby African Americans, radical northern whites, and their southern white sympathizers overthrew orthodox white southern racial control and political power” (Smith 2013, 27). McKinley (2013, 71) contends that “Burgess was the godfather behind the Dunning School’s racism.” Dunning was president of both the APSA (1921–1922), and the American Historical Association (1913).

During the early period, it was not unusual that political scientists and historians would be involved in each other’s professional associations, as the disciplines were interconnected and influenced each other. The founding motto of the American Historical Association possibly best captures the relationship of the political science and history disciplines, “History is past politics and politics present history” (Scott 1989, 680).² In considering John Burgess’ influence in political science, we must also bear in mind that he was a well-regarded academic within the discipline of history. Therefore, it is important to reflect on the ways in which the ideas that Burgess put forward had an influential role in the development of ideas within both the disciplines of history and political science. Here, we see the way that power works in the creation of knowledge, in this case, a discipline. As the primary founder of the discipline, Burgess’s racist ideas came to be accepted as normative, as he established the process for the reproduction of knowledge, which extolled whites and dismissed the study of non-whites due to their supposed inferiority (Burgess 1890).

There have been numerous historical analyses that highlight how similar influences have permeated the discipline of history, not only within the development of American history but in transnational contexts as well. For example, Michael Winston emphasizes,

Among the leaders in the academic world who succeeded in imposing an anti-Negro bias in scholarship were the historians William A. Dunning and John W. Burgess ... through their efforts it became the dominant view that slavery was a benign institution and Reconstruction a tragic error ... thus the oppressive racial policies of the South appeared to be vindicated by the best northern scholarship. (Winston 1971, 684)

Indeed, Burgess wrote three works on Reconstruction between 1897 and 1902: *The Middle Period, 1817–1858* (1897), *The Civil War and the Constitution, 1859–1865* (1901), and the two-volume, *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866–1876* (1902), his treatise on Reconstruction, written from the viewpoint that later became the foundation of the Dunning School. The two volumes are replete with Burgess’ racism and his insertion of this racism into his theories of the state.

In *Reconstruction and the Constitution 1866–1876*, Burgess contends that the North was misguided in its Reconstruction policies, particularly in giving political power to the “newly emancipated,” and argues that power should have been given to the white race, after a period of apologies. His book traces Reconstruction policy, and the underlying assumption is that freed slaves were uncivilized and not capable of handling the powers given to them by the North. The book highlights “the great mistakes of the Republican Party in its choice of means and measures in Reconstruction” (Burgess [1902] 1970, viii).

Understanding Burgess’s views on Reconstruction provides a window into how power works in the reproduction of knowledge, particularly within an emerging discipline. From his theory of the state, Burgess saw Reconstruction as the case of the federal “State”

illegitimately exercising its power over the former Confederate states, and those states rightly fighting the federal government's attempts for control, and limiting states' rights. The consequence of that attempt was, from Burgess' view, the ill-conceived, corrupt and oppressive Reconstruction period. He states, among other things,

From the point of view of a sound political science, the imposition of universal negro suffrage upon the Southern communities, in some of which the negroes were in large majority, was one of the "blunder-crimes" of the century. There is something natural in the subordination of an inferior race to a superior race, even to the point of the enslavement of the inferior race, but there is nothing natural in the opposite. (Burgess [1902] 1970, 244–245)

As Ruchames (1953, 143) highlights, the growing ideology of the "innate inferiority of non-whites to whites" was given "the stamp of scientific and academic responsibility" by John Burgess and his academic contemporaries. Yet, with few exceptions (Blatt 2014; Smith 2004), there has been silence within the discipline of political science on the legacy its racist origins have had on the structure and frameworks of the discipline.³

Solidifying racism into the foundation of political science

In the early decades of political science, the professional journals of the discipline played a central role in propagating and perpetuating the racism of its founders. As mentioned previously, *Political Science Quarterly* was the first political science journal to be published in the United States. Burgess served as editor, along with Archibald Alexander, Richmond Mayo Smith, Edmund Munroe Smith, Frank J. Goodnow, George H. Baker and Edwin R. A. Seligman. In the first volume of *Political Science Quarterly*, issued in March 1886, Burgess presents his views of nationality and the state in his article, "The American Commonwealth: Changes in its Relation to the Nation" (Burgess 1886). As with most of his other writings, he discusses the difficulties of creating national unity in the United States because of the presence of blacks and later "Mongols" within the country.

Dunning also had an article, "The Constitution of the United States in Civil War," in Volume 1 of *Political Science Quarterly* (Dunning 1886), as well as a follow-up article in the second volume of the journal in 1887, "The Constitution of the United States in Reconstruction," where he presaged some of his arguments about Reconstruction that would form the foundation of the Dunning School (Dunning 1887). To appreciate how important and widely read the fledgling journal was, consider that Woodrow Wilson's seminal article, "The Study of Administration," also appeared in Volume 2 of *Political Science Quarterly*. The authors whose work appeared in the pages of the journal were the most prominent scholars in the discipline of political science and history at the time.

The legacy of Burgess and his colleagues continued throughout the journals of the discipline for more than 100 years. Analysis of scholarship published in the early years of *Political Science Quarterly* underscores the recurrence of racist assumptions and arguments in the pages of the journal, and establishes a contrast with sociology and history.⁴ Hanes Walton and McCormick (1997) analyzed all articles in *Political Science Quarterly* from 1886 to 1990. In the early pages of the journal, they identified five articles in issues published in 1898, 1905 and 1907 that justified slavery as an institution. They also noted that the early articles on segregation offered a justification for the practice (Walton and McCormick 1997, 234).

A more recent assessment of a range of early political science journal articles highlights the presence of racist ideologies and attitudes in the discipline by documenting the near-absence of criticism of racism. Blatt (2014, 1072) in a search of political science journals published before 1910 (*Political Science Quarterly*; *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, 1903; and the *American Political Science Review*, 1906) found only one article that was critical of racial oppression, “The Realities of Negro Suffrage,” by Albert Hart (1905). This piece, however, was a reprint of a paper he gave on a panel at the then two-year-old APSA. Hart argued that Reconstruction had been so brief and the rights of blacks so limited that it was not possible to determine that blacks did not have the capacity to govern and exercise the vote. Baltimore Attorney General John Rose, who presented on the APSA panel with Hart, argued against enforcing black voting rights, and Blatt (2014) states that all three discussants agreed with Rose’s position (Rose 1906). Rose’s paper, “Negro Suffrage: The Constitutional Point of View,” was selected to appear in the inaugural issue of the *American Political Science Review* (1906).

A second article in the inaugural volume of the *American Political Science Review*, “Racial Distinctions in Southern Law,” by Gilbert Thomas Stephenson, while laying out the differences in how the law treats whites and blacks, ends with the assertion:

Social association is based upon something deeper and broader than statutory enactments. All that the written law need do, all that it has tried to do, is to separate the races wherever and whenever there is danger of friction and thus conduce to harmony between the black people and the white people of the South. (Stephenson 1906, 61)

Criticism of and challenges to Teutonic racism

Many scholars challenged Burgess and his colleagues’ racist views and their scholarship, but most lacked sufficient power and influence in their respective disciplines to change the direction of Burgess and the Dunning School’s views of Reconstruction regarding the capacity of blacks to function successfully in politics. Their view was the dominant view among many white historians and political scientists, but some white, and many black, sociologists and historians of the time challenged Burgess and his colleagues. In 1913, Burgess’ student Charles Beard criticized the racist notions of Teutonic civilization and government. Black historians also identified Burgess as the most prominent scholar to insert racism into the study of Reconstruction (McKinley 2013, 69). Among those blacks challenging Burgess were James R. L. Diggs, a founder of the Niagara Movement, John R. Lynch, a Reconstruction state legislator and member of the U. S. House of Representatives, and Norman P. Andrews of Howard University, a student of Carter G. Woodson, and Woodson himself (Smith 2013, 31–32). The most famous critique and challenge came from W. E. B. DuBois, first in a paper given at the American Historical Association’s 1909 meeting on a panel that included Dunning and some of his students. Smith (2013, 33) says that Dunning thought highly of Du Bois’ paper, but it failed to have any effect on the mainstream historical scholarship at the time. DuBois was brilliant, but he did not wield power in the discipline to reframe the debate.

Twenty-five years later, Du Bois redefined Reconstruction in the United States as an era in which blacks played a central and positive role, both socially and politically. In particular, in his seminal and monumental *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a*

History of the Part of which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880, published in 1935, DuBois developed his critique of academics who perpetuated negative visions of African-Americans through their interpretation of American history. John W. Burgess is one of the key culprits of spreading such distorted visions, and Du Bois references Burgess in two key parts of his book.

In Chapter 5, DuBois ([1935] 2012) begins by directly referring to Burgess and his famous quotation about “black skin” (381),

A great political scientist in one of the oldest and largest of American universities wrote and taught thousands of youths and readers that “There is no question now, that Congress did a monstrous thing, and committed a great political error, if not a sin, in the creation of this new electorate ... The claim that there is nothing in the color of the skin from the point of view of political ethics is a great sophism. A black skin means membership in a race of men which has never of itself succeeded in subjecting passion to reason; has never, therefore, created any civilization of any kind” (381).

In fact, Du Bois places Burgess into the category of individuals who, along with people such as Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, believed that “Negroes are not men and cannot be regarded as such” (652).

Du Bois also sees the Dunning School and Columbia University as the prime purveyors of anti-black sentiment and white supremacy masquerading as dispassionate scholarship. He takes them on as follows:

The Columbia school of historians and social investigators have issued between 1895 and the present time sixteen studies of Reconstruction in the Southern States, all based on the same thesis and all done according to the same method: first, endless sympathy with the white South; second, ridicule, contempt or silence for the Negro; third, a judicial attitude towards the North, which concludes that the North under great misapprehension did a grievous wrong, but eventually saw its mistake and retreated (642).

Du Bois brings up Burgess more extensively in his last chapter, “The Propaganda of History,” where he analyzes Burgess and contemporaries with similarly racist mindsets. Du Bois notes that the key thing that American children are taught about Reconstruction is that “all negroes are ignorant, were lazy, dishonest, and extravagant” (635). He further states that the “real frontal attack on Reconstruction” came from universities, namely Columbia and Johns Hopkins University (642). The essence of Du Bois’ last chapter is best captured in the following statement: “This chapter, therefore, which in logic should be a survey of books and sources, becomes of sheer necessity an arraignment of American historians and an indictment of their ideals” (DuBois [1935] 2012, 648).⁵

Even before *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois had published an article in 1910 in the *American Historical Review*, “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” providing a counter to Dunning and his students (Foner 2013, xi). Despite Du Bois’ critique of Burgess and earlier criticism of the Dunning School, their view of Reconstruction continued to prevail until, as some scholars suggest, the beginning of the modern civil rights movement in the mid-twentieth century (Holt 1998; Scott 1989; Smith 2013). Nevertheless, Du Bois’ work, along with that of John Hope Franklin and others, contributed significantly to the development of sustained and increasing criticism of Dunning and his students, and a revision of the study of Reconstruction in history. The question we are left with at this point is: how has this founding of the discipline of political science shaped the present day narrative about race in the field? To this we now turn.

Is the discipline's history its present?

How do the history of power and exclusion in the early days of political science and its legacy inform our understanding of the discipline today? Clearly, the types of arguments and views held and proclaimed by Burgess and Dunning and others in the founding generation have been discredited, and few today would subscribe to them. But are some of Burgess' ideologies and the agenda setting of his colleagues on what constitutes legitimate research areas of political science, for example, states' rights instead of studying race and racism as mainstream, still present in our discipline today? While it would be difficult, but clearly not impossible,⁶ to identify any scholar who would claim to ascribe to any of the blatantly racist views and ideologies that shaped the development of the field of political science in the early years, there is still a reluctance of some contemporary scholars to engage in REP research or to wholeheartedly support the work of colleagues who are doing research on minority politics in the United States.

Although more articles now appear in the pages of political science journals on race, ethnicity, and politics, some might argue that the boundaries of the discipline are still constrained by attitudes of scholars who still view the study of racism and racial politics as topics outside of legitimate political science (Jones and Willingham 1970). McClain and Garcia (1993) traced the history of the development of the fields of Black, Latino, and racial minority group politics in political science. Their analysis suggested, at the time, that although major strides had been made in the acceptance of these subfields in the discipline, there was still a long way to go in terms of moving these subfields into the mainstream of the discipline. Slightly more than 20 years later, scholars continue to maintain that progress still needs to be made (Harris-Perry 2003; Rich 2007a; Wilson and Frasure 2007), and that scholars studying race, ethnicity, and politics in the U.S. context are still struggling to be included (Farr 2004; McClerking and Philpot 2008).

In an effort to assess how much progress has been made, we counted the number of articles published in the top three journals of political science from 2013 to 2015.⁷ Of the 238 articles published in the *Journal of Politics*, only nine (3.8%) may be directly considered as race and ethnic politics work. Of the 135 articles published in the *American Political Science Review*, only 3 (2.2%) were directly relevant. Lastly, of the 180 articles published within the *American Journal of Political Science*, 13 (7.2%) were relevant. Thus, in the span of three years, of the 553 articles published within the top 3 journals, articles related to the REP subfield composed a mere 4.5%. Yet, one could argue that these numbers represent an improvement from the past and that progress, albeit slowly, is being made. It is possible that the founding in 1995 of the APSA Race, Ethnicity and Politics Organized Section has had some influence on the broader discipline, as the section has more than 500 members and is one of the largest in the association. The improved, yet still small, number of articles in the top three journals has led to the creation of journals aimed at the publication of REP and related research – *Politics, Groups and Identities* and the new journal of the APSA REP Organized Section, *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*. Our hope is that these new journals will not be marginalized within the discipline because of their content and the scholars who publish within their pages.

We were also interested in whether major political science departments have established REP as a subfield, concentration, and research track.⁸ Of the 108 universities identified as very high research activity institutes, only seven had established REP as a subfield,

concentration, or research track – Duke, UCLA, University of Delaware, Michigan, University of Washington, Texas A & M, and Johns Hopkins (comparative race). The University of Iowa and the University of Kansas have Identity Politics tracks. Some departments, such as the University of Chicago, subsume REP under American politics, and race is included in aspects of urban politics in some departments. That so few research programs have established REP as a legitimate area of study suggests, once again, that while progress is being made, more measures must be taken to promote the acceptance of this research as a legitimate area of study in undergraduate and graduate programs across the country.

Some scholars have lamented the absence of racial perspectives and frameworks in other subfields of the discipline. For example, Hawkesworth (2010, 687) notes that within political theory, the absence of critical race theory, a prominent theoretical framework in the social sciences, is a “puzzling omission”. Some also might suggest that the methods used in the discipline also contribute to the lack of acceptance of REP scholars and their research.

In a powerful piece, “Why Do We Need Diversity in Political Methodology,” in April 2014, Chris Achen, political scientist at Princeton, makes an argument for why political methodologists, who claim to be at the forefront of the science of politics, must be concerned about diversity. Burgess and his colleagues sought to legitimize political science as an empirical field rooted in the scientific method. Although Achen does not reference the founding origins of the discipline, his arguments fall in line with our use of Foucault’s genealogical analysis. Achen (2014, 1) notes that individuals’ ascriptive characteristics lead to different life experiences, so we should expect not only that those different experiences would result in different political attitudes and behaviors, but that they also would generate different research questions, some of which could not be answered by using quantitative methods. He argues that the notion that there is only one correct approach to address questions in political science leads to the assumption that those who approach political science from different theoretical perspectives and who use different methodological tools are lesser scholars and that “making a department diverse is just lowering standards” (Achen 2014, 4). For a discipline to be intellectually reputable, however, Achen argues, much as Mereshon and Walsh (2016) do, that political science needs diversity: diversity in what it studies, who conducts its studies, and how its studies proceed.

Political science scholars need to recognize the persistence of these challenges, and to understand the reasons behind the continued marginalization of minority groups in the political science, as well as the reluctance of some scholars in the discipline to formally accept REP as a legitimate field of inquiry. Indeed, the reasons outlined in this piece are limiting who practices political science and the subject matter that we research by maintaining conventional boundaries shaped by racist historical legacies, boundaries that hamper the relevance of our discipline in a country where the enslavement of one race led to civil war and in an era when whites will soon be a minority in the United States.

In an effort to legitimize political science as an empirical field rooted in the scientific method, Burgess and other prominent early political scientists in the United States turned to existing “scientific” notions of race as a basis for democratic legitimacy. These racial ideologies that spurred the development of political science continue to structure the ways in which issues of race and ethnicity are understood within the discipline today. Those scholars with the power and reputation within the discipline set the disciplinary agenda. Yet, historically, many scholars, particularly scholars of color, have pushed

against these racial ideologies in an effort to establish the legitimacy of the study of race and ethnicity. We hope that this article contributes to that continuing effort.

Our goal here was to trace the history of racism in the development of political science as an academic discipline in the United States, and to provide a clearer understanding of the ways in which the ideologies of some of the founding scholars of the discipline shaped what many political scientists still consider to be valuable and legitimate fields of inquiry within the discipline. Clearly, some progress has been made, but the struggle to move REP to the mainstream of the discipline persists. Given this, if faced with the same question in 2014, would Ralph Johnson Bunche provide a different answer than the one he gave in 1940?

Notes

1. One only need look at some of the comments on Political Science Rumors, a forum for political scientists to discuss issues related to the discipline and profession that, it is suggested, is dominated by graduate students, to see that negative attitudes about REP, scholars of color, and people of color still infuse the anonymous comments of some of those that comment on that site.
2. This was a quote from English Historian Edward Freedman that Herbert Baxter Adams was noted for regularly citing as he organized AHA events.
3. Lake (2003, 346) emphasizes the transnational influence of Burgess via the “White Australia” project and the idea of the “white man’s country,” which helped creators of White Australia to justify their attempts to create homogeneity.
4. A detailed discussion of the differences between political science, history and sociology on their respective embrace of the study of race and racial minorities is beyond the scope of this article, but Wilson (1985, 603) provides a nice discussion of the reasons. Among them are that history and sociology are concerned with:

(1) seeing society from the bottom up rather than the top down; (2) the study of the search for personal and group autonomy under constrained conditions; (3) a focus on the mobilization of new groups which put forward their own legitimate leaders; and (4) the role of non-formal institutions.

On the other hand, Wilson says that political science studies elites and decision-makers, the users and uses of influence, and blacks have historically been deprived of elite status thus are not political decision makers. There is also the fact that several black scholars were instrumental in establishing fields of study in these disciplines. W. E. B. DuBois’ 1899 book, *Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, was among the first empirical studies in sociology that generated an entirely new line of research methodology. George Washington Williams’ 1885 book, *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880: Negroes as Slaves, as Soldiers, and as Citizens*, was the first history written about blacks in the United States and became the foundation of subfield of African American History. Additionally, in both history and sociology, scholars had written volumes on the contributions of black scholars in both of those disciplines – Thorpe (1958) and Blackwell and Janovitz (1974); something that did not happen in political science.

5. The early connection of the disciplines of political science and history meant that historians would have seen Burgess as one of them, while political science, when defined as a separate discipline, would see him as a political scientist. DuBois sees Burgess’ early work on Reconstruction as putting him in the historian category, but he also refers to him as a political scientist at other points.
6. Every so often, racist statements and attitudes of political science professors make the news, as was the case with a Duke University political science professor in April 2015, who was unapologetic for his comments.

7. We utilized a content analysis as our primary tool of inquiry to measure the number of articles published. We took into consideration the total number of articles published within the journal, and then examined the number of articles published related to the race and ethnic politics discipline. We examined the article title and abstract for key words: race, racial, ethnic, ethnicity, black, Latino, Asian. Those articles that included these key-words were further explored to assess whether they were building on the race and ethnic politics literature, and to determine whether the article could be considered under the scope of race and ethnic politics research.
8. These research universities were identified as very high research activity by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2011).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

- Achen, Christopher. 2014. "Why Do We Need Diversity in the Political Methodology Society?" *The Political Methodologist* April 30. <http://thepoliticalmethodologist.com/2014/04/30/we-dont-just-teach-statistics-we-teach-students/>.
- Anderson, Gary L., and Jaime Grinberg. 1998. "Educational Administration as a Disciplinary Practice: Appropriating Foucault's View of Power, Discourse and Method." *Education Administration Quarterly* 34 (4): 329–353.
- Bevir, Mark. 1999. "Foucault, Power and Institutions." *Political Studies* XLVII: 345–359.
- Blackwell, James E., and Morris Janovitz. 1974. *Black Sociologists: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Blatt, Jessica. 2014. "John W. Burgess, the Racial State and the Making of the American Science of Politics." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37 (6): 1062–1079.
- Blumenthal, Henry. 1963. "Woodrow Wilson and the Race Question." *Journal of Negro History* 48 (1): 1–21.
- Burgess, John W. 1886. "The American Commonwealth: Changes in Its Relation to the Nation." *Political Science Quarterly* 1: 9–35.
- Burgess, John W. 1890. *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law, Volume 1: Sovereignty and Liberty*. New York: Baker and Taylor.
- Burgess, John W. [1902] 1970. *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866–1876*. New York: Da Capo.
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. 2011. *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2010 Edition*. Menlo Park, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Dawson, Michael C., and Ernest J. Wilson III. 1991. "Paradigms and Paradoxes: Political Science and African American Politics." In *Political Science: Looking to the Future: The Theory and Practice of Political Science*, edited by William J. Crotty, 189–237. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Dennis, Michael. 2010. "Looking Backward: Woodrow Wilson, the New South, and the Question of Race." *American Nineteenth Century History* 3 (1): 77–104.
- DuBois, W. E. B. 1899. *Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- DuBois, W. E. B. [1935] 2012. *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Towards a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America 1860–1880*. New Brunswick: Transaction.
- Dunning, William A. 1886. "The Constitution of the United States in Civil War." *Political Science Quarterly* 1 (2): 163–198.

- Dunning, William A. 1887. "The Constitution of the United States in Reconstruction." *Political Science Quarterly* 2 (4): 558–602.
- Dyer, Thomas G. 1980. *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Farr, James. 2004. "The Science of Politics – as Civic Education – Then and Now." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37 (1): 37–40.
- Foner, Eric. 2013. "Foreword." In *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, edited by John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, ix–xii. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Allen Lane.
- Gunnell, John G. 2004. *Imagining the American Polity: Political Science and the Discourse of Democracy*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Hart, Albert. 1905. "The Realities of Negro Suffrage." *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, Vol. 2, Second Annual Meeting, pp. 149–165.
- Harris-Perry, Melissa V. 2003. "The Heart of the Politics of Race: Centering Black People in the Study of White Racial Attitudes." *Journal of Black Studies* 34: 222–249.
- Hawkesworth, Mary. 2010. "From Constitutive Outside to the Politics of Extinction: Critical Race Theory, Feminist Theory, and Political Theory." *Political Research Quarterly* 63: 686–696.
- Hero, Rodney. 2015. "American Politics, and Political Science, in an Era of Growing Racial Diversity and Economic Disparity." American Political Science Association Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA.
- Herskovits, Melville. 1941. "The Interdisciplinary Aspects of Negro Studies." *American Council of Learned Societies Bulletin* 32 (September): 101–11.
- Hesli Claypool, Vicki, and Carol Mershon. 2016. "Does Diversity Matter? Evidence from a Survey of Political Science Faculty." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. doi:10.1080/21565503.2016.1170707
- Holden, Matthew, Jr. 1983. *Moral Engagement and Combat Scholarship*. McLean: Court Square Institute.
- Holt, Thomas C. 1998. "Explaining Racism in American History." In *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, edited by Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood, 107–119. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jones, Mack H., and Alex Willingham. 1970. "The White Custodians of the Black Experience: A Reply to Rudwick and Meier." *Social Science Quarterly* 51 (1): 31–36.
- Katznelson, Ira, and Helen V. Milner. 2002. "American Political Science: The Discipline's State and the State of the Discipline." In *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, edited by Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner, 1–26. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Lake, Marilyn. 2003. "White Man's Country: The Trans-National History of a National Project." *Australian Historical Studies* 34 (122): 346–363.
- Littlejohn, Stephen W., and Karen A. Foss. 2008. *Theories of Human Communication, 9th Edition*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- McClain, Paula D., and John A. Garcia. 1993. "Expanding Disciplinary Boundaries: Black, Latino and Racial Minority Group Politics in Political Science." In *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, edited by Ada W. Finifter, 247–279. Washington, DC: American Political Science Association.
- McClay, Wilfred M. 1993. "John W. Burgess and the Search for Cohesion in American Political Thought." *Polity* 26 (1): 51–73.
- McClerking, Harwood K., and Tasha S. Philpot. 2008. "Struggling to Be Noticed: The Civil Rights Movement as an Academic Agenda Setter." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41 (4): 813–817.
- McKinley, Shepherd W. 2013. "John W. Burgess, Godfather of the Dunning School." In *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, edited by John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, 49–76. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.
- Mershon, Carol, and Denise Walsh. 2016. "Diversity in Political Science: Why It Matters and How to Get It." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. doi:10.1080/21565503.2016.1170703
- Rabban, David M. 2013. *Law's History: American Legal Thought and the Transatlantic Turn to History*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Rasmussen, Kim Su. 2011. "Foucault's Genealogy of Racism." *Theory, Culture and Society* 28: 34–47.
- Rich, Wilbur C. 2007a. "African American Political Scientists in Academic Wonderland." In *African American Perspectives on Political Science*, edited by Wilbur C. Rich, 38–52. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Rich, Wilbur C. 2007b. "Introduction." In *African American Perspectives on Political Science*, edited by Wilbur C. Smith, 1–4. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Rose, John C. 1906. "Negro Suffrage: The Constitutional Point of View." *American Political Science Review* 1 (1): 17–43.
- Ruchames, Louis. 1953. "Charles Sumner and American Historiography." *The Journal of Negro History* 38 (2): 139–160.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. 1989. "History in Crisis? The Others' Side of the Story." *The American Historical Review* 94 (2): 680–692.
- Smith, Rogers M. 2004. "The Puzzling Place of Race in American Political Science." *Political Science and Politics*, 1 (1): 41–45.
- Smith, John David. 2013. "Introduction." In *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, edited by John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, 1–47. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.
- Smooth, Wendy G. 2016. "Intersectionality and Women's Advancement in the Discipline and Across the Academy." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. doi:10.1080/21565503.2016.1170706.
- Stephenson, Gilbert Thomas. 1906. "Racial Distinctions in Southern Law." *American Political Science Review* 1 (1): 44–61.
- Thorpe, Earl E. 1958. *Negro Historians in the United States*. Baton Rouge: Fraternal Press.
- Walton, Hanes, and Joseph P. McCormick II. 1997. "The Study of African American Politics as Social Danger: Cues from the Disciplinary Journals." *The National Political Science Review* 6: 229–244.
- Walton, Hanes, Cheryl M. Miller, and Joseph P. McCormick II. 1995. "Race and Political Science: The Dual Traditions of Race Relations, Politics, and African-American Politics." In *Political Science in History: Research Programs and Political Traditions*, edited by John S. Cryzek and Stephen T. Leonard James Farr, 145–173. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walton, Hanes, and Robert C. Smith. 2007. "The Race Variable and the American Political Science Association's State of the Discipline Reports and Books, 1907–2002." In *African American Perspectives on Political Science*, edited by Wilbur C. Rich, 24–37. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Williams, George Washington. 1885. *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880: Negroes as Slaves, as Soldiers, and as Citizens*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Wilson, Ernest J. III. 1985. "Why Political Scientists Don't Study Black Politics, but Historians and Sociologists Do." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 18 (3): 600–607.
- Wilson, Ernest J. III, and Lorrie A. Frasure. 2007. "Still at the Margins: The Persistence of Neglect of African American Issues in Political Science, 1986–2003." In *African American Perspectives on Political Science*, edited by Wilbur C. Rich, 7–23. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Winston, Michael R. 1971. "Through the Back Door: Academic Racism and the Negro Scholar in Historical Perspective." *Daedalus* 100 (3): 678, 684–685.