
The Association of Black Sociologists: A Descriptive Account from An "Insider"

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This is a brief case study of one particular black professional group, the Association of Black Sociologists. Even here, however, it is limited in its temporal focus to 1976 and earlier, the years when the organization was called the Caucus of Black Sociologists (CBS). One of the reasons encouraging this type of study is due to the overall professional and social importance of such a group as well as growing difficulty in obtaining relevant data with the passing of time. People's knowledge and records tend to diminish with the passing of time.

Very little has been written on the early days of the Caucus of Black Sociologists. James E. Blackwell's "Role Behavior in a Corporate Structure: Black Sociologists in ASA" (1974) is an important and notable exception. Anyone, therefore, desiring to reconstruct the activities, beliefs and accomplishments of CBS must depend on letters, reports, newsletters, programs, conversations (by telephone and in person), documents, and so forth. Such was the case in attempting to write this article. There is no central depository of CBS archives. This article is shaped also by the author's direct and active participation in CBS as well as studies by him of black sociologists on two different occasions, 1968 and 1981.

In the late 1960s black sociologists, as well as many other black professionals within larger professional bodies, perceived the necessity of organizing to achieve recognition and enhance opportunities. Tilman C. Cothran provided the initial leadership within the American Sociological Association (ASA). Dismayed at the absence of black participation in the annual programs of ASA, Dr.

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Cothran, then chairman of the department of sociology at Atlanta University and editor of *Phylon*, called together meetings of black sociologists at the annual meetings of ASA in 1968 (Boston) and 1969 (San Francisco) to discuss their common problems and strategies for dealing with same. He also communicated in writing and in person with foundations about the lack of blacks in leadership roles within them as well as the paucity of monies directed to black sociologists for research.

Six resolutions were presented at the 1968 ASA Boston annual meeting (Blackwell, 352):

1. The council of the association should always have representation from the black membership;
2. A greater effort should be made to assign black sociologists to membership and chairmanships on standing and ad hoc committees;
3. Black sociologists should serve more frequently as chairmen of sections in programs of association meetings;
4. Black sociologists should always be represented as presenters of papers and as discussants on programs that have major relevance to the black community;
5. Criteria for acceptance of papers for the American Sociological Association journals should be clearly enunciated and publicized so that all members, especially black members, will have equal opportunity for the acceptance of their papers, and
6. Black sociologists be secured as readers and referees of papers for publication in the American Sociological Association's journals.

Blackwell contends that although the Council of ASA approved these "radical" resolutions, its actions "remained tepid forays into academic tokenism" in view of the more activist caucus members evident at the 1969 annual meeting of ASA in San Francisco. Ernest Works of Cal. State (Fullerton), a former student of Tilman Cothran, was the temporary leader for the ad hoc committee of CBS. Specifically, the Caucus wanted to know what steps had been taken on the 1968 resolutions, that blacks be appointed to all ASA decision making bodies, that multiple participation in sessions be stopped, that ASA undertake a program for scholarships and financial assistance for black students interested in sociology as well as arrange for special sessions for them at the 1970 annual meeting. Most of the resolutions of 1968 and 1969 were assimilationist and organizationally specific. They dealt with professional and provincial concerns; however, there were other statements CBS made to itself, and to anyone else listening, having to do with conditions outside of the narrow confines of the Association, such as opposition to the Vietnam War, counterinsurgency research, political oppression of the Black Panther Party, the treatment of Nathan Hare at San Francisco State, black capitalism, and the like (Blackwell, 355).

At any rate, as a result of these activities, led largely by Cothran and Works, the genesis of the Caucus of Black Sociologists unfolded; however, CBS was not formalized until 1970 at the annual meeting of ASA in Washington, D.C. James E. Blackwell

of the University of Massachusetts (Boston) was chosen as its temporary spokesman. He, along with James E. Conyers (Indiana State University), Jacquelyne J. Jackson (Duke), Joseph W. Scott (Notre Dame), and others, worked around-the-clock. Directions for CBS, resolutions to be presented to ASA, as well as plans for the first formal nomination and election procedures to be followed were hammered out. Conyers was charged with carrying out the nomination and election procedures for the formal organization of CBS. Election results were announced on November 23, 1970 after 76 ballots had been received (a 66 percent return of all ballots mailed). James E. Blackwell was elected National Chairman of CBS, victorious over Tilman C. Cothran, Ralph Hines and Joseph Scott. Jacquelyne Jackson was chosen as Secretary-Treasurer; Ernest Works as Program Chairman; Edgar Epps, Research; Charles V. Willie and Charles King as Chair and Co-chair for membership; and the following as Executive Committee members: James E. Conyers, Tilman C. Cothran, Ralph Hines, Albert McQueen, Joseph W. Scott, Charles U. Smith, Alphonso Pinckney, Walter L. Wallace and William J. Wilson.

The voting population overwhelmingly approved the resolution that the previously mentioned persons would remain in office for two years' duration. Blackwell's administration achievements were numerous, including the following as most noteworthy: the preparation of a constitution for CBS; establishment of the position of Executive Specialist for Minorities and Women within ASA; appointment of a Committee on the Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in Sociology (ASA); institution of a Minority Fellowship Program (ASA); establishment of the DuBois-Johnson-Frazier Award Selection Committee of ASA; a CBS newsletter; and increased and broader participation of black sociologists within the overall structure and programs of ASA.

These accomplishments were not only spearheaded by CBS, but ASA incumbents were CBS activists and leaders. For example, Maurice Jackson (deceased) was the first to hold the ASA position of Executive Specialist for Minorities and Women, followed by Joan Harris and Doris Wilkinson, all early CBS members and activists. James Conyers was the first chair of the ASA's Committee on the Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities, followed by James Blackwell. Butler Jones chaired the first DuBois-Johnson-Frazier Award Selection Committee of ASA and Blackwell and Walter L. Wallace became members of the ASA Council. Other CBS members were elected and appointed to various committees of ASA, including the Committee on Committees (Charles Willie and Cora Marrett) and Committee on Nominations (James Conyers, Edgar Epps, Jacquelyne Jackson and Preston Valien).

Another noteworthy achievement of the Blackwell years occurred on May 5-6, 1972 when he and Morris Janowitz got the University of Chicago to sponsor a National Conference of Black Sociologists. Given its long-standing traditions in the production of black doctorates in sociology (still the number one leader) and the cultivation of race relations theory and research, Chicago was a natural site for such a conference. Papers presented at the conference subsequently were published in the most comprehensive book on black sociologists, *Black*

Sociologists: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, 1974. G. Franklin Edwards, Butler A. Jones, Stanley H. Smith, Charles U. Smith, James E. Conyers, Edgar G. Epps, Nathan Hare, Jacquelyne J. Jackson, Walter L. Wallace and William J. Wilson contributed to this volume, which Blackwell and Janowitz edited.

Following Blackwell in the position of National Chair of CBS, from 1973 to 1976, were, in succession: Jacquelyne J. Jackson (1972-73), James E. Conyers (1973-74), Albert J. McQueen (1974-75), and LaFrances R. Rose (1975-76). The student paper competition was begun in 1973 and the CBS *Newsletter* was formalized and expanded under the editorship of Doris Wilkinson. A proposed and revised constitution was carved out from 1973-75. Membership in CBS increased threefold under the leadership of Conyers (over 100 members) as well as money in the treasury, which increased to over \$1,000. The list of black doctorates in sociology was, in part, responsible for these increases in membership and money. For several years, Conyers sold the list for \$5 and donated same to CBS. In addition, this list became a basic source of information for interested persons and groups in the United States, including black sociologists. Its spin-off effects for the mobility and production of black sociologists should not be underestimated. Albert J. McQueen's (1974-75) organizational skills were made evident in San Francisco (1975) where he and others put together one of the best programs in CBS history. He also was instrumental in raising membership dues (1975) from \$5 to \$15 for regular active members and from \$2 to \$5 for student members. He, also, along with LaFrances R. Rose, and others began exploring incorporation of CBS. McQueen saw the following advantages of incorporation: to gain tax-exempt status; to become a legal body to raise, receive, and handle monies; and to gain corporate rather than individual responsibility (accountability) for collective actions; however, CBS did not become incorporated until August 4, 1976 by the Colonial Charter Company of Wilmington, Delaware, recorded in the Recorder's Office in Incorporation Record C, Vol. 122, p. 138 on the 9th day of August, 1976. At that point CBS became officially known as the Association of Black Sociologists (ABS) and beginning in 1977 the title President of ABS in lieu of National Chairperson of CBS was used. One reason for incorporation in Delaware was that Nolvert P. Scott (now deceased) resided there. He played an instrumental role in the incorporation process under the leadership of Al McQueen and LaFrances Rose. One other point deserves historical note: under the leadership of LaFrances Rose (1975-76), Wilbert Watson developed and edited *The Black Sociologist*, a journal-newsletter-type publication for our group that was published for about five years (1975-1980). LaFrances Rose also developed initial relations with the Society of Women Sociologists (SWS), largely through a joint social at the annual meeting in New York, 1976. Doris Wilkinson and Mareyjoyce Green established the early major links with SWS.

After 1976. From 1976 until the present, ABS may be said to be characterized by expansion, consolidation and restoration. For example, the first annual pro-

gram of CBS in 1971 in Denver had only two sessions and a social event. The 1990 program of ABS had 21 sessions and a preregistration fee that had never been imposed during the early years. Also, until 1990, ABS, formerly CBS, met almost exclusively at the same time as the annual meeting of ASA. Membership, as of 1990, was based upon a salary scale: under \$35,000, \$30 membership; \$35,000-45,000, \$35; and \$45,000 and above, \$45. Student members are now assessed a membership fee of \$15. Likewise, the governance and composition has changed since 1988 when the organization adopted its present constitution and bylaws. Once the Executive Committee was composed of six members, patterned after the regional district breakdown used by the American Sociological Association, a student member, and its principal officers. Now Article V of the 1988 Constitution stipulates the Executive Committee (the governing body) shall be composed of the following eight persons: President, President-Elect, Secretary-Treasurer, immediate Past President, Membership Committee Chair, Editor of the Newsletter, and three elected-at-large members (of which one must be a student). This efficient model insures continuity, and consolidation of authority and roles, especially since 1981 when four of the presidents served terms of two years: Rutledge M. Dennis (1981-83), Aldon D. Morris (1986-88), Sandra V. Walker (1988-90) and incoming president Florence Bonner who in 1991 preferred not to serve two years. Marejoyce Green (Cleveland State) is the 1992 president of ABS and Walter Allen (UCLA) will be incoming president for 1992-93.

Prior to 1977, CBS enjoyed a special relation with ASA. In fact, it was called CBS of ASA. However, with the proliferation of groups, it became clear from both parties that ASA could not assume special and permanent responsibility for such groups. This was true particularly after the ASA had established the Minority Specialist position, the Minority Fellowship Program, and the Committee on the Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession, all under jurisdiction of ASA. The aforementioned developed because of the persistent agitation and resolutions of CBS. Some of the caucus members wanted greater independence and thereby sought immediate incorporation as an official separate entity, not one based on any particular attachment to any other body.

In 1978 Charles U. Smith of Florida A & M University successfully organized a Race Relations section within ASA, a section that today is vibrant and growing (CSREM). Others pushed for greater association and cooperation with other sociological and social science groups. For example, ABS (CBS) jointly sponsored sessions during their respective annual meetings with the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) and the Society of Women Sociologists (SWS). The ties with SSSP became so close that some ABS members felt they were becoming "step-children" to SSSP. Formal ties with SSSP were amicably broken in 1987. ABS members harbor no hard feelings toward any of these groups for many of them are, or have been, leaders in these groups, including those established within ASA. Collectively they have helped, and been aided by, the activities of ABS. Even now, ABS has increased the annual amount it contributes to

the ASA Minority Fellowship Program to \$1,000 a year. Within ABS proper the Student Paper Competition has been restored (1986) and a Distinguished Career Award has been established. The first five recipients were Joseph Himes (1987), James Blackwell (1988), Joyce Ladner (1989), Andrew Billingsley (1990) and Ruth S. Hamilton (1991). All of these activities were established under the leadership of Aldon D. Morris (1986-88).

Past Presidents of CBS/ABS

There have been seventeen presidents in the twenty-one year history of CBS/ABS: James E. Blackwell (1970-72), Jacquelyne J. Jackson (1972-73), James E. Conyers (1973-74), Albert J. McQueen (1974-75), LaFrances Rodgers Rose (1975-76), Joan R. Harris (1976-77), Albert W. Black (1977-78), Wilbur H. Watson (1978-79), John Sibley Butler (1979-80), Rutledge M. Dennis (1981-83), James Pitts (1983-84), Lena W. Myers (1984-85), Essie M. Rutledge (1985-86), Aldon D. Morris (1986-88), Sandra V. Walker (1988-90), Florence Bonner (1990-91) and Mareyjoyce Green (1991-92). Four of them have served terms of two years: James Blackwell, Rutledge Dennis, Aldon Morris, and Sandra Walker. All have earned doctorates in sociology from reputable universities: Brandeis, Cal-Berkeley, Iowa, Michigan, Michigan State, Northwestern, Ohio State, Penn, Rice, SUNY-Stony Brook, and Washington State; however, three universities are represented more than once. Washington State has produced three presidents: James Blackwell, James Conyers and Rutledge Dennis; Michigan, two presidents, Albert McQueen and Essie Rutledge; and Northwestern, two, John Butler and James Pitts. All work in universities, with only one being employed by a predominantly black university at the time of the ABS presidency, Lena Myers of Jackson State. A regional breakdown of place of work and residence at time of election produced the following: seven from the north central region, six from the south, three from the northeast and one from the west. Nine of the presidents are males and eight are females, which speaks well for CBS/ABS, especially since as late as 1968, there were only 14 black female doctorates in sociology. By 1981, however, there were 103, a 636 percent increase, and 28 percent of all black doctorates in sociology. All of the past presidents of CBS/ABS are still living, attributable, in part, to the fact that most were under 40 at the time of incumbency. Likewise, all of them are black, attributable, in part, to the circumstances and thrust of the organization; however, nothing has ever been in any of the constitutions of CBS/ABS that would exclude any other racial or ethnic groups from participating in any of the programs or affairs of CBS/ABS. It goes without saying that all have been dedicated servants of CBS/ABS. Many of them are widely known scholars and activists; and others are in the process of becoming so. The combined efforts of these leaders, other officers and members of ABS collectively provide a contemporary missing link in the sociology of knowledge.

Conclusion

In the practice of sociology, as in other spheres of life in America, social constraints of various types are and have been imposed upon blacks. They have collectively inhibited the successful development of a professional mandate. Before the 1960s, black scholars, in all fields, had to practice their "trade" in an unequal and segregated order. For a long period in American history, blacks were not allowed to enter professional schools for training, and when the few "exceptional" persons were admitted, subsequent opportunity structures and mobility avenues were blocked. Everywhere one looked, the educational, economic, political, cultural and military dominance of whites over blacks was evident. Furthermore, prior to the 1960s, few of the predominantly white institutions had any black faculty members; rooms and housing on campuses were likely to be segregated. Even recreational outlets, shops and stores were likely to be segregated or discriminatory. Some of their fellow students were probably racists (or insensitive), as well as some of the administrators and professors. Theoretical, ideological, professional, monetary and governmental constraints were common-place all over the United States. Black sociologists, therefore, by choice and circumstances, had to be concerned about their narrowly defined roles and statuses. They had to be explicitly or implicitly concerned about change, reform and protest. CBS/ABS grew out of a need for change and reform. Their views of change and reform helped to democratize the sociological enterprise and undoubtedly will continue to do so.

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