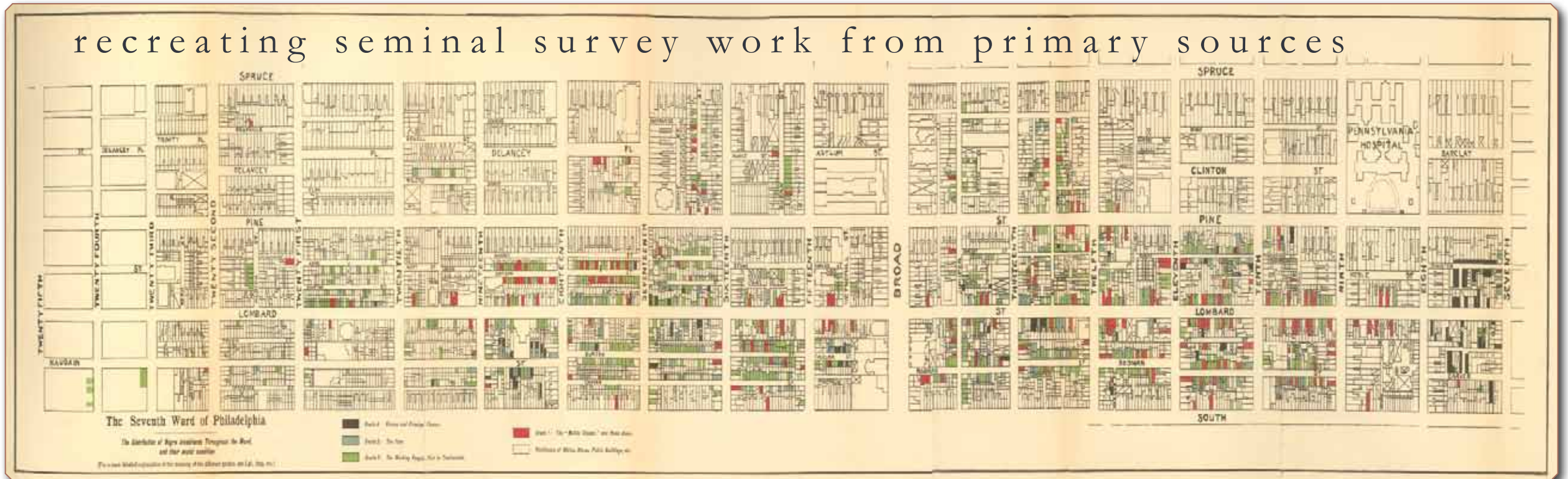


W.E.B. DU BOIS AND THE SOCIAL SURVEY MOVEMENT

recreating seminal survey work from primary sources



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CHAPTER SIX



Imagine being a 30-year-old African-American

scholar with a Ph.D. from Harvard, hand-picked by a member of University of Pennsylvania's Sociology Faculty to conduct a study of blacks living in Philadelphia. Imagine moving with your new wife to Philadelphia and personally conducting door-to-door interviews of 2,500 black households over 15 months. What would it have been like to ask a complete stranger who viewed you as an outsider even though you were African

American more than 100 questions about health, education, and employment? How long would have taken to canvass all 400 blocks within Philadelphia's Old Seventh Ward, enumerating everything from houses to fire hydrants and estimating everything from the width of sidewalks to the proportion of black and white residents? Imagine investigating all of the institutions that served blacks - countless churches, clubs, and shops - to determine how much property they each owned and who their members included. If that was not enough, consider listening to hundreds of stories about discrimination, attending weddings, observing normal daily activities, consulting with local experts, reviewing newspaper articles, and examining health reports. Imagine collecting all that information and then trying to synthesize it without the benefit of computers or research assistants.

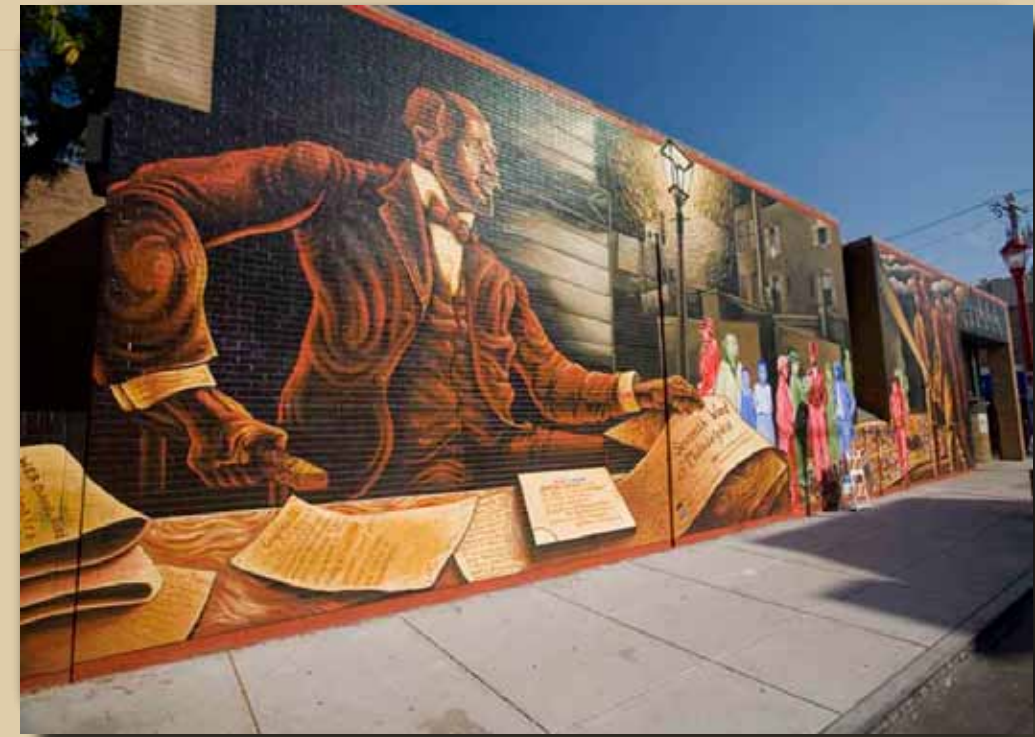
Such was the challenge W.E.B. Du Bois faced when he accepted the invitation to write *The Philadelphia Negro*, a methodologically and sociologically remarkable achievement in 1899 that is today considered a classic work of urban history. Fortunately, Du Bois was a man with an excellent education, a tremendous work ethic, and the extraordinary ability to collect and make sense of large amounts of data. We are also fortunate that Du Bois chose to use a map to represent his findings.

Of course, he produced much more than a map; *The Philadelphia Negro* is a dense narrative of 500 pages full of tables, charts, and detailed footnotes. No map could represent all the information that he collected in his field work, but the map he created was literally the centerpiece of his book. Even by itself, it does a remarkable job of telling the story of *The Philadelphia Negro*. The original version of this book featured an accordion style, pull-out map of all land parcels in the Old Seventh Ward. He carefully colored each of the parcels where he found black households according to his assessment of their social class (Figure 3). Sadly, the 1996 reprint

of the book by the University of Pennsylvania Press chopped the map into nine pieces and converted the map to black and white. Du Bois does not refer to this map in the book other than to list it in the table of contents, but his narrative is full of spatial analysis and insights that the map reveals.

DU BOIS' MAP OF SOCIAL CLASS

What, then, does Du Bois' exquisite map tell us? Perhaps the most remarkable thing is that blacks lived downtown in large numbers at the turn of the 20th century. You don't have to know Philadelphia well to know that the Old Seventh Ward - the area just south of Rittenhouse Square, City Hall, and Independence Hall - is no longer home to any large African American population. However, there are still signs of the vibrant and diverse African American community that Du Bois found; still standing today are the Mother Bethel Church, the first African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church in the country, Mercy-Douglass Hospital, the first black hospital in the country, and the Institute for Colored Youth, a school that trained



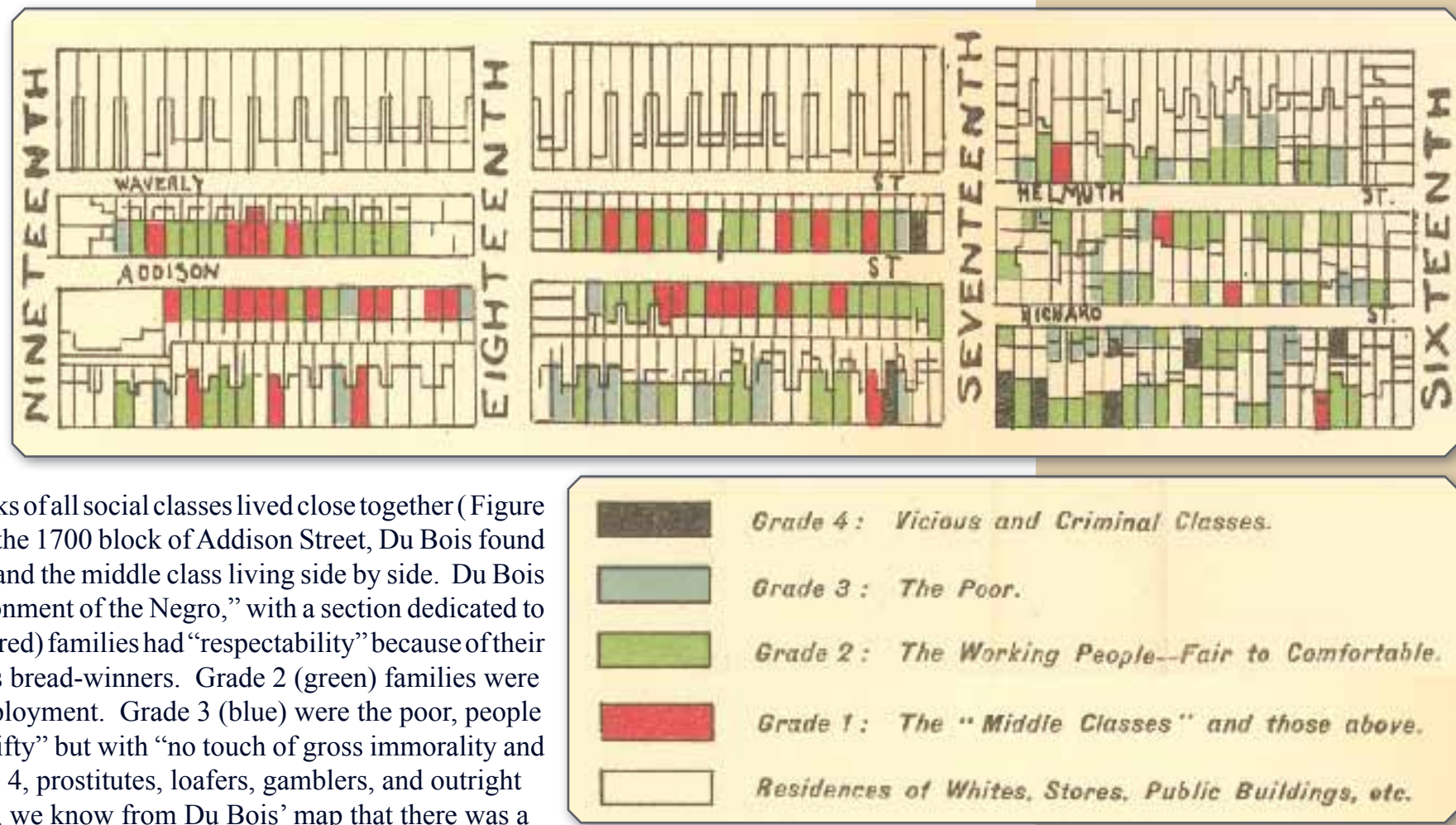
LEFT FIGURE 1 A young W.E.B. Du Bois

ABOVE FIGURE 2 "Mapping Courage," located at 6th & South Streets. Mural by Willis Humphrey, photo by Jack Ramsdale.

black teachers. A historical marker, located near the Settlement House where Du Bois lived when he came to Philadelphia, commemorates Du Bois' research in Philadelphia, as does a mural on the fire station at Sixth and South Streets (Figure 2). But the African American people walking through the Seventh Ward today are less likely to be residents than visitors to South Street, Philadelphia's most lively entertainment area. While African Americans made up nearly 30% of the population of the Old Seventh Ward in 1900, the area bounded by Spruce and South Streets, the Schuylkill River and Seventh Street, had a population only 7% black by 2000.

Du Bois' map shows us a distinct racial pattern among blacks and whites. Nearly all of the houses along Spruce, Pine, and South Streets, long rows of four and five-story brick row homes, were occupied by whites. Blacks, on the other hand, lived on the smaller streets and alleys with names that changed from block to block: Rodman, Carver, and St. Mary's Street, Waverly, Helmuth, Stone, and Kneass Street. Racial segregation at this scale could never be detected by the kinds of dissimilarity, isolation, and exposure indices we use today with census tract-level data to rank metropolitan areas. No doubt, whites living in downtown Philadelphia had much greater contact near their homes with blacks in 1896 than in 1996, but the pattern Du Bois documented represents another version of inequality and constrained housing choice.

Because Du Bois graded each individual parcel by the "social condition" of its residents, we also know that blacks of all social classes lived close together (Figure 3). For example, on the eastern end of the north side of the 1700 block of Addison Street, Du Bois found the "vicious and criminal," the poor, the working class, and the middle class living side by side. Du Bois explained these categories in his chapter on "The Environment of the Negro," with a section dedicated to discussion of "social classes and amusements." Grade 1 (red) families had "respectability" because of their income, which kept wives and children from serving as bread-winners. Grade 2 (green) families were also respectable, working-class people with steady employment. Grade 3 (blue) were the poor, people who were "honest, although not always energetic or thrifty" but with "no touch of gross immorality and crime." Those particular sorts were lumped into Grade 4, prostitutes, loafers, gamblers, and outright criminals (p. 311). At an even more fundamental level, we know from Du Bois' map that there was a class structure within the black community, something that few whites recognized at the time. Du Bois had not yet fully developed his concept of the "talented tenth," but he makes numerous references throughout *The Philadelphia Negro* to the "better classes of Negroes."



ABOVE FIGURE 3 Du Bois' map of social condition. Courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Archives.

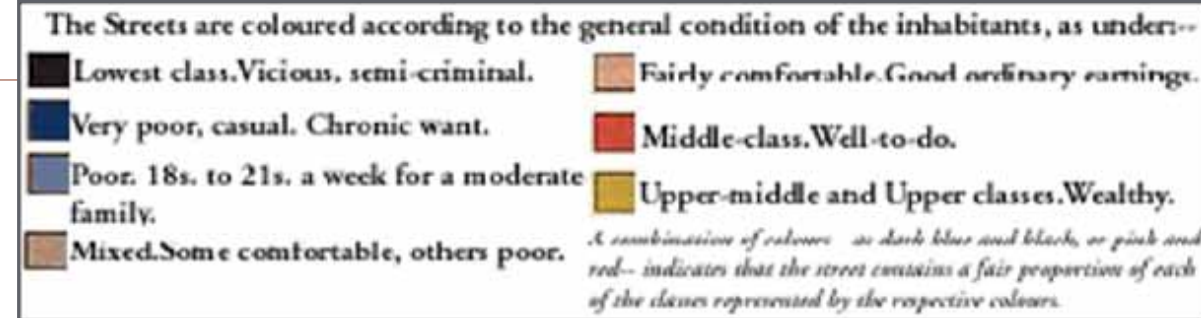
In addition to what Du Bois discovered, the map tells us a great deal about his research process. This was an empirical investigation, not a theoretical exercise. Because the map shows grades for individual households, we know that Du Bois talked with individual people. He did not use any kind of sampling system, choosing instead to visit each of the black households. Most of the people in the Seventh Ward had heard that the University of Pennsylvania was conducting a study, and in all but 12 cases (according to Du Bois), he was immediately invited into the “parlor, kitchen, or living room” to ask his questions (p. 62). Long before Institutional Review Boards and informed consent requirements, Du Bois left names out of stories and house numbers off his colored parcel map to protect individual identities, but he was very much interested in individuals. He could have summarized his survey results by block, as Charles Booth did with his maps of poverty in London (Figure 4), but instead he chose to show each individual household in the Seventh Ward. Du Bois further demonstrated his commitment to honoring individual experiences and voices by including 80 different examples of employment discrimination that he gathered from his interviews and presented in the “color prejudice” section of his chapter on “The Contact of the Races.”

Du Bois included only two other maps in *The Philadelphia Negro*. One showed the boundaries of Philadelphia’s political wards, a helpful reference map and one which clearly indicated the surprisingly small size and central location of the Seventh Ward, particularly as home to as many as a quarter of Philadelphia’s 40,000 blacks. A table showing the black

population of each ward in 1890 was awkwardly arranged running vertically along the side. In order to know the black population of each ward, the reader must go back and forth from the map to the table, turning the book at right angles (p. 59). The other map is more of a diagram than a conventional representation of geography. Arrows and different line patterns show the migration patterns of blacks, Italians, Jews, and Irish within Philadelphia between 1790 and 1890 (p. 306).

CONTEXT OF THE PHILADELPHIA NEGRO

While Du Bois was the first to systematically study a significant black urban population, his data collection methods and mapping were not unprecedented. Charles Booth began what is now referred to as the Social Survey Movement with his massive investigation of poverty in London in the 1880s. Unlike Du Bois, Booth collected data by relying on an army of women who made house-to-house calls to register children for school. Booth and his team produced a dozen volumes and a set of color-coded maps depicting the social class of each block. Booth recognized six classes, from “upper-middle, upper class, wealth” to “lowest class, vicious and semi-criminal” (Figure 4). While Du Bois acknowledged his debt to Booth, he made no reference to Florence Kelly, Jane Addams, or any of the other women at Chicago’s famous Hull-House settlement house that produced *Hull-House Maps and Papers* in 1895, just before Du Bois began his work in Philadelphia. There is little doubt Du Bois was aware of their work, however, which included extensive interviewing in their Chicago neighborhood and maps that color-coded individual parcels according to the ethnicity and wages of residents (Figure 5). Du Bois had as much in common with social workers (or “public sociologists,” as scholar Mary



Jo Deegan has called them), as with academic sociologists in his day. Isabel Eaton, a fellow at Philadelphia's College Settlement Association who had spent time at Hull-House, wrote the special report on domestic service that Du Bois included at the end of *The Philadelphia Negro*. Du Bois also maintained professional relationships with Eaton, Addams, and other social workers throughout his career.

By the time *The Philadelphia Negro* was published in 1899, Du Bois had already moved to Atlanta to begin a faculty appointment at Atlanta University, where he pursued another ambitious research agenda. Much like *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois' subsequent research was highly empirical. He organized and edited annual publications from conferences on the "Negro Problem" including *The Negro in Business* (1899), *The Negro Artisan* (1902), *The Negro Church* (1903), *Economic Cooperation among Negro Americans* (1907), and *The Negro American Family* (1908). His 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, marked his growing interest in essays rather than research reports and anticipated his departure from Atlanta University and the start of a long career as editor of *The Crisis*, a magazine published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Always a prolific writer, he also authored novels, histories, a book of poetry, and several autobiographies. Du Bois' life ended at age 95 in Ghana, where he lived after renouncing his U.S. citizenship.

The Du Bois map of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward provides evidence of interest in spatial patterns and social context long before desktop computers or GIS. But today's GIS capabilities make it possible to look more carefully at Du Bois' map. While that map tells us much, it generates more questions than it answers. Did white immigrants settle in a distinct residential pattern among white residents of the Old Seventh Ward? Did black migrants from the South produce distinct residential patterns among black residents? Who were the whites who lived on the small streets alongside blacks? What was the nature of their relationships? Where did residents work, worship, shop, recreate, or attend school in relationship to where they lived?

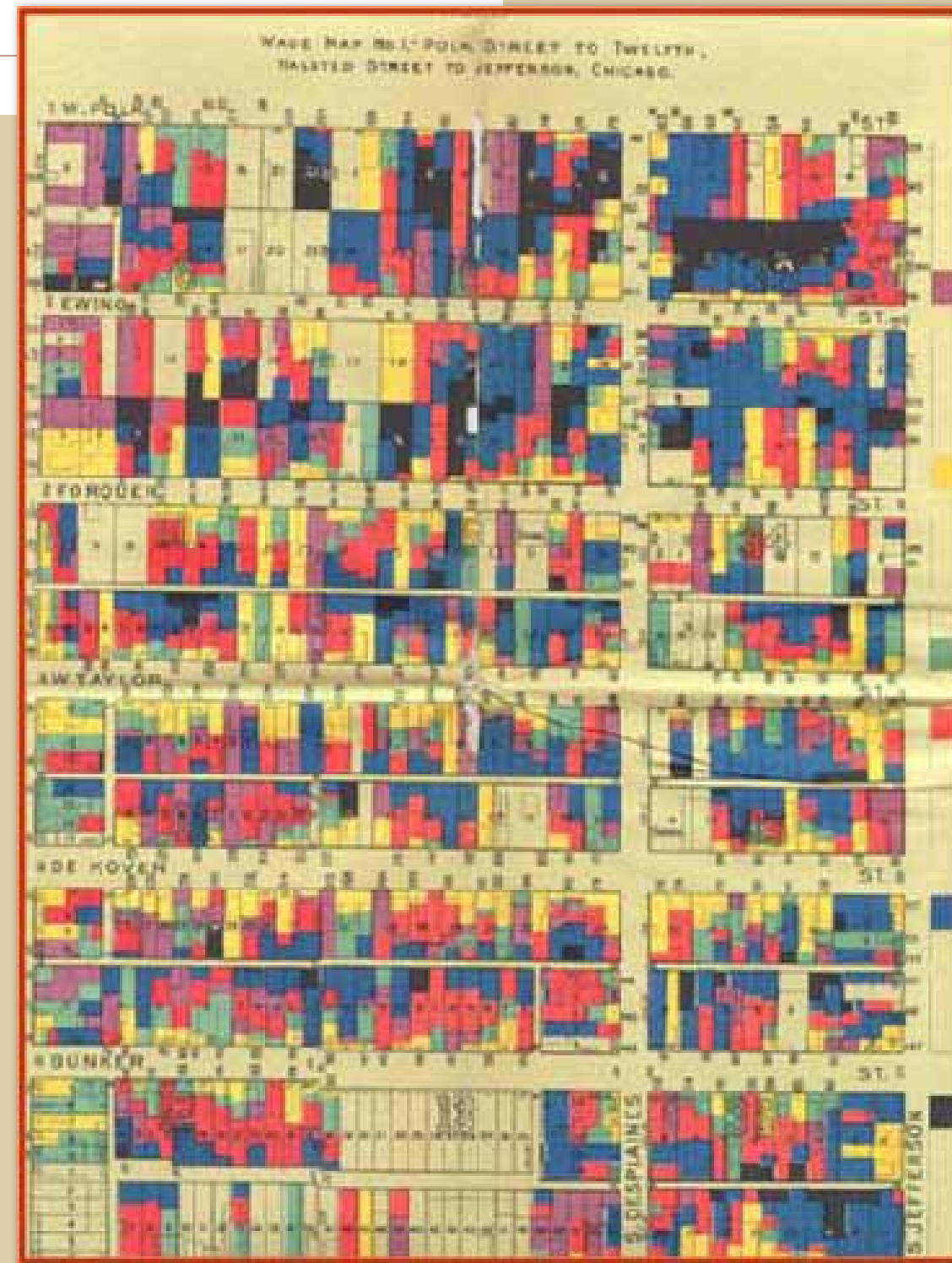


FIGURE 4 (previous page)
Charles Booth's map of poverty
in London

RIGHT FIGURE 5 Map of wages
in one Chicago neighborhood
from *Hull-House Maps and
Papers*

BELOW FIGURE 6 Screen capture from Seventh Ward GIS, available at www.mappingdubois.org

How crowded was housing relative to tenement living in New York and elsewhere? Who were the “vicious and criminal” people and how did Du Bois assess social class? Why was vice concentrated in certain parts of the Seventh Ward, and how did that change over time? And what eventually happened to the black residents of the Seventh Ward in the decades after Du Bois conducted his research?

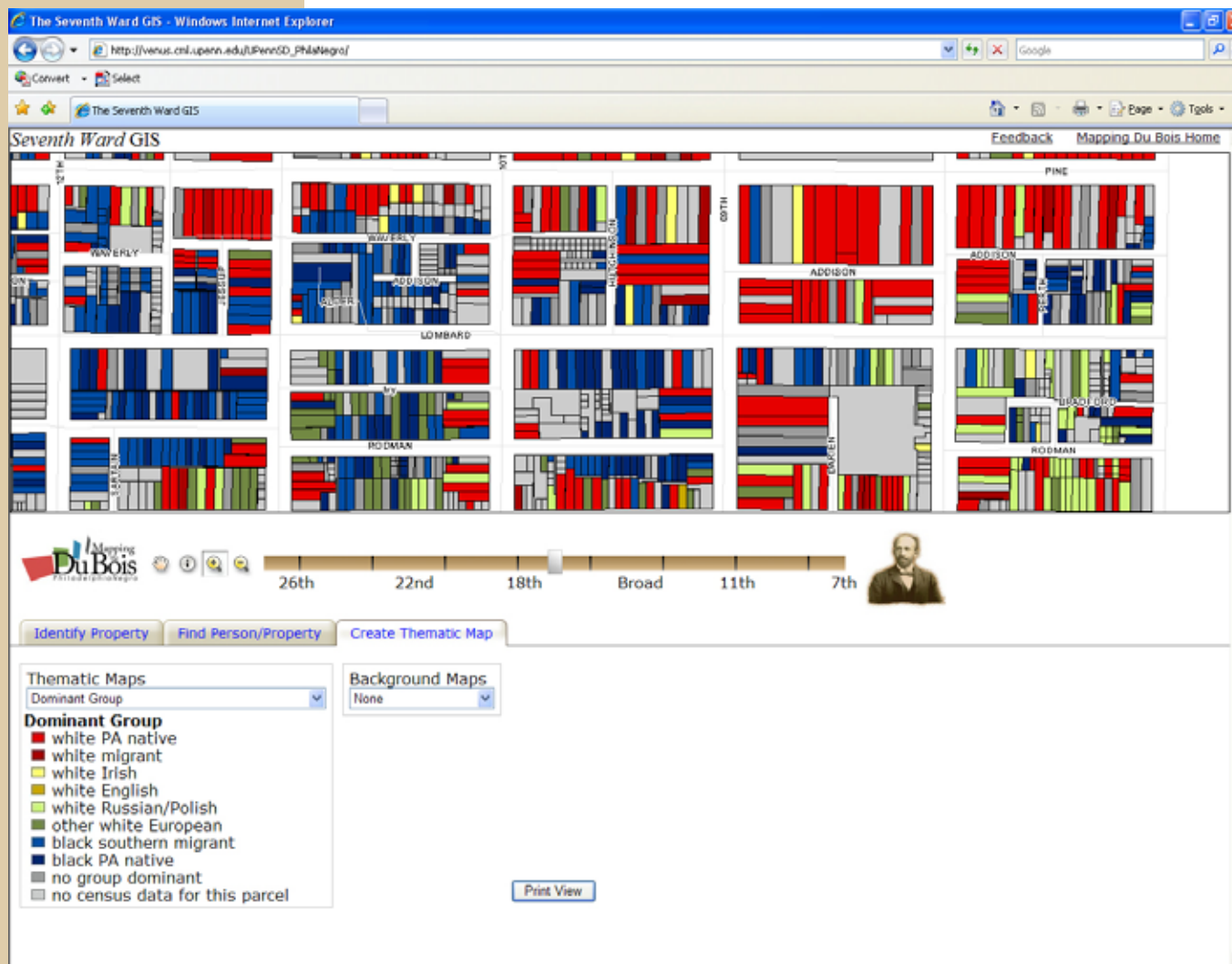
These are among the research questions that are currently guiding a large-

scale GIS project to assemble individual-level census data, birth and death accounts, disease and hospital records, crime reports, historical photographs, institutional histories, newspaper articles, and other primary sources in order to recreate the Seventh Ward as Du Bois found it. Funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Mapping the Du Bois Philadelphia Negro is a project designed to generate new research as well as curriculum materials for high school and college students. By creating an online GIS that integrates primary data for each of the 5,000 parcels in the Seventh Ward, researchers and students alike can generate maps and queries about race, place of birth, crowding, property ownership, school attendance, employment, and health (Figure 6). Those with the skill to analyze the data on their own can download map layers and attribute tables. Geography is only one lens through which visitors to the site can investigate the people, properties, and institutions of the Seventh Ward, but the mapping is essential to discovering many of the central themes.

THE MEANING OF ALL THIS

The “final word” Du Bois offered in the last chapter of *The Philadelphia Negro* attempted to interpret “the meaning of all this” after overwhelming his readers with endless facts. He emphasized the duty of both blacks and whites to confronting the “Negro problem.” On one hand, he lamented the unwillingness of white America to accept the humanity of blacks; on the other, he called for blacks to stop wasting money on unnecessary material goods and to create “rainy day” savings accounts. But what is the meaning of *The Philadelphia Negro* maps - and the other great maps of the Social Survey Movement - for those of us working with GIS today? What would Du Bois tell us, as we move to integrate spatial technologies into all of our academic disciplines, Internet applications, and personal devices?

The story of the mapping of *The Philadelphia Negro* encourages us to honor the broad range of mapping traditions from which we draw as social scientists concerned about how the environment impacts individuals.



It also calls on us to think carefully about why we are making maps. Are we simply enthralled by the methodological challenges, the quest to collect, analyze, and distribute more information in faster and more engaging ways? Is the end goal making it easier to find our favorite style of pizza in an unfamiliar city or peak over the wall of China's Forbidden City from our laptops? More likely, Du Bois would call on us to remember that each person we include in our maps has a story, and that producing a color-coded parcel map is no substitute for walking through city streets and talking with actual people. He would urge us to capture the potential of GIS to improve the quality of life of all people and address longstanding social inequities like poverty and racism. W.E.B. Du Bois, Charles Booth, Florence Kelly, Jane Addams, and others produced an impressive collection of sophisticated maps that provided compelling visual evidence of need in their communities. The best way to honor their work is to follow in their footsteps.