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SYMPOSIUM W.E.B. DU BOIS

This issue of *Sociologia & Antropologia* presents a special section dedicated to W.E.B. Du Bois, featuring three original articles, a research record on Du Bois's sociology of religion, accompanied by a previously unpublished Portuguese translation of the article "The Problem of Amusement", a review of the recent Portuguese translation of his book *The Negro Church*, and the symposium that follows. The section aims to contribute to the growing engagement with Du Bois's work in Brazil. While his connections to the country stretch back several decades, his writings have only recently gained wider visibility in Brazilian academic circles, inspiring courses, translations, and research.

The Brazilian readership first gained access to *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1999 through a pioneering translation by Heloisa Toller Gomes. Yet, this version remained out of print for many years. Only in 2021 did Editora Veneta address its absence, publishing a new translation by Alexandre Boide. Following this event, Editora Autêntica released *The Philadelphia Negro*, translated by Cristina Patriota de Moura, while *The Negro Church* was translated by Isaac Palma Brandão, Stefania Pereira da Silva, and Damien Browne. Additionally, several of Du Bois's articles have recently been published in Brazil. In 2021, *Crítica Marxista* published a dossier edited by Sávio Cavalcante, featuring brief texts related to Marxism and communism. That same year, the short story "The Comet" was released as part of a volume alongside Saidiya Hartman's "The End of White Supremacy," translated by André Capilé. More recently, other texts by Du Bois were translated for the journal *Áfro-Ásia* as part of a collaborative project led by researcher Matheus Gato, who also coordinated the translation of *The Negro Church*. Other translations are

available online, produced by Black and Marxist collectives that have played a significant role in introducing Du Bois's legacy in Brazil.

Du Bois's engagement with Brazil dates back to his formative years. His doctoral dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America*, completed at Harvard University in 1895 as the first dissertation defended by a Black candidate, frequently references Brazil. These references underscore the Atlantic connections and the ongoing U.S. involvement in the slave trade, which remained profitable in countries like Brazil even after its formal prohibition. Earlier, in 1891, Du Bois wrote a paper titled "Federal Government in Brazil (1889–1891)" for his advisor Albert Bushnell Hart's course, offering a brief analysis of Brazil's 1891 Constitution. The paper begins with the observation: "I have found it difficult to find any good picture of the actual working of government in Brazil–especially provincial and local government" (Du Bois, 1891: 4). He received a B+ grade.

Du Bois's interest in Brazil deepened over the following decades. A significant episode was his meeting with João Batista de Lacerda at the First Universal Races Congress, held in London in 1911. This encounter sparked Du Bois's interest in Brazilian racial dynamics. On multiple occasions, he interpreted Lacerda's presentation, *The Metis, or Half-Breeds, of Brazil*, as evidence that Black individuals in Brazil had access to social mobility and intellectual recognition. As scholars such as Góes (2022), Seigel (2009), and Nunes (2008) have noted, during the 1910s and 1920s, Du Bois was influenced by the prevailing view in American historiography that depicted Brazil as a racial paradise, free from the color line. His correspondence also indicates familiarity with the works of Oliveira Lima. The meeting with Batista de Lacerda generated one of the earliest mentions of Du Bois in Brazil. The anthropologist from the National Museum described him as a "mestizo whose great scientific merits were recognized at the [Universal Races] Congress" and cited excerpts from Du Bois's presentation to discuss the "racial issues" in the United States.

In the 1910s and 1920s, *The Crisis*, the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) journal edited by Du Bois, published several texts about Brazil. These ranged from brief notes on topics such as Palmares, the Archbishop of Mariana Silvério Gomes Pimenta, and Machado de Assis, to longer articles providing travelers' impressions of the country and biographies of historical figures like the abolitionist José do Patrocínio. The magazine also advertised opportunities for land acquisition in Brazil through the Brazilian American Colonization Syndicate (Meade & Pirio, 1988). As the editor of *The Crisis*, Du Bois received numerous letters from African Americans seeking guidance on migrating to Brazil. In 1926, he even wrote to the Brazilian President requesting clarification about reports that African Americans were being denied visas to enter the country.

Although Du Bois later shifted his intellectual and political focus toward the African continent, Brazil continued to appear in his works,

reflecting an evolving perception of racism (Hellwig, 1990). In a posthumously published article, "The Future of Africa in America," originally delivered as a lecture at Vassar College in 1942, Du Bois critically examined "the policy of racial absorption" as Brazil's proposed solution to racial relations. He observed that dark-skinned Brazilians rarely achieved significant economic positions or social status. Nevertheless, he maintained that Brazil had successfully avoided "racial friction and the open color bar" (Du Bois, 1942: 12). In this article, Du Bois introduced a new element: the concept of an "economic class line." He remarked, "when color combined with poverty has kept a large class of dark laborers in a depressed condition, it makes it unlikely that a Brazilian would boast of African ancestry as openly as he would assert his descent from white Europeans" (Du Bois, 1942: 12).

As Góes (2022) observes, Du Bois does not seem to have established strong ties with Brazilian Black social movements or social scientists. References in his works and in the archival materials preserved by the University of Massachusetts Amherst (https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/collection/mums312) include few relevant mentions. One notable exception is the anthropologist Arthur Ramos, whom Du Bois cited and corresponded with in the context of the unfinished *Encyclopedia of the Negro*.

Cristina Patriota de Moura and Joaze Bernardino-Costa, in their article in this issue of *Sociologia & Antropologia*, argue that Du Bois's work had almost no influence on the development of Brazilian sociology, unlike that of his contemporary, Robert Park. This discrepancy partly reflects internal conflicts within U.S. sociology, which prioritized the Chicago School while marginalizing Du Bois's Atlanta School. Using urban sociology as an example, the authors demonstrate how Du Bois's contributions were undervalued both in the United States and in Brazil, despite the enduring relevance of works like *The Philadelphia Negro*, which addressed key themes of 20th-century urban sociology and remain relevant today.

If Du Bois's work was neglected for decades in sociology, Juliana Góes's article examines the potential for its contemporary recovery by articulating with Brazilian authors, particularly Clóvis Moura. Góes draws on both sociologists to examine the tensions surrounding the possibilities for Black liberation within the radical frameworks of Black Marxism and Afro-pessimism, focusing on issues such as slavery and racial capitalism.

Valter Silvério and Hasani Elioterio dos Santos provide a foundational analysis of sociological theory through the lens of Du Bois's work, addressing one of the central issues in the field: human agency. Drawing on different texts, the authors argue that conceptualizing Black social action in a racially divided world is crucial to understanding Black transnationalisms and the diaspora, which they frame as "Black modernisms." Engaging with scholars such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Brent Hayes Edwards, the article opens new possibilities for connecting Du Bois's work to aesthetic and political practices, including Francophone *Négritude* and Brazil's Teatro Experimental do Negro.

As Andrea Lopes and Matheus Gato suggest, respectively in her review and in his research record included in this special issue, Du Bois was pioneering in many respects but historically subject to limited recognition compared to figures like Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. However, his ideas open new pathways and are being embraced by intellectuals from various fields of sociology. To explore the significance of Du Bois's work and its relevance to contemporary sociology, we invited distinguished scholars to respond to a common set of questions. They reflected on their first encounters with his writings, the impact of his legacy on their research, and how his ideas are received today. We extend our gratitude to Professors Aldon Morris, Gurminder K. Bhambra, José Itzigsohn, Julian Go, Karida L. Brown, Patricia Hill Collins, and Prudence Carter for their insightful contributions to this special section.

QUESTIONS

(1) In Brazil, where we are posing these questions, W.E.B. Du Bois's work has only recently begun to be translated more frequently. It may not be an exaggeration to say that it is only now that researchers have started engaging more deeply with his writings. Could you tell us about your first encounters with Du Bois's texts and reflect on how those early readings influenced your broader intellectual and personal development?

(2) Could you tell us how Du Bois's work became significant in your research and how you engage in critical dialogue with his ideas?

(3) Du Bois can be characterized as an intellectual who opened up various fields within the humanities, including sociology, history, and literature. What are your impressions of the contemporary reception of his work, particularly regarding the diversification of his critical legacy?

(4) Du Bois's body of work is exceptionally broad and varied. If you could select one or two works that you feel deserve special attention today, which would you choose and why?

ANSWERS

Aldon Morris

1

I first encountered Du Bois's texts in community college when I read his writings challenging Booker T. Washington's dominant leadership of African Americans. Du Bois triggered my intellectual awakening when in his 1903 book, *Souls of Black Folk*, he explored Black agency and identified Black's second sight derived from their racialized double consciousness.

That consciousness, he argued, provided them unique and superior insights into human affairs.

After reading *Souls*, I thirsted to learn more about Du Bois's life and writings because his perceptions of Black life were insightful, eloquently expressed, and imbued with deep passion. As I read Du Bois's writings, including his 1899 *Philadelphia Negro*, I realized Black people were not racially inferior as claimed by the White dominant society. Indeed, I saw more clearly that we were a historically significant race who had made enormous contributions to the United States and the world. Du Bois made clear that in the future, Black people were poised to positively impact human civilization. I also learned from Du Bois the fundamental sources of racial oppression and how they could be overthrown through Black activism and the development of an unswerving commitment to effectuate change.

For me, Du Bois personified both activism and scholarship because he excelled in both domains. Thus, I became committed to exploring Du Bois's scholarship and activism. Utilizing him as a role model, I developed a deep desire to become an exemplary scholar and engage in activism designed to liberate Black people.

2

My first presentation of Du Bois's work was given during the 2004 American Sociological Association meetings. For those meetings, I organized the opening plenary where I discussed Du Bois's work in the presence of thousands of sociologists eager to learn about Du Bois's scholarship. Following the plenary, Amin Ghaziani, and I capitalized on this interest by publishing "Du Boisian Sociology–A Watershed of Professional and Public Sociology" in 2005. We established that Du Bois published a vast groundbreaking scholarship, and we documented his role as a prodigious activist who demonstrated scholarship and activism were mutually reinforcing.

In 2005, I proposed that the American Sociological Association's (ASA) highest award, the "Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award," be renamed the "W. E. B. DuBois Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award." I organized a committee of six sociologists—Michael Schwartz, Mary Pattillo, Dan Clawson, Cedric Herring, Howard Winant, and Walter Allen, who launched the campaign to convince the membership to vote for the change. After a fiercely debated campaign, a majority of ASA's members voted affirmatively. In 2006, ASA announced the name change of its highest award, ensuring Du Bois could no longer be ignored by the discipline.

On the hundredth birthday of ASA, I was invited to contribute a chapter on Du Bois's sociological contributions. As I researched, I was stunned at the volume of Du Bois's scholarship and its complexity. In my chapter, "Sociology of Race and W.E.B. DuBois: The path not taken," I conveyed Du Bois's conception of social science as an objective quest for truth and discussed his analysis of race as a social construction facilitating White domination.

I explored how his work demolished sociology's Black inferiority thesis by documenting Black agency. I underscored Du Bois's analysis of gender, class, and global racism and his prodigious activism.

In 2020, I was elected president of ASA and chose the theme "Emancipatory Sociology: Rising to the Du Boisian Challenge." My 2021 presidential address, "Alternative View of Modernity: The Subaltern Speaks" (published February 2022 in the *American Sociological Review*) explored Du Bois's work on slavery, colonialism, social inequality, and how these developments shaped the modern world. My address advocated for a Du Boisian emancipatory sociology useful to efforts to liberate humanity.

3

Throughout the academy we are witnessing what I call the "Du Boisian historical moment." Du Bois's scholarship and activism are currently being discussed, debated, and absorbed in the social sciences and humanities. In sociology, a Du Boisian sociology has arisen. Numerous books and articles on Du Bois's scholarship and activism are appearing so rapidly it is difficult to track and absorb them. A leading text helping to spur this renewed interest in Du Bois's scholarship is Aldon Morris' 2015 book, *The Scholar Denied*. Moreover, scholars in numerous subfields: economic, environmental, and global sociology; gender, race, and ethnic studies: sociologies of methodology, demography, historical, and comparative studies and medical sociology; political and criminological sociology, and symbolic interaction, and sociological theory are exploring the pioneering contributions Du Bois has made in these areas. Some of these specialties now claim Du Bois as a founder. Handbooks on Du Bois are appearing, including the recently published *Oxford Handbook of W. E. B. Du Bois*, of which I am the senior editor. This volume contains forty-nine chapters by experts covering Du Bois's life, scholarship, and activism.

Contemporary scholars are seeking new and fresh insights into the troubling world we inhabit. The work of previous social theorists seems to have reached a limit on unraveling many of the baffling developments of modernity. With few exceptions, these accounts have been largely silent about the complex intersectional roles played by racism, slavery, colonialism, capitalism, class, and gender in collectively producing modernity. Much previous work has proceeded from an uncritical "top-down" approach that privileges the impact elites and dominant classes have played in human history.

Du Bois's work is being resuscitated because it employs a critical "bottom-up" approach, which seeks to understand modernity from perspectives of the oppressed and subaltern agency. Du Bois's approach is being interrogated because it starts not with examinations of empires but with those of dispossessed and oppressed builders of those exploitative configurations. It is these examinations that shed new light on modernity.

4

The scholarship and writings of Du Bois are so vast that no one or two texts can adequately convey the scope of his insights and contributions. For an introduction to his work, I would select Du Bois's 1903 book, *Souls of Black Folk* and his 1935 book, *Black Reconstruction*. *Souls* develops key Du Boisian concepts including the color line, double consciousness, and second sight. This book also displays Du Bois's eloquent writing style. *Black Reconstruction* analyzes racism through keen investigations of capitalism, class struggles, and the agency of the oppressed. It reveals how Du Bois integrated Marxism into his analytic perspective to generate understandings of modernity.

Finally, it must be understood that like all scholars, Du Bois had limitations and blind spots. Regarding the United States, Du Bois did not develop an analysis of the indigenous Native American population and the settler colonialism that dispossessed them and ended their way of life. Regarding Brazil and Cuba, Du Bois misdiagnosed the extent to which racism ravaged those societies. His analysis of gender sometimes fell short of giving credit to women scholars.

Nevertheless, the scholarship and activism of W. E. B. Du Bois remain vital to generating an understanding of the modern world. It is time to place Du Bois's work front and center for the purpose of understanding our world and engaging in fruitful efforts to liberate humanity.

Gurminder K Bhambra

1

I first encountered the work of W.E.B. Du Bois in the context of thinking about emancipation. An idea of emancipation had emerged within the tradition of the European Enlightenment at the same time that Europeans were integrally involved in the trade of human beings and the establishment of plantations in the Americas worked by coerced and enslaved indigenous and African labourers. While freedom was contrasted to the condition of slavery (associated with the "ancient world"), modern European practices of enslavement and forced labour were not deemed to be significant to claims of Enlightenment. Within the African American tradition, in contrast, conceptions of emancipation were developed precisely in the context of resisting enslavement and thinking about possibilities beyond it.

As set out by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* and in *Black Reconstruction*, emancipation went beyond simple liberation from enslavement to being regarded as the necessary condition for the fulfilment of one's capacities as a human being. The debate between Du Bois and Booker T. Washington on the meaning of emancipation, for example, provides one of the first instances of recorded public exchange on these issues (for discussion see Bhambra 2014). Du Bois contested what he regarded as Washington's more accommodationist approach and argued instead for the struggles by African Americans to be identified with the impetus behind the founding of the nation itself. He further

argued for a broader conception of emancipation which included the realisation of substantive equality at its core.

In 1911, for example, Du Bois attended the first Universal Races Congress, held at the University of London, where he delivered a paper titled 'The Economics of Negro Emancipation in the United States'. Here, Du Bois argued for consideration of what freedom means given that emancipation left formerly enslaved people with nothing except their freedom (no land, no capital, no possessions). While there had been initial discussion of establishing a Freedman's Bureau and a system of public education to systematically address past injustices, it was felt in Northern and Southern states alike that this would be too much of a burden for the "general" (read White) public to take on and ought to be the responsibility of those who had been freed. Freedom in such conditions was quickly curtailed with the establishment of sharecropping and other newly devised forms of bonded labour. Du Bois ended his paper with a call for solidarity not just across the colour line, but across lines of economic inequality.

2

Du Bois's understanding of emancipation emerged both from rigorous scholarly engagement and a concern with accounting for the structures of colonialism that necessitated struggles for freedom. The central argument, across much of my work over the last twenty years, has been to demonstrate how the very conceptual framework of the discipline of Sociology depends upon an idea of modernity that elides colonialism (see Bhambra, 2023). I have called for a reconstruction of the concepts and categories that constitute the discipline through a systematic consideration of histories of colonialism and empire. This I argue to be a necessary first step in the renewal of sociology and its application to pressing problems in the present.

Rather than "decolonizing" Sociology, my work reconsiders its standard accounts from the perspective of taking seriously the colonial histories that were also integral to the making of the modern world. I do this in the hope of opening up space from which we can think about Sociology differently and, in the process, make the discipline more effective in its analyses and address of social problems in the present. With this, I see my work as being, in some small measure, in alignment with the ways in which Du Bois himself undertook research, especially for his book, *Black Reconstruction*.

Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part which Black Folk played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880 was published in 1935 and developed at greater length the arguments of an earlier article that had been published in 1905 in the *American Historical Review*. In both accounts, Du Bois contested the dominant interpretation that Reconstruction had failed because Southern institutions had been dismantled and the suffrage had been extended too quickly to African Americans.

Instead, Du Bois pointed to three key benefits of Reconstruction, namely that it had brought about democratic government, that it established free public schools, and that it provided for new social legislation. Further, he argued that these benefits had been for all Americans, even though they were subsequently removed from African Americans under "Jim Crow." In this way, Du Bois did not simply write the chief witnesses of Reconstruction back into the history of the period, but pointed to their absence in standard accounts and, in reconstructing history, also reconstructed understandings of the nation and democracy in the process.

3

I understand *Black Reconstruction* as a work of historical sociology that explicitly challenges earlier racialized accounts by mobilizing evidence in support of a more adequate history of the period. Du Bois uses the tools of his discipline to deconstruct the problematic arguments of standard accounts and to reconstruct a more adequate historical narrative that establishes the "Truth" of the past such that a different future becomes possible.

The sociological and societal dilemmas about which Du Bois wrote across the first half of the twentieth century continue to structure our understandings through to the present. As such, it is encouraging to see increased engagement with his work across a number of disciplines. Much of the engagement appears to be with his more essayistic work in *The Souls of Black Folk* and his allusive and literary work on the particularities of race within the United States. More attention could also be paid to his more substantial sociological and historical-sociological contributions in *The Philadelphia Negro* and his later work, *Color and Democracy,* as well as *Black Reconstruction*.

With *Color and Democracy*, particularly, Du Bois moves from being concerned primarily with questions of race within the United States to questions about the colonial system globally. Personally, I find Du Bois's work most useful in his reconceptualization of the US in colonial terms and his anti-colonial analysis as it develops apace in his later writings.

It must be recognized, however, that Du Bois wrote over an extensive time span and, during that period, engaged with a variety of forms of writing including, but not limited to, books, articles, essays, newspaper articles, and campaign documents. He was an academic, a journalist, a political campaigner, and more at different times and sometimes simultaneously. He wrote a phenomenal amount and, across his life, encountered the structures of racialized hierarchies and associated obstacles in his way. Within his work, he never gave way to pessimism or despair, but simply carried on working to undo those structures and create the possibilities for a different world. There is much to laud across his writings, not least the spirit in which he continued to work till the end of his life.

Alongside learning from Du Bois's scholarly contributions, then, I also take heart from his refusal to give way to pessimism. We must simply continue to do the work that we believe to be vital for our times.

4

Black Reconstruction, according to Du Bois's biographer, David Levering Lewis, "represented one of those genuine paradigm shifts periodically experienced in a field of knowledge" (2000: 367). Du Bois challenged every problematic claim made within the dominant (White) scholarship of the time about Reconstruction and argued strongly for recognition of the contribution made by African Americans to reconstruct democracy during that period. It is both a powerful contribution to a more adequate history of the period and a challenge to the racialised historiography of earlier accounts. Further, Du Bois argued that Reconstruction—as well as its prehistory of the mass transportation of human beings and their enslavement—should be understood as "an upheaval of humanity like the Reformation and the French Revolution" (1935: 727); that is, as a world historical event in the making of modernity.

From presenting the color line as the defining issue for humanity in his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, by 1945, in *Color and Democracy*, Du Bois suggested that the abolition of colonialism should be considered the most profound issue that needed to be addressed (Bhambra and Holmwood, 2021). In this book, he demonstrated a keen understanding of the broader histories of colonialism and the extractive relationships through which they had not only existed but thrived. Du Bois was prescient in his analysis of the ways in which the colonial organisation of the world was also implicated in the situation of the working classes in colonising countries and vice versa. He wrote that when working people within European countries began to demand "costly social improvements from their governments," the financial burdens of this were likely to be balanced by increased investment in (and extraction from) the colonies (2007 [1945]: 276). In this way, he argued, democracy in the West would continue to impede the possibilities of democracy in other parts of the world.

As Holmwood and I argue at the end of our chapter on Du Bois in *Colonialism and Modern Social Theory,* the failure to acknowledge Du Bois as a canonical thinker within sociology is a matter of great significance from the point of view of histories of our discipline. However, we go on, it is not simply an issue of his presence within the canon, but of how sociological concepts have been structured by failing to address his sociology and its different interpretations. Sociology is far richer through its engagement with the scholarship of Du Bois.

Jose Itzigsohn

1

I completed my PhD without ever reading W. E. B. Du Bois—or even knowing who he was. My first job was a teaching postdoc at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. There I found that the main library was named the W. E. B. Du Bois Library and learned that many professors and students at UMass took pride in the university housing the Du Bois archives.

This sparked my curiosity. Who was Du Bois? I began reading his works and it quickly became clear to me that there was a significant gap in my sociological training. From that point on, I committed myself to incorporating his ideas into my sociological thinking. Today, I am proud to identify as a Du Boisian sociologist. Of course, not all sociologists who pass through UMass Amherst adopt a Du Boisian perspective. What led me to immediately appreciate his work? Perhaps it was my prior exposure to Frantz Fanon, whose books I encountered on my parents' bookshelves, or the fact that I read C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins* as an undergraduate in a Latin American history course. Or maybe it was that what brought me to sociology was the Latin American tradition of dependency theory. This background prepared me to recognize the profound sociological importance of Du Bois's work.

Over time, I began incorporating Du Bois's work into my teaching. Initially, my focus was on *The Souls of Black Folk* and *The Philadelphia Negro*, where I introduced Du Bois as a theorist of micro-interactions and a thinker on race. A major turning point came when I engaged deeply with his masterpiece, *Black Reconstruction in America*. This book revealed Du Bois as a global and historical thinker, a theorist of racialized modernity, and a profound analyst of racial and colonial capitalism. Today, I dedicate an entire graduate seminar to exploring his work and advancing the framework of Du Boisian sociology.

By Du Boisian sociology, I refer to a sociology rooted in the work of Du Bois but not limited to it. It seeks to examine both the historical and contemporary manifestations of racial and colonial capitalism, uncovering their structures of oppression while exploring how people have lived within and resisted these systems. Importantly, it approaches these questions not merely for the sake of knowledge but with the aim of contributing to collective efforts to dismantle racism and coloniality and to build a more egalitarian world.

2

Encountering the work of W. E. B. Du Bois has profoundly shaped the trajectory of my career. While I have long believed that Du Bois is one of the founders of sociology—and very likely its most exemplary practitioner—it took me some time to begin writing about his work. Though I recognized him as a major social theorist early on, it was not immediately clear to me how to frame that argument in a way that resonated with sociologists. Over time, I found ways to start practicing a Du Boisian sociology.

For example, when I wrote *Encountering American Faultlines*, a study of Dominican migration to Providence, I drew inspiration from Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro* to guide the structure and arguments of the book. Similarly, after reading *Black Reconstruction*, I thought about writing an article comparing its sociological significance to C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins*. Although it took time to realize this idea, I eventually published the article in the *C. L. R. James Journal*. In recent years, much of my work has focused on analyzing Du Bois's contributions and establishing the theoretical and methodological foundations for a contemporary Du Boisian sociology—an effort that is central to my co-authored book with Karida Brown, *The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois*.

The Du Boisian sociology I envision calls for theorizing within history—analyzing cases with careful attention to the complexities of specific historical moments—rather than constructing theories or concepts that claim universal applicability across time and place. It emphasizes examining the particularities of local cases while situating them within global trends and the broader structures of racial and colonial capitalism. This approach privileges "messy" narratives that highlight conjunctural contingencies and complexities over simplified causal models or mechanisms.

Central to this sociology is the argument that lived experience shapes how individuals perceive the world: those on the margins of society are often better positioned to discern the structures and realities of the dominant social order, whereas those in dominant positions frequently struggle to see beyond the color line. However, it also recognizes that not everyone in a subaltern position develops a critical perspective, nor do all who adopt such perspectives interpret the world in the same way. Furthermore, while it is more challenging to adopt a critical view from a dominant positionality, as Du Bois demonstrates in his masterful biography of John Brown, it is undoubtedly possible.

3

The work of W. E. B. Du Bois has long been a central focus in African American Studies and, to a lesser extent, in history and the humanities. However, as a sociologist, my interest lies in Du Bois's reception within the discipline. It is only in recent years that sociology has begun to fully acknowledge Du Bois as one of its foundational figures. This emerging "Du Boisian moment" is the result of sustained efforts by numerous sociologists who have challenged sociology's epistemic exclusions.

A key event in the consolidation of this Du Boisian moment was the publication of Aldon Morris's *The Scholar Denied* in 2015. Morris's book convincingly argued that Du Bois was the father of American scientific empirical sociology and that his contributions had been systematically ignored by the discipline. While Morris was not the only one to make this case, his work was the most compelling and influential among those who have advanced this argument.

I encountered Du Bois's work through the lens of my earlier readings of Frantz Fanon and C. L. R. James. This perspective shaped my understanding of Du Bois as an anticolonial thinker who theorized racial and colonial capitalism, rooted sociological analysis in historical context, and developed a methodology centered on "second sight." This interpretation of Du Bois is central to *The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois*, the book I co-authored with Karida Brown. However, it is neither the only nor the most common reading of Du Bois within sociology.

For me, Du Bois's sociology represents, as Aldon Morris put it, "a path not taken." However, we are also seeing attempts to reinterpret Du Bois in ways that align him more closely with the mainstream of the discipline. For instance, some sociologists focus primarily on *The Philadelphia Negro*, viewing it as a precursor to contemporary urban and community sociology—an early but less sophisticated version of the methodologies we use today. Similarly, some Marxist sociologists focus on *Black Reconstruction*, interpreting Du Bois's later work as little more than a variation of Marxism.

These interpretations suggest that Du Bois's contributions do not represent a "path not taken" and imply there is nothing fundamentally distinct about his work compared to current sociological practices. The future trajectory of the Du Boisian challenge within sociology will ultimately hinge on which interpretation of his work prevails—or, as Du Bois himself might have put it, on "chance."

4

As I mentioned earlier, I currently teach a seminar on Du Bois's work, where I ask students to engage deeply with his writings. I believe that only by reading Du Bois extensively can we grasp the full breadth of his work and his intellectual trajectory. However, if I had to choose just one or two books, I would select *Black Reconstruction* and *Dusk of Dawn*. Both are theoretical and methodological masterpieces that should be required reading for all social scientists.

Black Reconstruction, published in 1935, is a brilliant analysis of the rise and fall of the Reconstruction era following the U.S. Civil War. Du Bois argues that Reconstruction, which lasted from 1865 to 1877, presented a real opportunity for establishing true democracy in the United States. However, for this to materialize, it was crucial to politically and economically empower the newly freed Black laborers. The resurgence of a White ruling bloc ultimately ended this democratic experiment. Du Bois contends that the collapse of Reconstruction illustrates how racism obstructed the possibility of genuine democracy in the U.S.

Moreover, the book is a theoretical and methodological masterpiece. It provides a profound analysis of what I call racial and colonial capitalism—showing how historical capitalism was shaped not only by class, but also by racism and colonialism. It also exemplifies how historical sociology can be

conducted by focusing on the in-depth analysis of a single case while placing it within its broader global historical context.

Dusk of Dawn, published in 1940, is equally remarkable for demonstrating how lived experience can be integrated into social analysis. Its subtitle, *An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, describes its unique approach. In this book, Du Bois narrates his autobiography, not simply to recount his life but to show how his experiences were shaped by the global color line. The book also traces Du Bois's intellectual evolution and his shifting approaches to understanding and combating racism and colonialism. Through this lens, he illuminates the changing meanings of race, showing how racism has shaped his life and broader societal structures.

The Du Boisian sociology I propose is grounded in history and lived experience, and these two books embody that approach. They illustrate how sociological analysis can engage with the complexities of history and personal experience to produce profound insights into social structures and inequalities as well as the possibilities and limits for agency and change.

Julian Go

1

I cannot remember exactly the very first time I read Du Bois. It must have been as an undergraduate. But I do remember starting to read him more deliberately in the early 2000s. What struck me was how his writing was emotional and passionate (I was reading *Souls of Black Folk*) and yet he was a sociologist. So I became open to how "social theory" or "social thinking" or even just "sociology" could come in forms that are not just academic texts. I was also moved by how his writing gave a sort of voice to some segments of the globally marginalized populations. This influenced me because I was also reading Fanon, and I saw Du Bois and Fanon together as providing work that represented a form of social theorizing from the standpoint of the subaltern subject. This became a key part of my discussion of them in my 2016 book *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*.

2

Du Bois became significant to me because his work offers novel insight into experiences and structures of racialized domination. As so much of my research is about colonialism, empire and postcolonial thought, Du Bois' work obviously fits directly into my agenda. But I have never focused solely on Du Bois. I have treated his ideas as part of a larger tradition of anticolonial and postcolonial thought that highlights racialization, subjectivity, and capitalism as key parts of empire. So, I learn a lot about those things from Du Bois. I also rely on him as one theorist among others who raises questions of social science epistemology and knowledge production. His critiques of conventional sociology and his allusions to epistemic privilege (i.e., "second sight") help me think about how theorizing and social science emerge from particular

social locations. Finally, I use Du Bois' work as a prime example of why social "science" is necessary. As I explain in some of my work, I think Du Bois' early sociological work helps us see why social scientific explanation using empirical data is important for political projects.

That said, I have also found limits to some of Du Bois' ideas. While I think he raises questions about epistemic privilege in a generative way, I do not think he answers them fully. For instance, I am not entirely convinced that "second sight" is automatic as Du Bois implies, so I have tried to use Du Bois to think about epistemic privilege but I also think we need to go "beyond him," so to speak.

3

It is wonderful that so many scholars, particularly in my field of sociology and adjacent fields, like political science, are now taking Du Bois more seriously than before, and that so many younger scholars are incorporating his ideas into their work in new ways. It is all very exciting . It bodes well for the social sciences. I only have two concerns about what might happen.

The first is that Du Bois becomes "domesticated." That is to say that his later Marxism and anti-imperialism gets ignored and instead scholars only focus on his early work.

The second is that Du Bois will simply become another canonized thinker to add alongside Marx, Weber, Durkheim. In other words, I hope we do not just turn Du Bois into yet another male theorist who we are supposed to venerate. I think that having canonized "founding fathers" or "leading" sociologists is dangerous. I would much prefer that we canonize traditions of thought or sets of ideas. As I say, I think Du Bois is merely part of a bigger tradition and we should dig into the many thinkers of that tradition. This is one of my more recent projects: not just to look at Du Bois and incorporate his ideas but to bring in other neglected thinkers—especially a wide range of anticolonial thinkers in the Global South.

4

I would pick two. First, *Black Reconstruction*. This remains a crucial text for thinking about not just race but racial capitalism, and its insights remain powerful given the contemporary political situation in the United States. Second, *Color and Democracy*. Published in 1945, this underexamined text reveals some of Du Bois' thoughts on colonialism, empire, and the international system. These are issues that are not going away, and so this text remains good to think with.

Karida L. Brown

1

I discovered Du Bois in my second year of graduate school, at Brown University, when I was twenty-eight years old. It was at that point that so

many doctoral students confront the path that lies ahead of them—that watershed moment when many of us decide whether we will stay in academia or fight the good fight in some other space. During that time, I constantly asked myself: What am I doing here? Does any of this even matter? Can I even belong here, in this institution, in this discipline? I, a Black, cis-gender woman, a low-income, first-generation college student, discovered the writings of Du Bois later than I should have, yet fortunately for me at the time in my life when I needed him most. I needed to know that there was room for me and the world in which I lived in the discipline of sociology.

My first encounter with Du Bois occurred when I read *The Souls of Black Folk*, a collection of essays on race published in 1903 that introduced his seminal concept of "double consciousness" and went on to become a classic work of American literature. That book awakened something in my brain that had lain dormant up until that point. In fourteen short essays and what he called a "forethought," Du Bois eloquently gave words to all the intangible meanings of being a Black person in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. His prose was clear yet lyrical, his arguments subtle yet full of force, and embedded in every sentence was a plain old truth. W. E. B. Du Bois spoke to my own soul. Imagine my surprise when I learned that he too had been a sociologist, and that *The Souls of Black Folk* was one of the early works in the field.

I was surprised because I did not encounter Du Bois in my own department but rather in the Department of Africana Studies. I was surprised because I did not know that people could write so vividly and intimately and still be allowed to call themselves sociologists. I was surprised to realize that *The Souls of Black Folk* was not a mere one-hit wonder but that Du Bois had written, spoken, and curated art, theater, and performances prodigiously, and that there exists a vast body of secondary literature on his life and work. I was pleasantly surprised and even comforted to learn that there was such a thing as a Du Boisian sociology that I could study and incorporate into my scholarly work, and that it had been there all along, hidden in plain sight.

2

I am always thinking with Du Bois. Early on, it was primarily through his scholarship—his theorization, empirical analysis, and methodology. I also found his production of critical history to be both informative and instructive. His work illuminated the importance of historical sociology and its potential to shape how we understand modernity as a *racialized modernity*.

As I continued to develop as a scholar, I began engaging with what I think of as "Du Boisian Sociology." This framework goes beyond the specifics of what Du Bois, the scholar, said, or wrote. It encompasses the broader, emancipatory sociology he represents. Du Bois embodies a school of thought—a tradition of sociology as a liberatory practice.

This perspective allowed me to find community among a diverse group of scholars and intellectuals who also share this stance. I believe this intentional disposition toward one's scholarship—grounded in a commitment to justice and freedom—is emblematic of who Du Bois was as an iconic intellectual. It is an intellectual genealogy rooted in the Black Radical Tradition, one that I, alongside many other Du Bois scholars, strive to actualize in our work.

Now, I find myself drawing from three aspects of Du Bois: the scholar, Du Boisian sociology, and Du Bois the man. Over the years, I've come to learn more about his life, and placing it within a broader historical and geopolitical context has illuminated so much for me. Du Bois has become a portal—a way to think critically with and through his legacy to access different worlds and expand my global understanding of the historical thrust of this epoch of racial colonial capitalism.

Du Bois lived for 95 years, with at least 70 of those years being highly productive from a writerly standpoint. His scholarship evolved across eras, from the post-Reconstruction period to World War I, World War II, the formation of the League of Nations and the United Nations, and into the Civil Rights Movement, African independence, and the Third World Movement, up to the March on Washington.

Throughout his life, Du Bois was in constant communication with some of the world's most influential intellectuals, activists, politicians, philanthropists, and creatives. Because of this, his work serves as a portal through which we can explore these historical moments and enrich our political imaginaries. To me, this is profoundly exciting and endlessly inspiring.

3

I find this incredibly exciting, and I promise you—we are just getting started. But I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge and give credit to the generations of scholars, mostly Black, who dedicated so much labor and time to moving Du Bois's legacy from the margins to the center of the social sciences, particularly sociology. Achieving that took decades of hard-worn, tireless effort.

We all stand here benefiting from their labor—often a labor of love—that has created an open table where we can sit, engage in rich conversations, and build theory from the very center of our disciplines. This labor has expanded our understanding of the epoch of racial and colonial capitalism, and has set the stage for the work we do now.

I am always inspired when I travel—from Portugal to South Africa—or when I receive notes from people like my current collaborator and former student, Hasani Elioterio Dos Santos, in Brazil. Learning that scholars, especially young ones, are picking up the Du Boisian mantle and carrying it forward is profoundly energizing. That is our work.

It is not just about staying in the past and asking the same questions Du Bois grappled with during his lifetime. Instead, it is about ensuring that

the relay continues. We take the baton and extend the work, asking the most pressing questions of our time while remaining rooted in a Du Boisian lens. This lens reminds us of the importance of history, lived experience, and the systems of power that shape our world—capitalism, racism, patriarchy, colonialism—and challenges us to push these inquiries even further.

This is such an exciting moment. I believe we are witnessing a global Du Boisian renaissance, and I am here for it.

4

Ooh, this is a tough question. Two books that I feel deserve special attention today are *Black Reconstruction in America* and *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Black Reconstruction in America is a cornerstone text that truly synthesizes the issue of race and class. Du Bois shows us that it is not a matter of race *or* class but rather race *and* class. It does so by highlighting the limits of so-called democracy within white supremacist systems. While the book focuses on the American context, its insights are incredibly instructive from global perspectives. I believe everyone should take the time to read this one.

And then, of course, *The Souls of Black Folk*—our oldie but goodie. This book is timeless and iconic. For many of us, it is how we were first introduced to Du Bois. The prose is luscious, the critique is insightful, and the text remains nourishing. He pierces your consciousness with that opening question:*"How does it feel to be a problem?"* It continues to inspire intellectuals all around the world. I think it is a work everyone should embrace.

Patricia Hill Collins

1

I first encountered the ideas of Du Bois in the late 1960s and early 1970s during the height of the Black Civil Right and Black Power Movements. As a college student and an aspiring teacher, I was searching for ways to understand and incorporate the complex ideas that were emerging from this broader Black freedom struggle into my everyday life. The speeches, rallies, and protests shaped my decisions, from majoring in sociology as my undergraduate to pursuing a Master of Arts degree in teaching. Despite my interest in the political upheaval around me, the standard curriculum contained virtually nothing on Black history or culture. If we expected to develop skills of critical thinking about social problems of racism and creative solutions to them, we would have to do our own research. This meant locating the works of thinkers that we should have been able to read. Fortunately, we had much to work with. This period of Black activism was especially rich in bringing the works of Du Bois and similar African American and African Diaspora intellectuals back into print.

The seeming absence of scholarship on Black people within my formal education followed me into my work life. I began my academic career as a middle school teacher at St. Joseph's Community School, a space where

a heterogenous group of people came together to plan a K-8 elementary school for African American students from working-class families. There we faced a similar issue—we wanted to introduce our students to Black history and culture, but where should we start? There was no curriculum, set of rules, or recommended texts for crafting a relevant education for my students. We faced the daunting task of rediscovering works that had been ignored or suppressed, or writing entirely new work that spoke to the aspirations of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Again, I realized that I would have to do my own research and translate it into terms that my middle school students could understand. With hindsight, I'm grateful that there was no designated curriculum. During this period, I read voraciously–the Black freedom struggle and the children in my classrooms deserved no less from me. They needed a Black Studies curriculum that would help them criticize the social problems in their lives with an eye toward developing creative solutions to them.

There was no playbook for developing the kind of Black Studies curriculum that we needed, yet there were several towering figures that everyone was reading and discussing. William E. B. Du Bois was one of the intellectual activists whose ideas were central to the Black freedom struggle but whose ideas rarely appeared in the dominant curriculum. His ideas were in the air and water in the circles of Black progressive politics where I was situated. Because I was trying to develop a curriculum that was shaped by Paulo Freire's educational philosophy, Du Bois' work was especially useful for me. I needed to criticize the Western canon that I had encountered in my formal studies and create new arguments that were tested in crucible of the community schools movement. At that time, the two texts that most closely resonated with me were those that took on the framing assumptions of Western knowledge. The first was his dissertation from Harvard University, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* (1896), where Du Bois brought a global analysis to chattel slavery in the US (Du Bois, 1896 [1904]). This was Du Bois as a historian, bringing the tools of research to bear on the distorted view of this fundamental event in the creation of the Black population in the Western hemisphere. The other text that deeply resonated with me was *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), his core text within the then-fledgling field of sociology (Du Bois, 1899 [1996]). Once again, he not only criticized the depiction of Black people within the social sciences, but also conducted original empirical research that was a ground-breaking work in urban sociology. Neither of these texts was assigned to me when I was a student. Like so many of us at the time, I read them on my own.

Then and now, his works speaks to a core question that has guided my work: "what will it take for Black people to be free?" For me, this question lies at the heart of Du Bois's work as well. I was especially attracted to Du Bois because of his life-long commitment to the life of the mind and placing it in service to social justice. I especially liked that he grounded his copious work

in the needs and aspirations of Black people but rejected zero sum views of power where any gains by Black people were often coded as a loss for some other group. He was, in the words of contemporary thinkers, unapologetically Black, and stayed that way over his life course. Things changed around him, but he never wavered.

2

Basically, I engage with not just the content of Du Bois's arguments, but also the epistemology of how he went about doing intellectual work. From Du Bois, I realized the importance of social context both in making knowledge claims, and in critically assessing those of others. Du Bois's meticulous scholarship challenges me to cast a self-reflexive eye on my own work. Du Bois never had the luxury of comfort, of assuming that his ideas would be accepted based on who he was. He recognized how he and the knowledge claims that he made were situated in the knowledge/power relations of his times. I see a sophistication in how he writes coupled with self-reflexivity not just about *what* he is saying, but also *how* he is saying it. Du Bois did meticulous intellectual work, recognizing and criticizing the norms under which he worked. Take for example, the challenges he faced within sociology, a field where many of his colleagues embraced eugenics as normal, if not cutting-edge science. Du Bois did not reject Western science, painting it with the brush of "White" as if that thin critique would ever be enough to tame that beast. Instead, he engaged in science, claimed its tools when he needed them, criticized it when it needed criticism, was open to other ways of thinking than just science, and simply left it at the side of the road when it was irrelevant to the questions at hand. The guiding question "what will it take for Black people to be free" neither limited his vision nor held him captive to academic fads. Instead, it was an anchor for an incredibly diverse corpus of intellectual work.

The fundamental challenge is to respect the integrity of Du Bois's work on his own terms, all the while recognizing that, for him, it would never be finished. His long and distinguished career spans the installation of the color line to the beginning of its formal dismantling. Du Bois lived to be 95 years old and witnessed and continued to pursue his commitment to the Black freedom struggle across widely varying situations as well as across periods of time marked by war, peace, major changes in global capitalist marketplaces, the role of women, the creation of colonialism and how liberation struggles dismantled it. Du Bois developed intellectually during his long and prestigious career, and in such careers, one expects to find paths followed and abandoned, other paths taken up sporadically again and again, and still others that reveal the defining elements of a particular intellectual's work. Why would he be any different?

In some ways, studying Du Bois is like reading the Bible—if you look long enough, you can find in his work themes that resonate with a wide

variety of contemporary concerns. For example, his sociology and social science spent considerable time advancing a social structural analysis of racism, showing how power relations socially constructed it. His massive study *The Philadelphia Negro* illustrates how the tools of social science research can illuminate important social problems. In his *Atlanta Studies*, he set out to systematize the study of Black life and culture, planning longitudinal studies that engaged important social issues through the lives of African Americans. His social science and social theory informed a host of concepts within African American Studies. For example, from Du Bois we have the theme of "double consciousness" as explicated in *Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 1979); an attention to Pan-Africanism that preceded current work on globalization and transnationalism; the significance of historicizing social research as illustrated in *The African Slave Trade* and in *Black Reconstruction* (Du Bois, 1935 [1962]). Du Bois hitches his analyses to social activism—he was the editor of various journals, of which the most well-known is *Crisis*. In part, the breadth and eclecticism of his work reflects his long life span and his ability to remain active as a scholar during most of his life. He never gave up.

3

Popularity can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, seeing how widely Du Bois's ideas are being taken up does address the omissions and distortions that I encountered as a student. Most people do not have a sense of the scope of what Du Bois said, thought, or did. In part, this is because he simply wrote so much. I remain impressed by David Levering Lewis's ambitious anthology, *W. E. B Du Bois: A Reader,* which was published in 1970, seven years after Du Bois's death. The volume weighs in at a whopping 801 pages and surveys a wide array of themes of Du Bois's work (Lewis, 1995). I honestly do not know how anyone could ever become the definitive expert on Du Bois. His work is that expansive. The fact that so many people are beginning to scratch the surface of his work now means that there is so much more yet to come.

On the other hand, *how* Du Bois's ideas are being taken up, interpreted, and applied matters. In the absence of serious study that aims to understand a thinker in the corpus of his/her work, it is easy to cherry pick ideas from a thinker, use it as sound bite, without disrupting in any substantive fashion the systems of inequality that Du Bois spent so much of his life trying to dismantle. Take, for example, how his idea of double consciousness, the notion of always looking at oneself through the eyes of an oppressor, with its iconic question, "how does it feel to be a problem," circulates within contemporary popular culture. To reduce Du Bois's work to pithy sayings, or slogans that circulate on the internet give people a false sense of "knowing" an author through easily digested sound bites. To take one idea from one book, however insightful, without reading this text in dialogue with his other writings flattens the richness of his intellectual work. DuBois's premier text, *The Souls of Black Folk*, from which these ideas are taken, is widely cited. Yet we need

to understand why this particular book has had such staying power, especially among the general public. My sense is that it resonates with the internal space of identity construction, one that is so in vogue now. Du Bois was anticipating psychoanalysis, a framework that is now well-accepted. Yet a superficial rendering of the idea of double consciousness reduces Du Bois into a native informant who shares the pain of being Black. What is lost in this voyeuristic reading is that Du Bois also provides a robust historical and sociological analysis of why we have the social problems that create double consciousness, not just the experience of living it.

4

To tackle this question, I looked at my bookshelf to see which of Du Bois's books survived my many moves. Several of the books that I have cited this far were on the shelf. But then I noticed that I had also kept *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, first published in 1920 and republished in 1969 at the height of the Black Power Movement (Du Bois, 1969). Why did I keep it? When I pulled my copy of *Darkwater* off my shelf, I had not looked at it in years. What a revelation for what this text does say about placing one's intellectual work in service of social justice. In *Darkwater*, Du Bois takes stock of the Black freedom struggle in the face of ongoing repression, reflecting and diagnosing, and not necessarily crafting a course of action. As he puts it in a 1919 "Postscript" that precedes the essays in the volume, "I have been in the world, but not of it. I have seen the human drama from a veiled corner, where all the outer tragedy and comedy have reproduced themselves in microcosm within" (Du Bois, 1920: vii). Here Du Bois develops the metaphor of the veil, not to claim an inner reality for Black identity, but rather as a protective covering to analyze the world of a virulent anti-Black racism that he can see from this vantage point.

Written at the mid-point of Du Bois's long and impressive life (1868-1963), Du Bois had moved beyond the hopefulness of his early years to see the ongoing challenges of participatory democracy in the United States. Written after *The African Slave Trade* and *The Philadelphia Negro* in the 1890s, and after a decade of teaching and research in sociology at Atlanta University (1897-1910), the essays in *Darkwater* are far less optimistic about reversing the decline of Black citizenship rights. Relinquishing the belief that sociology and other academic disciplines were up to the task of keeping a growing eugenics movement at bay enabled Du Bois to turn his sight to other forms of activism. The essays in *Darkwater* offer a glimpse into how Du Bois was coming to terms with the arc of his own intellectual activism during a period when the dream of freedom seemed to be increasingly out of reach.

Du Bois wrote *Darkwater* during an important inflection point in African American history. By 2020 it was clear the forces that he meticulously details in *Black Reconstruction in America* had prevailed, and that a pervasive anti-Black racism that differed in form but not in function was deeply entrenched in the

states of the South and the North. This was a momentous time in African American history when Black soldiers were lynched, some in their uniforms, after returning from World War I. The Black migration out of the American South to escape poverty, powerlessness, and violence was winding down. The growing recognition that the Great Migration from the South to the North yielded a continuation of anti-Black racism in new forms was just setting in. He had worked for decades for the possibilities that were present in 1920, but had not yet emerged during the time when he was writing. *Darkwater* was published at the dawning of the Harlem Renaissance, a period of Black creativity and widespread social movements that would reenergize Black communities, as the struggle moved from trying to extract civil rights from a recalcitrant government to community organizing and cultural creativity. Fortunately, Du Bois lived long enough to see the changes that ensued.

For me, *Darkwater* was published during a time that seems very much like our own, one marked by the resurgence of far-right nationalist projects, a diminishing commitment to human rights, and the erosion of participatory democracy. Doing intellectual work in such times can foster nihilism, which contributes to the very conditions that one criticizes. Yet reading *Darkwater* from the current perspective enabled me to see things that were not apparent in my first reading so long ago. Du Bois identifies a series of themes that I now see as dimensions of what was named as intersectionality in the 1990s. He was not doing intersectional work per se, but made provocative arguments that can easily inform contemporary intersectional projects. The self-reflexive essays in *Darkwater* foreshadow themes that resonate within contemporary concerns. It is all there–wealth/labor, race, gender, age, and religion, the core categories of varying intersectional analyses. Take for example, Du Bois's analysis of the intersecting relationship of racism and capitalism in his essay "Of Work and Wealth," a depiction of how the South in the aftermath of the war "mobilized all the machinery of modern oppression: taxes, city ordinances, licenses, state laws, municipal regulations, wholesale police arrests and, of course, the peculiarly Southern method of the mob and the lyncher" (p. 89). This is a powerful essay on labor history that excavates how anti-Black racism has been essential in creating white wealth. His essays are alternately analytical and reflective: "Of the Ruling of Men" analyzes White masculinity that harms society; "The Damnation of Women" offers a stanch defense of women's rights, including a tribute to Black women; and "The Immortal Child" offers the provocative argument that the future of democracy rests on how we treat children. We are fundamentally rediscovering an intersectionality that was far more synergistic and holistic for him for which he had no name.

Du Bois neither has all the answers nor should he. Yet by asking questions when there were no guarantees that his ideas would be taken seriously, he demonstrates a form of intellectual courage that we would do well to emulate. As I write this answer, I find myself looking for inspiration

concerning how to do critical social theory in the context of the seeming retrenchment from social justice projects as well as the massive social changes brought on by climate change, the emergence of far-right projects, new technological changes, and the erosion of a global world order. For me, these are times very much like those that confronted Du Bois. I want to avoid a selective reading of Du Bois that reflects how far too many of my academic colleagues read social theory, namely, trying to extract the author's main argument for their own projects, or mining for nuggets of ideas, rather than engaging the corpus of an author's thinking over time and place on his or her own terms. I take inspiration from Du Bois's work in *Darkwater*, not because I seek a role model to inspire me, but rather because I am grateful that I have found a colleague whose voice reaches across time to speak so compellingly to why ideas are so important for social justice projects.

Prudence L. Carter

1

My earliest encounter with W.E.B. Du Bois' ideas and works occurred during my childhood in an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in the Mississippi Delta, a region deeply rooted in the U.S. South. Historically, the AME church has played a pivotal role in various civil rights struggles, and from an early age, I was socialized by my elders to recognize the potential, power, and strength of Black communities. It was during this formative period that I was first introduced to Du Bois through a dramatization of Dudley Randall's poem, "*Booker T. and W.E.B.,*" performed by two youth in my community. This poem captures the ideological debate between Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, the first president of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

Washington and Du Bois, both prominent thinkers and leaders of African American communities in the late 19th and early 20th century, held sharply divergent views on the role and type of education necessary for the liberation and advancement of African Americans. Washington championed a strategy of accommodation and gradualism, emphasizing economic self-sufficiency and vocational education as pathways for African Americans to improve their material conditions after emancipation. Du Bois, however, vehemently opposed this approach, critiquing Washington for conceding too much to White supremacy and perpetuating racial subordination. Du Bois argued for the necessity of higher education, political activism, and direct action, believing these were essential to combating racial inequality and cultivating an educated Black elite. Their debate remains one of the most significant ideological clashes in African American history, encapsulating divergent strategies for achieving civil rights and justice in the face of systemic, anti-Black racism.

Years later, as a graduate student pursuing a Master's in Sociology and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, I revisited Du Bois in a history of education course. I wrote a paper analyzing the ideological

differences between Du Bois and Washington, a piece I eventually submitted as part of my PhD application in sociology at Columbia University. Despite this engagement, Du Bois' work was largely absent from the theoretical canon of American sociology during my doctoral training. Even when I joined the faculties at Harvard and Stanford, Du Bois was rarely, if ever, featured on colleagues' syllabi—including my own, regrettably—or in lectures of visiting scholars. At the time, sociologists in elite, predominantly White departments seldom addressed systemic or structural *racism*—"racial inequality or 'gaps' were the preferred concepts," and Du Bois' contributions were virtually invisible within these academic spaces.

My deeper engagement with Du Bois thus emerged outside formal academic settings, through my exposure to African American culture and history in my community and through my exploration of my heritage. As my scholarly career evolved, however, I began to draw on Du Bois more explicitly in my own research, particularly his seminal writings that resonated with my research findings on school integration, race, and education in the U.S. and South Africa; mainstream sociological frameworks, in comparison, were limited in their applicability.

2

Du Bois has undoubtedly been one of my intellectual and sociological muses, and his influence prominently shaped my presidential address at the 2023 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. His work has also been central to my research, particularly in my second book, *Stubborn Roots: Race, Culture, and Inequality in U.S. and South African Schools*. In this book, I explore the social processes of school integration in majority-minority and majority-White schools across the United States and South Africa. My research distinguishes between the material advantages of integration and the sociocultural and political challenges that arise when historically marginalized and oppressed students and their families enter educational spaces long dominated by privileged White students and their families.

Some scholars and policymakers have implied that simply granting access to Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian students to resource-rich schools—historically monopolized by Whites—is sufficient. However, my findings challenge this notion, revealing that true racial integration requires deeper, structural organizational change. Integration, I argue, is distinct from desegregation, which focuses solely on demographic representation and proximity in schools and universities. Instead, meaningful integration must go beyond surface-level inclusion to address power dynamics, cultural recognition, and systemic inequities.

Du Bois anticipated many of these complexities in his 1935 writings on education. He famously argued:

> The Negro needs neither segregated nor mixed schools. What he needs is education. What he must remember is that there is no magic, either in mixed or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers, with hostile opinion, and no teaching concerning Black folk, is bad. A segregated school with ignorant placeholders, inadequate equipment, poor salaries, and wretched housing, is equally bad. Other things being equal, the mixed school is the broader, more natural basis for the education of all youth. It gives wider contacts; it inspires greater self-confidence; and it suppresses the inferiority complex. But other things are seldom equal, and in that case, Sympathy, Knowledge, and the Truth outweigh all that the mixed school can offer (Du Bois, 1935: 335).

Du Bois was not an opponent of integration; however, his writings suggest that he was equally critical of so-called "mixed schools" or "integration" efforts characterized by symbolic violence, cultural deference, and assimilation that often undermined the self-confidence and esteem of African Americans. In my work, I engage critically with Du Bois' insights to argue that true racial integration in schools and society can only be achieved when both "distributional equality" (the equitable provision of material resources) and "relational equality" (the establishment of parity in cultural and social dynamics that foster collective and individual well-being) are realized [see Prudence L. Carter, *American Sociological Review,* 2024].

3

In my view, W.E.B. Du Bois was always a gifted intellectual thinker—prolific and visionary in documenting the historical, social, and political forces that shaped the racial formation and sustained White supremacy in the United States. Despite his brilliance, the deeply entrenched systemic racism of American higher education and the social sciences hindered his rise to prominence and centralization within these disciplines during his lifetime.

Nevertheless, scholars of African American culture and history have long recognized Du Bois' immense contributions. Meanwhile, his stature in American sociology has notably increased, particularly since the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The scholarship of sociologists like Aldon Morris, Jose Itzigsohn, Karida Brown, and Earl Wright II has been instrumental in expanding our understanding of Du Bois' critical legacy and has greatly influenced my own thinking. Additionally, the work of prominent White scholars such as Michael Burawoy has helped elevate Du Bois' contributions, bringing them into greater focus for a new generation of emerging sociologists.

It is encouraging to see that Du Bois has become increasingly mainstreamed within U.S. sociological literature. His work, which once struggled for visibility due to systemic barriers, is now being critically examined and celebrated more broadly, signaling a diversification and deepening appreciation of his legacy.

4

Many readers are likely familiar with W.E.B. Du Bois' seminal collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), where he introduces the concept of "double consciousness," the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others and feeling the tension of being both American and Black in a society that marginalizes African Americans. As a sociologist with a strong interest in linking macro-level social phenomena to micro-level interactions and lived experiences, I am particularly drawn to Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), which celebrates its 90th anniversary this year. For anyone seeking to understand how a so-called "racial democracy" can progress from a period of liberal racial inclusion—offering access to political and educational opportunities—only to later experience regression and retrenchment, this book is essential reading.

Black Reconstruction provided me with a profound framework to grasp why racial integration in the United States has never been fully realized. It also sheds light on the recurrent backlashes against civil rights, affirmative action, and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives in recent years. In this work, Du Bois offers a systematic and incisive analysis of the trajectory from slavery to the brief renaissance of Black inclusion during Reconstruction, characterized by modest political representation in Southern states and access to basic education, to the devastating regression into the Jim Crow era marked by lynching and systemic oppression.

Du Bois brilliantly documents how the failure to redistribute economic power during Reconstruction undermined the potential for sustained political, educational, and cultural empowerment for African Americans. His insights into the structural dynamics of racial progress—and the forces that inhibit it—remain strikingly relevant today. *Black Reconstruction in America* is not only a work of profound historical and sociological significance, but also a critical lens through which we can interrogate the persistent challenges of anti-Black racism and racial inequality in our own time.

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SYMPOSIUM W.E.B. DU BOIS

Abstract

This symposium brings together the reflections of seven sociologists who study the work of W.E.B. Du Bois and explore its theoretical and epistemological implications. The participants—Aldon Morris, Gurminder K. Bhambra, José Itzigsohn, Julian Go, Karida L. Brown, Patricia Hill Collins, and Prudence Carter—share how they first encountered Du Bois's writings, the impact of these readings on their own work, and the relevance of his ideas today. Their responses reveal the diversity of interpretations and the significance of Du Bois's contributions to contemporary sociology.

Keywords

W.E.B. Du Bois;
Sociological Theory
Classical Sociology
Contemporary Sociology
Racial Relations.

SIMPÓSIO W.E.B. DU BOIS

Resumo

Este simpósio reúne as reflexões de sete sociólogos que estudam a obra de W.E.B. Du Bois e exploram suas implicações teóricas e epistemológicas. Os participantes – Aldon Morris, Gurminder K. Bhambra, José Itzigsohn, Julian Go, Karida L. Brown, Patricia Hill Collins e Prudence Carter – compartilham como entraram em contato com os textos do autor, o impacto dessas leituras em seus próprios trabalhos e a atualidade de suas ideias. As respostas evidenciam a diversidade de interpretações e o alcance das contribuições de Du Bois para a sociologia contemporânea.

Palavras-chave

W.E.B. Du Bois;
Teoria Sociológica;
Sociologia Clássica;
Sociologia Contemporânea;
Relações raciais.