

Decolonizing Sociology: The Significance of W.E.B. Du Bois

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We live in times of multiple global crises brought to the surface by Covid-19. We face an economic crisis that has been brewing for a half-century of neoliberal policies, creating the exponential growth of inequality and the polarization of classes. Neoliberal policies have left us defenseless against global warming and all its unexpected reverberations, and defenseless against the era of pandemics. Across the planet, education and health are caught in the grip of privatization. We face a political crisis of anemic liberal democracies that have lost their legitimacy, generating radical social movements of the left and the right, movements of racial justice and white supremacy. In many places, liberal democracy has given way to authoritarian regimes.

What has sociology to say to these crises? Sociology should come into its own as the inequalities that we have been studying for decades have become not only transparent but also magnified by Covid-19. Everyone has become a sociologist. In fighting for a place in the sun, should we bend to immediate pressures and suspend interest in the classics or is this a time to reassert their importance?

At a recent international panel on global labor in the pandemic,¹ I listened to three stimulating papers. Anne Engelhardt evoked the plight of seafarers, imprisoned on their boats, unpaid for extended periods, subject to quarantining and travel restrictions. Madhumita Dutta examined the inequality embedded in the universal Covid prescriptions, as applied in India.² Social distancing, shelter in place, and washing hands are simply impossible for large sections of the Indian population. On the optimistic side, Ben Skully from South Africa spoke of the increased political support for Universal Basic Income, as social grants proliferate to deal with Covid-19, calling into question the era of neoliberal economics.³

Each analysis is specific to Covid-19 but also points to something more general. The plight of the seafarers recalls Marx's analysis of the despotic labor process. The inequality built into universalistic policies recalls Weber's warning that formal equality reproduces substantive inequality. And radical proposals for social justice, such as Universal Basic Income, bring to mind Durkheim's vision of organic solidarity based on welfare guarantees.

Now why might Marx, Weber, and Durkheim be relevant to the problems of today? There are many answers to this question, but the most obvious one is that we are indeed returning to the

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desperate times of the 19th century—the period in which sociology struggled to be born. As Thomas Piketty (2014), author of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, has underlined, we are returning to the raw capitalism—the object of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim’s critical analysis—as it faced deep economic and political crises before transitioning toward state socialism in the Soviet Union, organized capitalism and fascism in Europe, and imperialism abroad.

We will return to these three figures, but now I want to draw your attention to another founder of sociology of the same generation—W.E.B. Du Bois—whose work is especially well-suited to our era. An African American born in 1868, 4 years after Weber and 10 years after Durkheim, he died in Ghana in 1963, outliving both Weber and Durkheim by more than 40 years. His writings are a brilliant sociological record of the 19th and 20th centuries, but largely ignored by sociology until the last two decades. Today, his work is regularly included in sociology syllabi, usually only partially as he was a prolific writer throughout his long adult life—historian, novelist, political commentator as well as sociologist. Even as a sociologist, his work interweaves all four knowledge practices—professional, policy, public, and critical. He poses a serious challenge to the conventional canon.

The Early Du Bois

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois grew up in a largely white Protestant community in Western Massachusetts, where he experienced a suppressed racism. Excelling academically, supported by the local community, he made his way to Fisk University in Tennessee—a famous historically black university. There he rediscovered the meaning of blackness. Taking off his summers to teach in the rural areas, he came face to face with the legacies of slavery in the Jim Crow South. From Fisk, he won a place at Harvard University to study history and philosophy for a second undergraduate degree, then to become the first black Harvard PhD in 1895.

Du Bois’s (1896) dissertation examined the twists and turns of the suppression of the African slave trade (1638–1870)—how the postcolonial order failed to eliminate the slave trade, even after being outlawed. With the emancipation proclamation of 1863, slavery was suppressed, only to rear its head in new forms of racial oppression during and after the period of Reconstruction (1865–1877), the subject of Du Bois’s future masterpiece, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935).

Before receiving his PhD, however, Du Bois spent 2 years, 1892–1894, at the University of Berlin where he imbibed the embryonic discipline of sociology at the feet of distinguished economists and historians. He was a fellow student of Max Weber, but they hardly knew each other. When Du Bois returned to the US, supremely talented though he was, no white university would touch him. He took a job at Wilberforce University, a historically black university in Ohio. He did not last long at this provincial outpost in the Mid-West, and accepted an assistantship at the University of Pennsylvania, commissioned to study the African American community of Philadelphia. Although he was marginalized in the university, his remarkable and meticulous research produced *The Philadelphia Negro*—still recognized as a foundational monograph in urban sociology.⁴ Excluded from the University of Pennsylvania, he moved to another black university in 1897, Atlanta University, where he founded and directed the Atlanta School of Sociology—organizing a succession of studies of African American society, mainly in the South.

As Morris (2015) has detailed in his inspirational book *The Scholar Denied*, Du Bois suffered racial exclusion and was refused his rightful place as the true founder of American sociology.⁵ Focusing on the early Du Bois, in particular his direction of the Atlanta School, Morris shows that he not only predated the mythical Chicago School, but his research was more rigorous in its mapping of African American urban and rural life, refuting the racist assumptions of the time. *The Scholar Denied* focuses on the early empiricist research of Du Bois at the expense of his later work,

which is far more critical, radical, global, and publicly engaged. In comparing the Atlanta School to the Chicago School, and in elevating Du Bois above Robert Park—the dominant figure of the Chicago School, Morris has done our discipline an enormous service by centering the place of Du Bois in American sociology, reminding us of the racism he and so many others have had to endure. On the other hand, comparing him to Park and the Chicago School, Morris also does not do justice to Du Bois's accomplishments. The enormous scope, depth, and vision of Du Bois's opus far exceeds the rather provincial research of the Chicago School. After all, who now reads Robert Park?

If we are serious about bringing Du Bois into the sociological pantheon, he has to be compared not to Robert Park and the Chicago School, but with the sociological canon. In the remainder of this paper, I sketch canonical dialogues between Durkheim, Weber, and Marx on the one side and Du Bois on the other, ending with reflections on the significance of Du Bois for sociology today.

Du Bois Meets Durkheim

The analysis of the early Du Bois bears a close relation to the ideas of Durkheim, especially Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society*—the foundation stone of Durkheimian sociology. There is no indication that Du Bois knew of Durkheim's work, yet *The Philadelphia Negro* describes the "pathological" behavior of the "submerged tenth" in precisely the terms of Durkheim's abnormal division of labor. On the one hand, in Du Bois's eyes, the recent emancipation of slaves and the migration from the South gave rise to a state of moral disorientation or what Durkheim famously called the anomic division of labor. On the other hand, Du Bois's elaboration of discrimination against African Americans, denying them basic rights and opportunities, exemplified Durkheim's forced division of labor.

In *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), Du Bois appeals to white elites to redirect their focus from the pathologies of the submerged tenth to the achievements of the talented tenth which, of course, included Du Bois himself. Here, Du Bois is relying on the power of social science to show how African Americans respond to their social context just as whites do. By contrast, *The Souls of Black Folk*—perhaps his most well-known book—published in 1903 and written in a literary register makes an emotional appeal to whites, asking them to recognize the unjust suffering of Blacks in the Jim Crow South—lynching, segregation, poverty, convict leasing, sharecropping, and so forth. Despite being the victims of callous brutality, African Americans, through it all, demonstrated their humanity in striving to overcome all the obstacles thrown in their path. Du Bois shows how African Americans share and contribute to the US "collective consciousness," alongside white Americans. Here, Du Bois's radicalism and courage have to be seen in its time—when so many did not regard African Americans as worthy members of the human race, let alone contributing to the national culture.

If there are convergences with *The Division of Labor in Society* (Durkheim 1984[1893]), Du Bois would depart from the academic Durkheim by entering the public sphere in his pursuit of racial justice. Marking his turn to an open politics of protest, in 1909 Du Bois penned a biography of John Brown, the militant white abolitionist, who led the abortive insurrection at Harper's Ferry in 1859, a dress rehearsal for the Civil War. In *John Brown*, Du Bois's mantra was the "cost of liberty is less than the price of repression"—the cost of fighting for liberation is less than the price of continued suffering under racial oppression.

Outraged by the atrocities visited upon fellow African Americans and by the racism he himself experienced; finding himself marginalized in academia, excluded from resources to conduct his research; and questioning the all-powerful Booker T. Washington's compromise with white powers, Du Bois leaves Atlanta University in 1910 to become one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He becomes the editor of *The*

Crisis—the NAACP’s popular magazine that became a mouthpiece for Du Bois’s growing radicalism for the next 24 years.

From “scholar denied,” Du Bois becomes “scholar unbound”—the greatest public sociologist the US has seen.⁶ Abandoning the view that knowledge has an emancipatory power of its own, Du Bois devotes the rest of his life to accumulating public support in a fight for racial justice. He departs from Durkheim, not only in his public engagement, but in the centrality of race, always examined in the context of capitalism.

Du Bois meets Weber

Influenced by the socialism of the time, Du Bois’s rising radicalism is amply displayed in his 1920 collection, *Darkwater*, a counterpoint to *The Souls of Black Folk*. He is no longer trying to elevate the souls of black folk in the eyes of whites, but to denigrate the souls of white folk in the eyes of blacks. He describes the inhumane brutality of white against white in World War I—a war, he argues that is rooted in the struggle among European imperial powers for the control of Africa. Added to this is the violence of white against black, not just in the agrarian South of the US but also in the industrial North. He analyzes the 1917 race riot in East St. Louis as the result of a three-way struggle between capital, immigrant white labor from Europe and black labor from the South. Their jobs threatened, rather than building a working-class unity, white labor turns violently on the swelling ranks of cheaper black labor.

Inter-racial solidarity appears to be a remote possibility, but this does not stop Du Bois proposing a universal solution—a vision of democracy that is not based on a limited franchise (to which he had previously subscribed) but on including all in the name of a plurality of experiences. Everyone has something to contribute to a socialist democracy, but it will require democratizing industry through public ownership. In his future world, Du Bois imagines not just democratization of industry but the reduction of the working day to enable all people to develop their rich and varied abilities. Another essay displays his abhorrence of menial service work, calling for technological innovation that will deliver service without servants. In the chapter entitled the “damnation of women,” he calls attention to the dual role of women as mother and citizens, thrusting them to the head of the movement for the abolition of slavery, prefiguring theories of intersectionality.⁷ There is one obstacle in particular to the realization of his socialist vision—racial oppression. You cannot build socialism on exclusion; you cannot postpone the race question; it needs to be solved here and now.

This socialist Du Bois is not yet Marxist. Instead, I call this moment, Du Bois’s anti-Weberian phase. The two had met briefly in 1904 at the St. Louis World’s Fair, when Weber showed an interest in Du Bois’s analysis of southern agriculture and its racial order. Weber would soon publish in his journal a commissioned article by Du Bois (1906), “The Negro Question in the United States.” But their correspondence appears to have been brief and business like. Despite common interests and common teachers, they fundamentally diverged on the origins and future of capitalism and on the relation between politics and science.

As regards the origins of capitalism, as we know, Weber gives pride of place to the Protestant ethic demarcating modern western bourgeois rational capitalism, from its predecessor merchant capitalism that secured profit through trade, piracy, and plunder. Du Bois, by contrast, emphasizes the colonial moment but it is not simply present in the origins of modern capitalism but continues throughout capitalism’s history. Modern capitalism may come into the world dripping with blood, but for Du Bois the blood does not stop flowing, whereas for Weber the blood ceases to flow once rationalization takes over, and bourgeois capitalism establishes itself.

If they diverge in the understanding of the history of capitalism, they also diverge in their vision of its future. Whereas Du Bois imagines a socialist future, Weber cannot envisage the supersession of capitalism. The “iron cage” will continue until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. The most hopeful scenario, says Weber, is for liberal democracy to temper capitalism’s tendency to hyper-rationalization—a possibility endangered by the fight for socialism that can only yield the dictatorship of bureaucratic officialdom.

The third collision between Weber and Du Bois concerns the relation between science and politics. Departing from his earlier vision in which an impartial, objective autonomous science would bring enlightenment and reconciliation; now as a public sociologist, Du Bois saw science and politics as inseparable, diametrically opposed to Weber’s insistence on their separation. Du Bois demonstrates their interconnection in his devastating attack on the Dunning School of historiography in the final chapter of his 1935 magnum opus *Black Reconstruction in America*. In that final chapter that he calls “The Propaganda of History,” Du Bois shows how the reigning interpretations of the civil war, of Reconstruction and of its aftermath are based on racist assumptions that his voluminous research emphatically refutes.

Du Bois Meets Marx

This is now Du Bois’s explicit Marxist moment.⁸ He extends Marx’s inspirational writings on the American Civil War⁹ by showing the US class structure as divided geographically between North and South—how within each region global forces create racial divisions within class and class divisions within race. He analyzes the origins of the civil war as lying in the inherent expansionism of southern slavery, arguing that the North did not enter the war to abolish slavery but to keep it contained within the southern Confederacy. Most startling, at least for the times, was Du Bois’s claim that half a million slaves (out of 4 million) deserted to the side of the Northern union armies—some 200,000 fought as soldiers and the other 300,000 provisioned the army in different ways. He provocatively calls this a General Strike, linking ex-slaves to the idea of a revolutionary working class. In Du Bois’s view, the slaves were pivotal to the much-celebrated victory of the North. Ridiculed by historians in the 1930s, 40 years later Du Bois’s account becomes authoritative and 80 years after its publication, the famous historian of Reconstruction, Eric Foner (2013), can still say it is “indispensable.”

The victory of the North gave rise to the period of “Reconstruction,” which ended after 11 years of experimentation with “inter-racial” democracy—ended by the withdrawal of military and economic support from the North and by Supreme Court decisions that effectively cancelled the expansion of democracy in the South. Handed back to the planter class to build a new racial order, the South moves “back toward slavery.”

Writing *Black Reconstruction* at the height of the New Deal, Du Bois made a decisive shift from his utopian socialism in *Darkwater* to a Marxist analysis. He was no longer posing an *imaginary utopia* against an oppressive and unjust racial capitalism, but discovering a *real utopia* in the past, an “abolition democracy”—just as, at the same time, he became an advocate for the constitution of a black cooperative commonwealth, a socialism within a segregated black America. Although they were *failed utopias*, both Reconstruction and the Cooperative Commonwealth have the flavor of a Gramscian “war of position” prefiguring a future socialism.¹⁰

Du Bois’s ideas of a black socialism within one country rankled the integrationist politics of the NAACP. He resigned the editorship of *The Crisis* in 1934 after returning to Atlanta University the previous year. He immediately becomes the chair of sociology, studying and teaching the writings of Marx and publishing *Black Reconstruction* in 1935. In 1940, he publishes *The Dusk of Dawn*,

autobiographical reflections on the intermingling of race, class and imperialism in the first half of the 20th century.

Du Bois's Marxism is not only a frame for historical analysis; it becomes a practical politics. Starting with his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1926, despite its repressive side, he becomes ever more impressed by its accomplishments, not least the seeming absence of racism, the determination to abolish poverty, its support for anti-colonial struggles, and the promise of a utopian future. After World War II, estranged from both academia and the NAACP, Du Bois becomes involved in the Peace Movement, calling for a ban on nuclear weapons and openly sympathetic to the USSR—and this in the era of anti-communist McCarthyism. In 1951, the US state charges Du Bois with being an “unregistered foreign agent.” He campaigns across the country in his own defense but also in support of the peace movement. If he began as “scholar denied” to become “scholar unbound,” he now becomes “scholar persecuted.”

In the trial, the case against him was thrown out, but his passport was nevertheless withdrawn so he could no longer travel. His leftism cost him support among African Americans, and he leaned in the direction of communist fellow travelers. When his passport was restored in 1958, he resumed his world travel, including extended trips to the Soviet Union and China where he was welcomed as an open and articulate critic of US imperialism. His anti-colonial pedigree was impressive, having played a leadership role in all five Pan African Congresses from 1900 to 1945, culminating in his 1947 treatise *The World and Africa* (Du Bois 2007[1947]). In 1961, in one of his last acts, thumbing his nose at the US state, he finally joins the Communist Party and departs for newly independent Ghana where he dies in 1963, on the eve of the civil rights movement's march on Washington. From “scholar persecuted,” he becomes a “scholar liberated.”

Canonical Dialogues

There ends my thumbnail sketch of Du Bois's extraordinary life. Let me turn to the question: What shall we do with W.E.B. Du Bois today? Through these imaginary conversations with Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, Du Bois raises five challenges to the conventional sociological canon.

1. A global and historical perspective on capitalism that pays attention to the centrality of race, beginning with the slave trade and continuing through colonialism and imperialism.
2. A moral science, centering a utopian dimension that, in turn, calls for an anti-utopian analysis of the changing limits of the possible.
3. A reflexive science that places social scientists within the world they study as well as within their contested fields of inquiry.
4. An interdisciplinary science that recognizes disciplinary boundaries in order to cross them, in particular a cross fertilization between social science, history, and humanities.
5. A public engagement that forces social science out of its academic cocoon, entering the public arena with social theory and empirical analysis, framing public debates and issues.

Incorporating Du Bois into the canon changes the criteria defining the canon, compelling a rereading of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. And this has already begun. For example, Kevin Anderson (2010) discovers a third Marx based on Marx's later, largely unpublished writings on colonialism and nationalism. Karen Fields (2002) links Du Bois's treatment of racism to Durkheim's open hostility to anti-Semitism through her rereading of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim 1995[1912]). And Christopher McAuley (2019) in his *The Spirit vs. The Souls* brings out the tension between Weber's notion of bourgeois capitalism and Du Bois's idea of racial capitalism. Just as the introduction of Marx and Engels into the canon in the 1970s was not simply an

“add on” but entailed a radical rereading of Weber and Durkheim, so does the inclusion of Du Bois mean reorganizing the relations among and a rereading of all four.

But you may ask, why not delete Marx, Weber, and Durkheim and let Du Bois stand alone, the author of a Du Boisian sociology, as Itzigsohn and Brown—in their impressive overview of Du Bois’s contributions—have recently proposed? Here we might learn from the history of US sociology. The domination of the Parsonian structural functionalism in the 1950s proved to be its own undoing. By expunging critical voices and thereby denying the plurality of values and interests that have been the lifeblood of sociology, this singular monolithic research program atrophied and disappeared when its “domain assumptions” were patently at odds with the social reality it claimed to portray. Rather than imposing a consensual canon convergent on a singular framework, I propose a relational or contested canon in which each member stakes out a distinctive research program—a dynamic unity based on opposing perspectives. The research programs of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Du Bois are fortified and reconstructed through conversations with each other. Out of the conversations there tentatively emerge new criteria that become foundational to our discipline.

Undoubtedly, the extant canon would benefit from a dialogue with Du Bois, but how might a Du Boisian research program benefit from such canonical dialogues? I would emphasize three benefits:

- Compel the examination of Du Bois’s works so as to move toward greater abstraction and comparative analysis in order to draw generalizations from his historically specific accounts.
- Call attention to the different phases in his life work, countering any essentialist rendering of Du Bois but also giving life to Du Bois’s sociology as reflective of his changing public engagement.
- Guard against “vindicalism,” thereby highlighting his shortcomings as well as his achievements, providing the challenge of pushing his framework forward.¹¹

But you may well ask, why should we have a canon at all? Indeed! The attack on the canon comes from two directions. From the one side, the positivists regard the 19th century figures as an anachronism, of only historic interest and irrelevant (if not an obstacle) to the advance of science. As Alfred North Whitehead (1916: 413) has said, “A science which hesitates to forget its founders is lost.” If we follow the positivists, however, we would return to the world before the canon—scattered and aimless empiricism which would turn sociology into a minor branch of economics or political science. We would also lose what has defined sociology from its birth—anti-utilitarianism—no less important now in an era of neoliberalism than it was then in the face of 19th century *laissez-faire* capitalism.

From the other side, followers of postcolonial theory regard the canonical figures as Eurocentric and exclusionary. The founders are creatures of their time and place, misconstruing the importance of such issues as race, gender, and imperialism—issues that have become central to sociological inquiry. These are real shortcomings, but do they justify abandoning the canon and letting a hundred flowers bloom—whether in the name of Raewyn Connell’s southern theory or Julian Go’s (2016) perspectival realism? Are Gurinder Bhambra’s (2007) connected histories so different from Kevin Anderson’s third Marx? The application of Edward Said’s (1994) “contrapuntal” method to elucidate the hidden transcript of sociology’s classics illuminates without invalidating their importance.¹²

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim are a product of their times to be sure, but we must also ask what made it possible for them to transcend their times, and why they should remain foundational to sociology, especially in these times of crisis. Precisely because they originated sociology, they escaped the narrow professionalism that lies in wait for any academic discipline as it establishes itself, a narrow

professionalism that loses sight of the big questions that animated the genesis of sociology. Because they were founders and had to struggle for the very existence of sociology against other disciplines, their vistas and accomplishments remain an inspiration for what sociology can be. They are not the ladders that can be cast aside when we reach the roof, but necessary pillars of a complex architecture.

It is better, therefore, to retain our canon but to think of it not as complete and permanent, but as contested and dynamic. Sociology flourishes through critical dialogues. At the same time, like a research program, disciplines require renewal and reconstruction in the light of mounting pressures from social movements and worldly challenges. When Marx was added, Weber and Durkheim had to be rethought and the criteria defining the canon shifted, so now with the introduction of Du Bois the criteria are reconstructed once again. We need all these figures not only because of the brilliance of their sociology and the living research programs they founded, but also because they raise such profound questions about the world in which we live today; we need them because they give us moral foundations for our work; we need them because they recognize that we are part of the world we study, and as such public engagement is intrinsic to sociology. Du Bois forces these questions out into the open.

The jury is out whether sociology can meet the challenge of Du Bois and with him such writers of the black radical tradition as C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, and Stuart Hall.¹³ In these times when race, class, and gender have thrust themselves onto the political scene, when the survival of humankind is at stake, we desperately need Du Bois—not to dissipate but to recompose sociology.

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Notes

1. "'We're not in it together': Global Labor in the Pandemic" 16 February 2021. Online Panel of the Working Group on Labour Struggles of the German Association for *Critical Social Research* and the *Global Labor Journal*.
2. See Bhaskaran and Naidu, "Flattening the Curve or Flattening Life? Public Service Announcements in the Pandemic." *Economic and Political Weekly* 25 February 2021.
3. See Scully, Ashan, Castel-Branco, and Francis (forthcoming). *The Pandemic-Era Politics of Social Policy: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Basic Income's Reemergence in South Africa*.
4. See Hunter's (2013) revisit to *The Philadelphia Negro* tracing the development of Black Philadelphia from Du Bois's account to the present.
5. A similar argument is made by Wright II (2016).
6. See Itzigsohn and Brown (2020: chapter 4) for a wonderful account of the variety of public sociologies Du Bois developed over his lifetime.

7. While recognizing his contributions, feminists have also underlined the limitations of his analysis and his ignoring of his contemporaries, Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells Barnett (James, 1996).
8. Du Bois tangles with the actual writings of Marx relatively late in life. Inspired by his visit to the Soviet Union in 1926, Du Bois's serious engagement with Marx had to await his return to Atlanta University in 1933 when he was 65. In 1944, he writes: "Karl Marx was scarcely mentioned at Harvard and entirely unknown at Fisk. At Berlin he was a living influence, but chiefly in the modifications of his theories then dominant in the Social Democratic Party. I was attracted by the rise of this party and attended its meetings. I began to consider myself a socialist. After my work in Atlanta and my advent in New York, I followed some of my white colleagues – Charles Edward Russell, Mary Ovington, and William English Walling into the Socialist Party. Then came the Russian Revolution and the fight of England, France and the United States against the Bolsheviks. I began to read Karl Marx. I was astounded and wondered what other lands of learning had been roped off from my mind in the days of my 'broad' education" (Du Bois, 1990[1944]: 49).
9. Marx's journalistic writings on the American Civil War are too little known. There he demonstrates his abhorrence of slavery, prophesying, correctly, that a constitutional war will turn into a revolutionary war. See Zimmerman's edited collection of Marx and Engels' (2018) writings on the American Civil War.
10. Du Bois was not averse to writing about *imaginative* utopias, especially in his novels, most importantly *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911) and *Dark Princess* (1928).
11. Reed (1997) criticizes tendencies toward "vindictiveness" in the writings about Du Bois, that is a critique of the one-sided celebration of Du Bois's works, although in the process he elaborates a one-sided essentialist view of Du Bois's corpus.
12. Likewise, subalternist Chakrabarty (2000: 19) refers to elements of European thought as "indispensable but inadequate."
13. It would take me far beyond this short essay to engage Robinson's (1983) claim that Du Bois along with C.L.R. James and Richard Wright moved from Marxism to a black radical tradition, but it seems to me Du Bois was, for most of his life, suspended between both, between a critical Marxist analysis of historical conjunctures and a radical project based on a race essentialism, tied to his Pan-Africanism. Indeed, the tension between these two projects—the science and the politics—makes Du Bois's work all the more interesting and stimulating.

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