

## **RACE, CLASS AND CAPITALISM: THE CHANGING VIEWS OF W.E.B. DU BOIS**

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois has rightly been claimed as the hitherto unrecognized founder of American sociology. He lived a long life, born in 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts and died at the age of 95 in Ghana in 1963. Although one of the great intellectual figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until recently sociologists largely neglected Du Bois' work and life. He was educated at Fisk University, the University of Berlin, after which he became the first African American PhD to graduate from Harvard, writing his dissertation on the suppression of the slave trade in the United States. He had two stints teaching as a sociologist at the Historically Black University, Atlanta University. The first stint was from 1897 and 1910 when he developed the Atlanta School of community studies and the second was from 1933 and 1944 when he developed his global sociology.

For much of his life Du Bois was a scholar activist or a public sociologist. He was a founder of the civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909; he was a Pan-Africanist beginning as early as 1900 when he attended the first Pan African Conference; he was a fighter for racial equality, which included opposing Booker T. Washington in the first decade-and-a-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; he was a peace activist after World War Two, and a declared socialist for, at least, the last 60 years of his life. He was the founding editor of the popular and influential NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*, from 1910 to 1934. He was the author of some 20 books, many of which have now become classics in sociology, history, and other disciplines. He has been much debated in African American Studies, and Ethnic Studies. He wrote several novels, though they might be better understood as "sociological fiction;" he was a poet, and a dramatist. These are just a few highlights of his extraordinary life that we will explore this semester.

It was a long life full of twists and turns, full of reflections into the past so as to better envision the future. He flowed back and forth between the academy and the public sphere, and from country to country; he was creative to his dying day in Ghana, where he bent over his brain child Encyclopedia Africana. Each discipline and inter-discipline constructs their own Du Bois and they can look quite different. Ironically, although Du Bois was a card-carrying sociologist, it took sociology among the longest to take his work seriously and to this day there is much foot dragging. If there is one person responsible for bringing Du Bois back home to sociology in recent times it has been Aldon Morris who in his *Scholar Denied* claimed him as the (unrecognized) founder of US sociology, his Atlanta School anti-dating the Chicago School by some 20 years. Playing off Du Bois against Robert Park (who now reads Robert Park?), however, belittles Du Bois; he is far more appropriately and profitably played off against the canonical figures of sociology, Marx, Weber and Durkheim.

But that is not the story we will pursue here. Instead our focus – for there has to be a focus otherwise we will drown in details at the intersection of biography and history – will be Du Bois's changing understanding of the relationship between race, class and capitalism. The fraught concept of racial capitalism, instigated by Cedric Robinson and drawn from South Africa Marxism, is now the subject of an ever-burgeoning literature. Much of sociology examines the relationship between "race" and

“class” without so much as mentioning “capitalism.” Marxist theory prompts the question of whether the relationship between “racism” and “capitalism” is historical or necessary, conjunctural or organic? Can “capitalism” exist without “racism” and vice versa can “racism” exist without “capitalism.” We will begin by exploring these questions as they are currently formulated before asking these questions of Du Bois.

### **Requirements**

Each week I will require a short memo on the readings – no more than 250 words – in response to questions I will provide, making for guided reading, disciplined thinking and a lively seminar. These memos have to be posted on bcourses by midnight Wednesday so I can read and comment on them Thursday morning and to prepare ourselves for the seminar Thursday afternoon. There are no auditors or observers, everyone has to fulfil this requirement whether they are enrolled or not. At the end of the semester I will require a short paper, reflecting on the content of the course.

I will make readings available on bcourses. Each of Du Bois’ books come in multiple editions. It would be good for us all to share the same edition, i.e. the one on bcourses. If you buy books make sure they are the right edition. There is a magnificently curated Du Bois digital archive at UMass, Amherst available here: <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/collection/mums312>. Du Bois’ magazine *The Crisis* as well his later magazine *Phylon* have all been digitalized and can be found on the internet. Apart from the readings for the course there are a lot of commentaries available on the internet, including recordings of speeches he made. In particular, I recommend you watch the documentary: W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography in Four Voices: <https://www.kanopy.com/en/berkeley/video/175454>

### **January 19: INTRODUCTION**

We will begin with a discussion of why we should read Du Bois, why I am interested in Du Bois, the importance of studying his whole life. Given his own wide-ranging scholarship as well as a library of commentaries, it is important to have a focus for this course. I will offer a summary outline of Du Bois’ biography from the perspective of his changing understanding of the relationship among race, class and capitalism.

### **January 26: THE QUESTION OF RACIAL CAPITALISM**

We will attempt to situate Du Bois’ history and sociology in the context of contemporary debates about “racial capitalism.” Is “racial capitalism” an approach to the study of capitalism – capitalism seen from the standpoint of “racism” – or it is a particular feature of capitalism? In the case of the latter is “racial capitalism” a specific form of capitalism or is it definitive of all capitalism: is it a particular or a universal? What is the difference between “racial capitalism” “racialized capitalism,” and “race and capitalism”?

- Julian Go, “Three Tensions in the Theory of Racial Capitalism.” *Sociological Theory* (2021) 39(1): 38-47
- Arun Kundnani, “What is Racial Capitalism?” Address to the Havens Wright Center for Social Justice, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2020.
- Nancy Fraser, “From Exploitation to Expropriation: Historic Geographies of Racialized Capitalism.” *Economic Geography* (2017) 94(1): 1-17.
- Satnam Virdee, “Racialized Capitalism: An account of its contested origins and consolidation.” *The Sociological Review* (2019) Vol.67(1):3-27

## February 2: “RACE” IN DU BOIS

Like any great scholar Du Bois is a terrain of struggle! And he’s full of great contradictions. We see in the readings of this week the different interpretations of the very meaning of “race” as found in Du Bois. We begin with Appiah’s claim that, despite all, Du Bois never rids himself of a biological view of race, a view hotly contested by Morris. Robinson’s canonical, ambiguously titled, *Black Marxism; The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* affirms an essentialist view of race brought to heel in Shelby’s “analytical Marxism.” In every case Du Bois is held up as a paragon of “race” scholarship. We will see how faithful this is to Du Bois’s own writings.

- Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race.” *Critical Inquiry* (1985) 12(1): 21-37
- Aldon Morris, *Scholar Denied* (Chapters 1-2, pp.1-55)
- Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (2000 [1983]).
  - Preface (pp.xxvii-xxxiii)
  - Introduction (pp.1-28)
  - Chapter 7, The Nature of the Black Radical Tradition (pp.167-171)
  - Chapter 8, The Formation of the Intelligentsia (175-184)
  - Chapter 9, Historiography and the Black Radical Tradition (pp.185-240)
- Tommie Shelby, “Afro-Analytical Marxism and the Problem of Race.” Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 95 (2021): 37-60.

## February 9: THE PHILADELPHIA NEGRO (1899)

So we begin our journey through the twists and turns of Du Bois’ trajectory not with his first book, an historical analysis of the (failed) suppression of the US slave trade, but with *The Philadelphia Negro*, empirical sociology par excellence.

Frustrated by the conditions at his first teaching position at the HBCU Wilberforce University, Du Bois (1895-96), not least because he was not allowed to teach sociology, Du Bois leaves for a position as “assistant in sociology,” at the University of Pennsylvania. It is a marginal position, typical of the racial discrimination he faced. He was hired to undertake a study of the African American in Philadelphia. He collaborated with Isabel Eaton who wrote the section on domestic

service, which is interesting in its own right, but we will focus on Du Bois' solo research that culminated in *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). It launched urban sociology in the US, though, until recently, it was not given the recognition received by the Chicago urban sociologists who arrived 20 years later. *The Philadelphia Negro* was a comprehensive social study, combining historical analysis, survey research and ethnography. We can't read the whole book, so I've chosen chapters that are important in the light of the theme of the course. We will see how Du Bois conceives of class as well as race – the way Du Bois divides up the African American population into what we would call socio-economic status groups, what he calls “grades” and the way he treats the relations between races.

- Chapter 1, The Scope of This Study (1-4)
- Chapter 2, The Problem (pp.5-9)
- Chapter 3, The Negro in Philadelphia, 1638-1820 (pp.10-24)
- Chapter 4, The Negro in Philadelphia, 1820-1896 (pp.25-45)
- Chapter 9, The Occupation of Negroes, Section 23 (pp.111-140)
- Chapter 11, The Negro Family (pp.164-196)
- Chapter 13, The Negro Criminal (pp.235-68)
- Chapter 14, Pauperism and Alcoholism (pp.269-286)
- Chapter 15, The Environment of the Negro (pp.287-321)
- Chapter 16, The Contact of Races, Section 47 (pp.322-55)
- Chapter 17, Negro Suffrage (pp.368-384)
- Chapter 18, A Final Word (pp.385-97)

### **February 16: SOULS OF BLACK FOLK (1903)**

Du Bois quickly realizes that “sociology” as conventionally understood as an empirical science has severe limitations when it comes to challenging white racism of the time, so he turns to “propaganda” as he puts it. He turns to a non-academic audience in a new register – the literary essay, but still based on extensive and intensive research as well as his own experiences. The result was *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), the book with which he came to be most widely associated. It was here that he famously anticipated that the problem of the Twentieth Century as the problem of the color-line. In this book he introduces the idea of double consciousness. The first half of the book focuses on the importance of education and not stopping short of higher education. Here he clashed bitterly with Booker T. Washington who was ready to make an historic compromise with segregation and inequality.

- The Forethought (pp.1-2)
- I. Of our Spiritual Strivings (pp.3-12)
- II. Of the Dawn of Freedom (pp.13-35)
- III. Of Booker T. Washington and Others (pp.36-50)
- IV. Of the Meaning of Progress (pp.51-62)
- V. Of the Wings of Atalanta (pp.63-73)
- VI. Of the Training of Black Men (pp.74-90)

## February 23: THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK (Continued)

The second half of *The Souls of Black Folk*, turns to political economy in the Black Belt (Georgia) where Du Bois did most of his research while at Atlanta University. In these essays he develops a system of stratification that is not based on socio-economic status but property relations. He is still focused on the Black Community (within the veil) and the hardships and segregation it faced. Du Bois may be writing in a different genre but he is still appealing to whites that Blacks are human whether this be in his account of the loss of his first born, in the divergent lives of the two Johns, or in the power of the African American church. Throughout he underlines the humanity and distinctive contributions of African Americans, opposing the assumptions of Jim Crow.

- VII. Of the Black Belt (pp.91-110)
- VIII. Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece (pp.111-132)
- IX. Of the Sons of Master and Man (pp.133-153)
- X. Of the Faith of the Fathers (pp.154-68)
- XI. Of the Passing of the First Born (pp.169-175)
- XII. Of Alexander Crummell (pp.176-185)
- XIII. Of the Coming of John (pp.186-203)
- XIV. The Sorrow Songs (pp.204-216)
- The Afterthought (p.217)

## March 2: DARKWATER (1920)

By 1920 we have a very different Du Bois – having left Atlanta University in 1910. It was not just that he faced discrimination but the university, as an institution, was simply not equipped to undertake the social transformation that Du Bois deemed necessary. As early as 1905 Du Bois had organized the Niagara Movement, the civil rights movement that became the NAACP in 1909. He became the editor of the NAACP magazine *The Crisis* (1910-1934). From this position he was able to challenge the domination of Booker T. Washington whose death in 1915 made Du Bois the leading African American public intellectual and political figure in the US. *Darkwater* reflects Du Bois radical turn – a rebuttal to *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Du Bois has given up trying to convince whites that Blacks are human, and instead turns to Blacks to show that whites are inhuman. Here we find the famous essay, “The Souls of White Folk,” the foundation of whiteness studies – an analysis of imperialism that highlights the brutality of whites to one another in WWI, portrayed as a struggle for the control of Africa. Here are a series of essays that advocate a radical democracy, requiring the expropriation of capitalists. An analysis of the Race Riot at East St. Louis depicts a three-way struggle between capital, white workers from Europe and Black workers from the South. Du Bois writes of the subordination of women in general, of Black women in particular and why they were among the leading Abolitionists. Throughout Du Bois embraces a socialist vision of the future – the mechanization of despised service work, the expansion of the realm of freedom – but this could only happen if socialists take the “race question” far more seriously. Du Bois may be critical of the socialists, but there’s no sense that race is an insurmountable problem under capitalism. It is a necessary stage on the way to socialism.

- Postscript (p.ix)
- Credo (pp.1-2)
- I. The Shadow Years (p.3-13)
- II. The Souls of White Folk (pp.17-29)
- III. The Hands of Ethiopia ((pp.32-42)
- IV. Of Work and Wealth (pp.47-59)
- V. The Servant in the House (pp.63-77)
- VI. Of the Ruling of Men (pp.78-94)
- VII. The Damnation of Women (pp.95-108)
- X. The Comet (pp.149-162)

### **BLACK RECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA (1935)**

We come now to Du Bois' most elaborate analysis of the relationship among race, class and capitalism. As Du Bois became more radical he began to clash with the NAACP leadership until it became impossible for him to continue. He resigned from *The Crisis* in 1934 and returned to Atlanta University to build up its sociology department. Much had happened to make him critical of the integrationist politics of the NAACP – the limited progress in the civil rights of racial minorities, the economic crisis of capitalism, and limited gains for African Americans in the New Deal. Equally important was Du Bois' first visit to the Soviet Union in 1926, after which he declared that if what he had seen and heard is Bolshevism, then he is a Bolshevik. This led him to his first deep engagement with the writings of Marx which inspired his *Black Reconstruction in America*, published in 1935, and widely regarded as a masterpiece – an innovative historiography that challenged so many conventional views about the origins, conduct and aftermath of the civil war.

*Black Reconstruction* was a reconstruction of the history of the US that pivoted around the civil war and not around the revolutionary war of Independence. In contrast to the 1619 Project that centers slavery, *Black Reconstruction* is an assessment of the possibility of an inter-racial democracy. Even if in the end it was a failure, Reconstruction was a “tragic failure” – it harbored a real utopia rather than the imaginary utopia that inspired *Darkwater*.

### **March 9: BLACK RECONSTRUCTION I – THE ORIGINS OF THE CIVIL WAR**

As we will read in the last chapter of *Black Reconstruction* Du Bois' views were anathema to conventional historians. While Du Bois claims he is true to the facts unlike the Dunning school which is full of racist prejudices and distortions, *Black Reconstruction* has its own Marxist foundational assumptions. Thus, in excavating the origins of the civil war, Du Bois adopts a “class analysis” of the racial order in the US, with chapters on the Black worker, the white worker, the planter. But this class analysis, argues Du Bois, can only be understood in the context of global forces. The expansion of the textile industry in England and the North East of the US increased the demand for cotton, leading to pressures for the expansion of slavery beyond the South, threatening the capitalist system in the North. It was this expansionist tendency that precipitated and underlay the Civil War, as much as the protection of the Union.

- XVII. The Propaganda of History (pp.711-730)

- I.The Black Worker (pp.3-16)
- II.The White Worker (pp.17-31)
- III.The Planter (pp.32-54)

### **March 16: BLACK RECONSTRUCTION II – THE PROSECUTION OF THE CIVIL WAR**

As early as 1910 Du Bois published his revisionist view of Reconstruction and its achievements in *The American Historical Review*. The achievements included votes for African Americans and poor whites, the election of African Americans to political and administrative office, new progressive social legislation, and especially the expansion of education in the South. The secret of the victory of the North lay in the defection of half a million enslaved workers from the plantations in support of the Union armies and the international balance of forces. The seeds of Reconstruction, that is the advance toward an inter-racial (abolition) democracy, lay in this “General Strike” and the imagination and determination of the enslaved.

- IV.The General strike (pp.55-83)
- V.The Coming of the Lord (pp.84-127)

### **March 23: BLACK RECONSTRUCTION III – THE AFTERMATH OF THE CIVIL WAR**

As Reconstruction (1865-1876) wore on, the balance of power in the North began to turn against the developing inter-racial democracy in the South. Capitalists had got what they wanted – the vanquishing of slavery – Democrats were becoming more powerful in Congress, and the Supreme Court was interpreting questions of citizenship and voting rights as a state concern. In 1877, the North withdraws its military presence from the South, necessary to support Reconstruction, and effectively hands power back to the planters, who enlist the support of white workers in the recreation of a new racial formation based on a “public and psychological wage for whites” – the wages of whiteness. Behind the transition is the “counter-revolution of property” rather than a war for white supremacy.

- Chapter 14, “Counter-Revolution of Property” (pp.580-636)
- Chapter 16, “Back Toward Slavery” (pp.670-711)

### **March 30: SPRING BREAK**

### **April 6: DUSK OF DAWN (1940)**

*Dusk of Dawn* is the third autobiographical approach to history. Just as *Darkwater* is a response to *The Souls of Black Folk* so *Dusk of Dawn* (subtitled “An essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept”) is a response to *Darkwater*, returning to ideas in *The Souls of Black Folk* while incorporating the more Marxist analysis he had developed in *Black Reconstruction*. After the introduction and a revisit to his early life, we will take up the story in chapter 5 where he examines the concept of “race,” tracing it back to the experience of slavery. In chapter 7 he considers possible Black middle class responses to racial domination; in chapter 8 he describes his political engagement of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and chapter 9 discusses a collectivist response that takes advantage of desegregation to build a nation within a nation, a cooperative commonwealth.

- Apology (p.xxxiii)
- Chapter 1, “The Plot” (pp.1-3)
- Chapter II, “A New England Boy and Reconstruction” (pp.4-12)
- Chapter III, “Education in the Last Decades of the Nineteenth Century.” (pp.13-25)
- Chapter V, “The Concept of Race.” (pp.49-68)
- Chapter VII, “The Colored World Within” (pp.88-110)
- Chapter VIII, “Propaganda and World War.” (pp.111-133)
- Chapter IX, “Revolution.” (pp.134-162)

### **April 13: COLOR AND DEMOCRACY (1945)**

Du Bois spends 10 years at Atlanta University, before the administration casts him out in 1944 on the grounds of his age (76), and the NAACP takes him back as director of special research. His connections to Europe, China, the Soviet Union and Africa would prove useful to the NAACP, but it was assumed that he had reached his dotage and this would be a comfortable sinecure. Nothing could be further from the truth and he assailed the UN with an indictment of the US human rights record, *An Appeal to the World*. He helped organize the Fifth and most important Pan-African Congress in 1945 in Manchester (UK) where he was elected as its President in recognition of his role in the Pan-African Movement. *Color and Democracy* expressed the hope that the postwar period would see the decolonization of Africa under the auspices of the UN. Here lies a paradox: if colonialism rested on imperialism, itself a product of the capitalist competition for profit, how could tutelage from above bring about progress toward democracy. Du Bois seemed to have left behind the lessons of *Black Reconstruction* that democratization depended on struggles from below.

- Preface (p.241)
- Chapter 2, “The Disenfranchised Colonies.” (pp.253-277)
- Chapter 4, “Democracy and Color.” (pp.287-302)
- Chapter 6, “The Riddle of Russia.” (pp.312-317)
- Chapter 7, “Missions and Mandates.” (pp.318-330)



### **April 20: THE WORLD AND AFRICA (1947)**

Writing two years later, we see a Du Bois reaffirming a Marxist denunciation of the history of imperialism, “the rape of Africa,” including a moving account of commodity fetishism on a world scale. The solution is no longer a UN Mandate but an appeal for a socialist project, but its agent is still not clear.

- Chapter 3, “The Rape of Africa” pp.28-51
- Chapter 11, “Andromeda,” pp.143-64.

### **April 27: IN BATTLE FOR PEACE (1952)**

Du Bois’ return to the NAACP did not last long. His politics moved increasing leftwards, supporting the Progressive Party and Henry Wallace. With the rise of the anti-communist crusade, Du Bois, although still not a member of the CPUSA, was a embarrassment to the NAACP, especially as its membership attracted leftist critiques of the US. Du Bois was fired in 1948. In 1950 Du Bois stands for the Senate as a candidate of the American Labor Party, New York’s affiliate of the Progressive Party. But Du Bois was not only embroiled in political support for Africa through his role in the Council for African Affairs, he became a leading figure in the world anti-nuclear peace movement. His profile was so public that the US state charged him and others from Peace Information Center as an undeclared agent of a foreign power. The trial took place in 1951 and the case was effectively dismissed for want of substantial evidence. He was acquitted but still the state department managed to expropriate his passport until it was declared unconstitutional in 1958 whereupon he undertook a triumphal world tour as the enemy within – receiving invitations from leaders of China and the Soviet Union. *In Battle for Peace* written in 1952 Du Bois describes the issues in the trial and his understanding of the broader significance of his trial for a theory of the US state.

- Chapter 9, “An Indicted Criminal,” pp.69-86
- Chapter 10, “The Pilgrimages for Defense,” pp.87-108
- Chapter 11, “Oh! John Rogge.” (pp.75-81)
- Chapter 12, “The Trial,” pp.119-139
- Chapter 13, “The Acquittal,” pp.150-55
- Chapter 14, “Interpretations,” pp.160-181

### **May 4: CONCLUSION: UNFINISHED TASKS**

In the final analysis how then can we trace the development of Du Bois’ thinking of race, class and capitalism? Are there two streams of work: one focused on the US and other focused on Pan-Africanism, starting with *The Negro* (1915), *Black Folk: Then and Now* (1939) and ending with *The World and Africa* (1947). The two streams come together in *Black Reconstruction* but then go their separate ways – a theory of monopoly capitalism in the US and a theory of imperialism for Africa and Asia. We need to attend to the writings of other Black Marxists, such as CLR James and Frantz Fanon, to see the way they saw race, class and capitalism in the colonies.