

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY: FROM DU BOIS TO TODAY

6.30-8.00p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 245 Li Ka Shing

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 20th 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 1910; he was a Pan-Africanist beginning as early as 1900; he was a fighter for racial equality, which included opposing Booker T. Washington in the first decade-and-a-half of the 20th century; he was a peace activist after World War Two, and a socialist for most of his adult life. He was the founding editor of the 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 wrote several novels, he was a poet, and a dramatist. These are just a few highlights of his extraordinary life that we will explore this semester.

So much for Du Bois, but what about sociology? One of the great sociologists of the 20th century was the maverick, C Wright Mills, author of many famous books, including the *Sociological Imagination* where he defined sociology as lying at the intersection of biography and history. Put simply sociology is understanding the lives of people in their historical context. Sociology tries to understand how we are shaped by historical forces beyond our control and how under certain circumstances we also shape those external forces through our individual and collective action.

Du Bois had a parallel definition of sociology. In an unpublished essay of science fiction, *The Princess Steel*, written between 1908 and 1910, Du Bois focuses on the magic of an African American sociologist who says: "You know we can see the great that is far by means of the telescope and the small that is near by means of the microscope. We can see the Far Great and the Near Small but not the Great Near." The Great Near is the realm of sociology where large scale forces, or the "social Over-life," make themselves present in our daily existence. Sociology requires neither a telescope nor a microscope, says Du Bois, but the fantastical machinery of the megascope to reveal how historical forces shape everyday life, which is none other than Mills' sociological imagination. Not only in his conception of sociology but also in his practice, Du Bois was the quintessential

sociologist. So much of his writing begins with lived experience, often his own, that he then locates within the broad historical context that shapes it.

The course will, therefore, follow the life of Du Bois – a drama in four episodes. We will begin with his early writings – the famous *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) focused on the urban North, and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), focused largely on the rural South. The second episode will pivot around Du Bois’ analysis of race, class and capitalism in his essays in *Darkwater* (1920) which opens up to a broader vision of the US, situated in world history, especially the history of imperialism. The third episode will focus on his masterpiece, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), written during the Great Depression, a radical inversion of conventional understandings of the origins and conduct of the Civil War, the period of Reconstruction and then the turn to Jim Crow. The final episode follows Du Bois engagement with Pan Africanism and his views of imperialism in *The World and Africa* (1947), and the international peace movement against nuclear war, making him an enemy of the US state as described *In Battle for Peace* (1952). Du Bois died in 1963, just as the US enters a “Second Reconstruction,” spawned by the Civil Rights Movement.

We will learn to be historians from Du Bois’ widening engagement with the world, and we will learn to be sociologists by examining the significance of his writings for the world in which we live today. In this way we will engage issues at the center of sociology through Du Bois’ megascope.

All the readings are available as a PDF on bcourses. I recommend you buy a reader that includes all the readings for the course from Replica Digital Ink at 2138 Oxford St. If you want to buy books, then I recommend the following by Du Bois: *The Souls of Black Folk*, *Darkwater*, *Black Reconstruction in America*, *In Battle for Peace*. They are all quite cheap but they do come in different editions. If you rely on PDFs alone then you should print them out so as to be able to carefully annotate the assigned pages.

There will be four short (1,000 words), “take-home” papers spread over the semester. You’ll be required to write three of them – each based on questions distributed one week before the due date. Each essay will count for 25% of the final grade and the section grade will also count for 25%. If you write all four essays, then you will get the highest three grades.

Your Graduate Student Instructors are: Elena Amaya, José Avelldanes, Akilah Favors, Janna Huang, Jessica Law, Anthony Palafox, Lara Schiffrin-Sands. It is essential that you attend sections if you wish to pass the class.

I will have Open Office Hours on Thursdays 4-6p.m. in my office, 454 Social Sciences Building.

Introduction

August 25: What is Sociology? We shall follow a particular version of C Wright Mills' famous definition of the "sociological imagination," sociology lies at the intersection of biography and history. WEB Du Bois is the living incarnation of such a definition as he was always attentive to how his very existence was shaped by history and how he strove to shape social change. We will illustrate this vision of sociology by following his own investigations into his own ancestry.

EPISODE I (1885-1910)

BEHIND THE VEIL IN RURAL AND URBAN LIFE

Having grown up in Western Massachusetts in a largely white community, Du Bois discovered a whole new world when he attended Fisk University, an Historically Black University in Nashville. It was here that he advanced his boyhood interest in journalism and, being among fellow African Americans, he consolidated and deepened his racial identity. At Harvard (1888-1895) and the University of Berlin (1892-94) he was inducted into the writings of Western Civilization and the Enlightenment idea that knowledge is liberating, that racism would dissolve in the face of education and research. It was in Berlin that he acquired a taste for sociology that, through the collection of empirical data about the lives of African Americans, social reform could be engineered. Thus, Du Bois wanted to be a professional sociologist but his racist exclusion from academia and the ineffectiveness of empirical investigation, led him to supplement rigorous research with a different medium of persuasion – literary essays that would appeal to a wide audience.

WEEK 1: INEQUALITY IN THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

The Philadelphia Negro was the first serious empirical examination of the life of African Americans in the city, a foundational text of urban sociology. It explored the history of African American migration to Philadelphia, the demographics of the population, the economic and social conditions of their existence, the organizational forms they inhabited (family, church, occupation, schools, neighborhood), and what others have called social "pathologies" (crime, poverty, gambling, alcoholism, racism). We will then compare Du Bois research with research conducted nearly a century later by William Julius Wilson, one of the most influential sociologists of our era, studying parallel patterns of life in the Chicago ghetto of the 1980s

August 30: WEB Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899)
 Chapter I: The Scope of this Study (pp.1-4)
 Chapter II: The Problem (pp.5-9)
 Chapter XIV: The Causes of Crime and Poverty (pp.282-6)
 Chapter XV: Social Classes and Amusements (pp.309-321)
 Chapter XVI: Color Prejudice (pp.322-26)
 Chapter XVIII: A Final Word (pp.385-97)

September 1: William Julius Wilson, "Studying Inner-City Social Dislocations: The Challenge of Public Agenda Research." 1990 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association, *American Sociological Review* 56(1): 1-14 (1991)

WEEK 2: DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND RURAL LIFE

The Souls of Black Folk (1903) is perhaps the most famous of Du Bois' books. Very different from *The Philadelphia Negro*, this is a set of poetic essays that illuminates the humanity of African Americans living in the post-bellum South, their striving for education, their struggles against appalling poverty, and patterns of stratification within what Du Bois calls "the veil." *The Souls of Black Folk* opens with a chapter on Du Bois' famous concept of "double consciousness" and that is where we will begin, stretching the idea beyond race to gender and more general theories of social psychology. Whereas Du Bois view of double consciousness remains at a psychological level, we will give it sociological twist, bringing it down to earth and expanding it to the sky through an investigation of Baltimore's surveillance of the African American community.

September 6: WEB Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
The Forethought (pp.1-2)
Of Our Spiritual Striving (pp.3-12)

September 8: Benjamin Snyder, "Big Brother's Bigger Brother': The Visual Politics of (Counter) Surveillance in Baltimore. *Sociological Forum*, 35(4): 1315-1336 (2020).

WEEK 3: STRIVINGS FOR EDUCATION

One of the most persistent themes in *The Souls of Black Folk* is the power of education – the progress made by the Freedmen's Bureau during the period Reconstruction (1865-1876) after the Civil War (1861-1865), the challenge of education in impoverished rural areas, the importance of higher education for the development of a "talented tenth," who will lead African Americans out of the confinement of segregation. We will read about Du Bois' adventures teaching in the rural areas of Tennessee, and his critical appreciation of Booker T. Washington. We will compare Du Bois' account of education of African Americans in the 1880s and Jonathan Kozol's assessment of life and schooling in East St. Louis in the 1980s.

September 13: WEB Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
On the Meaning of Progress (pp.51-62)
Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others (pp.36-50)

September 15: Jonathan Kozol, "Life on the Mississippi," *Savage Inequalities* (1991), pp.7-39

WEEK 4: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE OTHER SIDE OF THE VEIL

Even as early as 1903 in *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois recognizes the crucial role of economic class, as defined by property relations. His essay on Dougherty, Georgia, analyzes the way cotton production determines the livelihood of different classes within the veil. We will contrast Du Bois' account of life within the veil with Holly Haworth's account of environmental destruction in the Black Belt.

September 20: WEB Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.
Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece (pp.111-132)

September 22: Holly Haworth, "Something Inside of Us" *Oxford American* 82 (Fall 2013): 1-15.

SEPTEMBER 26: FIRST TAKE-HOME ESSAY DUE

EPISODE II (1910-1934)

THE DYNAMICS OF RACE AND CLASS

Denied resources to pursue his ambitious research program, suffering all manner of racial insults and exclusions, recognizing the limited impact of his sociological studies, and horrified by barbaric lynchings, the segregation of Jim Crow, and other racial traumas, he felt he could no longer afford to pursue an ineffectual academic career. Already engaged in a civil rights movement, Du Bois leaves Atlanta University in 1910 to become editor of *The Crisis*, the magazine of the newly formed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He remained editor until 1934, becoming a wide-ranging public sociologist and the most renowned African American intellectual of his time. During this period he used *The Crisis* to advance the interests of African Americans and beyond the US, the interests of the “darker races of the world” as he called them. As we will see from reading *Darkwater* (1920) during this period his politics became more radical and critical of the US.

WEEK 5: RACE, CLASS AND IMPERIALISM

If *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) was designed to convince whites that African Americans were human beings worthy of respect and recognition, *Darkwater* is its rebuttal. It aims to convince African Americans that racism is not rooted in ignorance, but in the white defense of rational and irrational interests. The essays in *Darkwater* call for a socialist future beyond capitalism, which will only be possible, Du Bois warns, if the race problem can be solved first. In one chapter “The Souls of White Folk” – a foundational treatise of today’s whiteness studies – Du Bois shows how whites are both inhuman and inhumane. They not only violently subjugate Blacks but they wage a brutal war on each other for control of Africa. In the light of Du Bois’ view of World One War I, we will reflect on the rise of German Nazism and the killing of Jews as portrayed in Rebecca Donner’s biography of Mildred Harnack, at the heart of resistance to Hitler.

September 27: WEB Du Bois, *Darkwater*: “The Souls of White Folk” (pp.17-29)

September 29: Excerpts from Rebecca Donner, *All the Frequent Troubles of Our Days* (2021) (pp.15-24, 58-62, 70-85, 90-96, 97-100, 155-60, 206-9, 224-8, 287-291, 436-8, 442-44)

WEEK 6: RACE, CLASS AND CAPITAL

Our second famous essay from *Darkwater*, “Of Work and Wealth,” analyzes the race riot at East St Louis in 1917 in which white capital pits Black workers, cheap labor migrating from the South, against higher priced white workers from Europe. Du Bois shows how and why it is that white workers and Black workers can forge only a limited and temporary solidarity against their common enemy, capital. Today, we do have examples of unionizing campaigns that stretch across race, gender and sexuality. What would Du Bois have to say about them?

October 4: WEB Du Bois, *Darkwater*, “Of Work and Wealth” (pp.47-62)

October 6: Wes Enzinna, “What will Chris Smalls do Next?” (*New York Magazine*, July 18, 2022)

Angelika Maldonado, “Here’s How We Beat Amazon” (*Jacobin*, April 2, 2022)

WEEK 7: RACE, CLASS AND GENDER

In our third essay from *Darkwater*, “The Damnation of Women,” Du Bois condemns the way women’s potentiality is consumed in the double shift, work at home and work as wage laborers, especially true for African women. Nonetheless these same women have often been courageous and resolute in their fight against slavery. He refers to Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman as among the great abolitionists. We shall examine Angela Davis’ Black Woman’s role in the community of the enslaved. How does her view differ from Du Bois’? We will also examine whether Du Bois’ essay can be seen as a forerunner of contemporary theories of “intersectionality,” as in Patricia Hill Collins’ iconic essay.

October 11: Du Bois, *Darkwater*, “The Damnation of Women” (pp.95-108)

October 13: Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves.” *The Black Scholar* 3(4). (1971)

Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought.” *Social Problems* 33(6) (1986): S14-S32.

October 17: SECOND TAKE-HOME ESSAY DUE

EPISODE III (1934-1944)

RISE AND FALL OF BLACK RECONSTRUCTION

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. First, the origins of the civil war were not, first and foremost, about the protection of the Union, but were generated by global forces that led to the intensification and expansion of slavery in the South. Second, the Unionist armies were victorious not because of their inherent superiority but due to the defection of African Americans from the plantations, and their joining the Northern armies. Third, the period after the civil war, known as Reconstruction was not an unmitigated disaster but contained the potential of an inter-racial democracy. Fourth, the end of Reconstruction, brought about by the withdrawal of Northern military forces, led to the rise of a new racial order based on an alliance of the restored planter class and poor whites, preempting inter-racial solidarity within the working classes. We will discuss these contributions in the next three weeks and relate them to the “new history” of the US associated with the 1619 Project.

WEEK 8: INTER-RACIAL DEMOCRACY

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. As we will read in the last chapter of *Black Reconstruction* Du Bois' views were anathema to conventional historians. We will see how Du Bois' views aligned with those of Karl Marx (1818-1883), a **foundation figure of sociology, who followed the US Civil War very closely.**

- October 18:** Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, "The Propaganda of History," pp.711-29
- October 20:** Marx, "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association," October 1864
 Marx, "The Civil War in the United States," *Die Presse*, November 7, 1861
 Marx, "Address of the Working Men's Association to Abraham Lincoln" January 28, 1865
 Marx, "International Working Men's Association, To the People of the United States of America,"

WEEK 9: THE ORIGINS OF THE CIVIL WAR

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, and the defection of half a million enslaved workers from the plantations in support of the Union armies. 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 the Civil War.

- October 25:** Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*
 Chapter 1, "The Black Worker" (pp.3-16)
 Chapter 2, "The White Worker" (pp.17-31) [SELECTIONS]
- October 27** Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*
 Chapter 3, "The Planter" (pp.32-54) [SELECTIONS]
 Chapter 4, "The General Strike" (pp.55-83) [SELECTIONS]

WEEK 10: RACIAL FORMATION AFTER RECONSTRUCTION.

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. With *Black Reconstruction* under our belt we can examine how Du Bois would assess the 1619 Project under the leadership of Nikole Hannah-Jones.

- November 1:** Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*
 Chapter 16, "Back Toward Slavery" (pp.670-711) [SELECTIONS]
- November 3:** Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Our Democracy's Founding Ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them True." *New York Times*, August 14, 2019.
- November 7:** THIRD TAKE-HOME ESSAY DUE

EPISODE IV (1944-1963)

SOCIALISM AND PAN-AFRICANISM

As demanding as ever, after 10 years Du Bois was expelled from Atlanta University on the grounds of his age. In 1944 he was 76 years old, but his scholarly and political life was far from finished. He was invited back to the NAACP as Director of the Department of Special Research. The NAACP executive thought he would take this as a sinecure, but the historical context and the atmosphere in New York renewed his political energies. He intensified his campaign for decolonization of Africa and condemned racism in the United States at the newly formed UN. He only lasted 4 years at the NAACP before he was forced to resign as his radicalism became an embarrassment, especially now that anti-communism was heating up. Leaving the NAACP gave Du Bois a freer rein in his politics. In 1950 he stood for the Senate as a member of the American Labor Party, closely allied to the US Communist Party. But he also became involved in the international peace movement, putting him at loggerheads with the US state. In 1951 he was indicted for being an “undeclared agent of a foreign principle” in his capacity as the chair of the Peace Information Committee. The US state department’s framing of Du Bois by a colleague who had turned state witness was so flimsy and clumsy that the judge threw the case out. But the state department took its revenge by withdrawing Du Bois’ passport until 1958 when the Supreme Court ruled that withdrawal had been illegal. He then took off for a world trip to Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China, everywhere drawing an enthusiastic welcome from the highest political leadership, and decorated for his staunch commitment to civil rights, Pan-Africanism and socialism. On his return to the United States, he feared for his safety, joined the Communist Party (as a final gesture of hostility to the US state) in 1961 and left for Ghana at the invitation of the newly elected President Nkrumah where he died two years later at the age of 95.

WEEK 11: IMPERIALISM: THE WORLD AND AFRICA

In the postwar period Du Bois was one of the organizers of the 1945 Pan-African Congress that brought together many of the future leaders of independent Africa. We will read two chapters from his book *The World and Africa* (1947), his third and final major attempt at assessing, the place of Africa in the history of the world and its subjugation to imperialism. We will discuss the relevance of Du Bois to contemporary exploits of capitalism in Africa.

November 8: Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (1947)
 Chapter 3, “The Rape of Africa” pp.28-51
 Chapter 11, “Andromeda,” pp.143-64.

November 10: Colin Kinniburgh, “[Beyond ‘Conflict Minerals’: The Congo’s Resource Curse Lives On](#)”
Dissent, Spring 2014.

WEEK 12: THE STATE: DU BOIS ON TRIAL

At the end of World War Two the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing an estimated 120,000 people with thousands later dying from exposure to radiation. An international peace movement arose to ban the bomb. Du Bois would be one of its leaders, but this would place him in opposition to the US state that was fueling the arms race. Du Bois would be indicted as an undeclared foreign agent. The trial was eventually held in 1951 and Du Bois would be acquitted. *In Battle for Peace* (1952) describes the ordeal and in so doing Du Bois analyzes the US state. We will reflect on another famous trial of dissidents – the Chicago 7 – protesting racism and the War in Vietnam at the Democratic National Convention in 1968.

November 15: Du Bois, *In Battle for Peace* (1952)
 Chapter 9, “An Indicted Criminal,” pp.69-86
 Chapter 10, “The Pilgrimages for Defense,” pp.87-108
 Chapter 12, “The Trial,” pp.119-139

November 17: FILM: THE TRIAL OF THE CHICAGO 7

WEEK 13: CAPITALISM AND COMMUNISM

In 1950, Du Bois wrote *Russia and America: An Interpretation* – a book that has never been published, critical of the US and exuding excessive praise for the Soviet Union. Du Bois summarizes his views in the last chapter of *In Battle for Peace*, an assessment of the defects of capitalism and the virtues of socialism. In the last readings of the semester we will take up the idea of socialism, first as intimated in Dr. King’s last speech before he was assassinated and also in Erik Olin Wright’s idea of “real utopias.”

November 22 Du Bois, *In Battle for Peace* (1952)
 Chapter 13, “The Acquittal,” pp.150-55
 Chapter 14, “Interpretations,” pp.160-181

November 24 THANKS GIVING HOLIDAY

November 29 Erik Wright, “Real Utopias for a Global Sociology.” (*Global Dialogue*, 1(5), July, 2011)
 Martin Luther King, “I’ve been to the Mountain Top.” (1968)

CONCLUSION: SOCIOLOGY AFTER DU BOIS?

December 1 What sort of sociology does Du Bois leave us with? A sociology that is focused on inequality, especially race and class but also gender. A sociology that is global in scope recognizing domination of nations over one another. A sociology rooted in lived experience, but one that is connected to the widest forces that shape that experience. A sociology with moral foundations, that rejects any idea of value free sociology. A sociology that is publicly engaged. A sociology that transcends disciplines, that embraces fiction as well as poetry, drama and music, different ways of exploring, expressing and communicating the human condition.

December 12 FOURTH TAKE-HOME ESSAY DUE