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Is There a Du Boisian Sociology?

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A colleague once approached me about his theory syllabus. His students were complaining that every single author was white and European. But classical theory, he insisted, is about the emergence of modernity: capitalism, rationalization, normalizing power, and so forth. Race, he insisted, was extraneous to such an analysis—an effect, perhaps, but nothing fundamental. Yes, we might include a few theorists of racialization as a kind of coda to our contemporary theory syllabi, but to our classical courses? Impossible.

His position is precisely why we need José Itzigsohn and Karida Brown's recent book *The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois: Racialized Modernity and the Global Color Line*. As their subtitle insists, racialization is a central component of any serious analysis of the emergence of modernity. Insofar as there is a central claim in this rich book, it is that Du Bois was never a sociologist of race but rather a critic of racialized modernity. The standard story of modernization in classical theory, Itzigsohn and Brown contend—bureaucratization, industrialization, secularization, and so forth—can never be reduced to some abstract, universal march of progress. Du Bois's work demonstrates that modernization always contains a dark side: there is no modernity that is not simultaneously a racialized modernity. As Cedric Robinson ([1983] 2000:26) famously put this point nearly two decades after Du Bois's passing, "The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate." Or to riff on Du Bois's famous line, the problem of modernity is the problem of the color line.

The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois: Racialized Modernity and the Global Color Line, by **José Itzigsohn** and **Karida Brown**. New York: New York University Press, 2020. $30.00 paper. ISBN: 9781479804177.

A number of recent sociological monographs on Du Bois describe him as a figure marginalized by the discipline. For Aldon Morris (2015), he was "the scholar denied," a key founder of sociology expunged from sociology's own origin narratives. Likewise, a year later, Earl Wright II (2016:ix) published the first comprehensive account of Du Bois's Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, his early empirical work that was met with "tumultuous *silence* within the sociological community," sidelined in favor of the standard Chicago School origin story. This period of Du Bois's life was central to Morris's argument, as well as a growing consensus that this body of research, paired with the fieldwork that formed the basis for *The Philadelphia Negro*, is the true origin of American sociology—decades before Robert Park rose to prominence. Interestingly, in other fields, Du Bois is not typically cast as such a forgotten figure—above all, in political science (e.g., Marable [1986] 2005; Reed 1999), but also in anthropology (e.g., Chandler 2022, 2021) and other disciplines. But there has long been a consensus that the enormous body of scholarship on Du Bois—save for possibly Marx, has any theorist received such consistently widespread treatment?—focuses excessively on his early work (Porter

2010; Reed 1999), ignoring his later historical sociology, turn to the arts, and, above all, his insistence that the color line is a *global* phenomenon linked to the project of empire.

Why then do we need yet another book on this clearly canonical figure? Itzigsohn and Brown's project is twofold. First, these authors, much like Morris and Wright II before them, argue that Du Bois has been excluded from the canon. When he is included, it is often as a *supplement* to the standard canon of classical sociological theory rather than as *constitutive* of it. Their argument is not that Du Bois has received no treatment in the secondary literature, which would of course be absurd; it is that he has been sidelined in the disciplinary canon of American sociology when he should occupy a central position. He might be tacked on to the end of a syllabus to immunize a professor against criticism that their lily-white reading list marginalizes voices of color, much as a feminist writer, often taken seemingly at random, is used to conclude a class and trouble the standard narrative. But Du Bois's thinking is rarely taken as an original account of modernization itself, comparable to approaches of Simmel, Weber, Durkheim, and so forth. This is where the concept of racialized modernity these authors develop comes in handy: it represents a novel approach to thinking about the origins of modern society as necessarily racialized instead of treating the emergence of racism as merely epiphenomenal.

And second, Itzigsohn and Brown seek to develop and extend Du Bois's approach to sociological theory into the present, developing a properly Du Boisian sociology that centers both racism and colonialism. Sociologists today might identify as Marxists or Weberians, but as Du Boisians? For most sociologists, it remains unclear what exactly this might specify. Elaborating the content of a properly Du Boisian sociology, then, is the authors' stated goal. To advance it, the book's three opening substantive chapters all take a similar form, focusing on one of Du Bois's central preoccupations, but developing it in relation to a white foil that has been thoroughly incorporated into American sociology's narrative about itself. Their goal is to demonstrate how in each case, Du Bois's work exceeds that of the foil, developing a key tenet of his critique of racialized modernity. Together, coupled with a fourth chapter on Du Bois's public sociology, these chapters form the heart of the book.

The first of these three chapters demonstrates the extent to which Du Bois fits into early twentieth-century sociology's preoccupation with phenomenology. But the figures typically included as central—George Herbert Mead, William James, and Charles Horton Cooley—tend to write from the perspective of a homogeneous, abstract universality. ''[T]he veil,'' the authors argue, ''prevented them from seeing those who were excluded from recognition and were precluded from full participation in the broad processes of societal communication and therefore from American democracy'' (p. 35). This is the first of three concepts that they maintain are central to Du Bois's phenomenology of Black subjectivity, all of which they tie to ''double consciousness'' as a sort of umbrella concept.

The ''veil'' is Du Bois's metaphor for the experience of the color line—the experience of feeling racialized—and it ''structures the everyday experiences, self-formation, and perception of the world for people living on both sides of it'' (p. 38), precluding the very possibility of mutual recognition. Itzigsohn and Brown identify the veil as a structure of sorts, generating two effects: ''twoness'' and ''second sight,'' the second and third concepts included in their discussion of double consciousness. Twoness is the experience of being torn between two contradictory worlds, the universal and the particular, that remain in perpetual tension. The authors emphasize that twoness should not be reduced to a straightforward analysis of oppression, but that there is ''a rich cultural and social world behind the veil, a world invisible to the dominant world,'' which can lead to a number of responses, ranging from striving to revolt, which explains the ''constant striving of African Americans for recognition'' (p. 42).

Third is the less ambiguously positive second sight, which, in their telling, reminded me of Lukács's writing about the class nature of sociological understanding. In Lukács, only proletarians are capable of truly comprehending the social world as

a totality; bourgeois thinkers' own class interests preclude them from transcending an unreflective empiricism. In much the same way, those invested in white supremacy, who of course lack the gift of second sight, can never take the standpoint of "the whole community because they do not see or recognize the humanity of part of the community in which they live" (p. 47): Black people. In other words, if white people *were* to adopt a version of second sight, simultaneously understanding the world from the vantage point of two distinctly racialized subjectivities, they would undermine the basis of the racial order itself and would be forced to acknowledge their own role in actively reproducing racist domination. And as in Lukács, this standpoint epistemology has the potential to catalyze a revolt of the oppressed and exploited, though this is where the authors are a bit more ambiguous. To what extent is this spirit of revolt limited to individual scholars pursuing activist routes? Or might second sight help facilitate the emergence of a collective project of revolt, linking consciousness to mass uprisings, as in Cedric Robinson's account of the Black radical tradition?

If this first chapter uses white phenomenologists as a foil, the second chapter adopts a similar framing, but this time with respect to Marx. The author of *Capital* is accused of relegating colonial and racial domination to capitalism's origin story, when in Du Bois, Itzigsohn and Brown insist, colonial exploitation and dispossession, both proceeding on a racialized basis, are "not just a moment of primitive accumulation but [are] constitutive of racial and historical capitalism" (p. 66). Though they repeatedly insist that Du Bois was the originator here, I could not help but think about his analysis in relation to some of the other figures mentioned in the book, such as C. L. R. James's analysis in *The Black Jacobins* ([1938] 1963), as well as those who are not emphasized, like Eric Williams's notorious argument in *Capitalism and Slavery* ([1944] 1964). To what extent is it helpful to declare Du Bois "the first social theorist to analyze the historical and social construction of race" (p. 14), as opposed to embedding him in a broader milieu of Black radical thinkers who arrived at comparable analyses contemporaneously? The authors cite Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells as intellectual antecedents here (p. 87), and there are surely countless others, from Hubert Harrison to Claudia Jones. I will return to this question in the conclusion.

Itzigsohn and Brown proceed to draw a theory of racial and colonial capitalism out of Du Bois's later work, demonstrating that race structures capitalist development, though they do this in a rather sophisticated manner. Unlike in Robinson, where racism and capitalism both emerge from the soil of feudalism, Du Bois ([1920] 1999:17) explicitly argues, "The discovery of personal whiteness among the world's peoples is a very modern thing—a nineteenth and twentieth century matter, indeed. The ancient world would have laughed at such a distinction." In other words, for Du Bois, much like Williams, James, Oliver Cromwell Cox, and many other early twentieth-century Black radical thinkers, racism is itself a product of capitalist development; but this does not relegate it to being some kind of afterthought—it comes to structure not only labor markets and ongoing colonial relations of domination, but even subjectivity and self-understanding.

It did occasionally feel as if Itzigsohn and Brown were projecting from Du Bois's own context onto contemporary race versus class debates, for example, when they repeatedly assert that "race trumps class" (pp. 78, 83), as if the two are wholly separable in Du Bois. Likewise, I did not think it quite worked to retroactively apply the label "intersectionality" to Du Bois's analysis of racial capitalism. That term, as Himani Bannerji (2021:107) has argued, tends to refer to an "aggregative" approach in which race and class are taken as preexisting concepts, rather than situating them in existing social relations. Du Bois's formulation has always struck me as much closer to what Stuart Hall ([1980] 2019) called "articulation," which involves the co-constitution of race and class. There is no separable concept of "race" that can simply be added or subtracted from "class," especially given that Du Bois argues that racism emerged only in the context of capitalist imperialism. And above all, the authors' claim that "class struggle is always racialized" (p. 67) struck me as at odds with their insistence on

a contextual—and to use Hall's term, *conjunctural*—analysis in the spirit of Du Bois. Only under certain conditions does class struggle assume a racialized guise; the task, then, is to figure out when and how class becomes articulated with and through race, rather than making any sweeping statements about universal applicability. This is what they do so well in their analysis of the racial state, a concept that has been less prominent in recent work by sociologists, as opposed to work by anthropologists, historians, and political theorists.

The third major chapter takes the Chicago School as its foil, elaborating Du Bois's distinctive approach to community and urban research. While this is the material that has been most widely covered by sociologists, Itzigsohn and Brown notably move beyond mere methodological insights, demonstrating the extent to which this work too is shaped by Du Bois's theory of racialized modernity. Most crucially, they identify the key move Du Bois made in standing the so-called "Negro problem" on its head, moving from the reigning moralistic pathology to a more sociological (and less individualizing) approach that interrogates "the failure of American society to include Black people" (p. 100). The authors also really nicely tie Du Bois's early theory of democracy to his later analysis in *Black Reconstruction*: the systematic exclusion of a large section of the population renders democracy impossible to realize in practice.

Even when Du Bois was at his most descriptive, they point out, he always went to great pains to root his analysis in historical context. Even in *The Philadelphia Negro*, for example, Du Bois's statistical analyses, survey research, and ethnographic fieldwork are always situated in relation to the history of (racialized) community formation—which, of course, involves drawing out the role of the racial state, as developed in the previous chapter. This double move—historicizing and contextualizing—is what most notably distinguishes Du Bois's approach from the subsequent natural histories of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, who patterned community development after plant ecology. In the authors' telling, "The history of different areas of the city is presented as the unfolding of a teleological process of growth rather than a process of political construction of exclusion and access" (p. 124). Or to put the same point slightly differently, Du Bois never attempted to separate urban sociology from historical and political sociologies, which would be to take the world as one found it rather than to account for its origins and genesis.

The penultimate chapter moves beyond the thematic overview of Du Bois's theory of racialized modernity, providing an account of Du Bois's "public sociology." I admittedly was not sold on the authors' use of that term to describe Du Bois's political work. To be sure, until his departure from Atlanta University in 1910, he certainly qualifies as a public sociologist, insofar as he conceived of his research program and political project as inseparable. But after becoming disillusioned with "scientific" sociology, frustrated by his realization that truth was insufficient to win over white people, he turned away from academic work altogether. As the bulk of the chapter demonstrates, Du Bois did everything *but* sociology in this period, from his work with the Niagara Movement to the Pan-African Congress and the NAACP, and later, various organs of Afro-Asian unity and even the Communist Party. Inspired as he was by the New Negro Movement, he even turned away from empirical research for a period, interested instead in the arts.

Of course, it would be equally disingenuous to argue that he fully abandoned sociology, and Itzigsohn and Brown provide a wonderful account of Du Bois's decade-long return to Atlanta University (1934–1944). This was a decade absolutely characterized by public sociology, albeit one quite different from his initial stint: if the first period was marked by scientific production in order to convert white racists, the second period was characterized by the use of social science to help facilitate Black organizing and community formation. Still, I could not help but wonder whether the authors' argument that "he was always a sociologist," that "it is disingenuous to assert, as many sociologists continue to do, that he was not really one of our own," is itself a sort of sleight of hand. Indeed, much of the narrative contained in this chapter convinced me that Du Bois oscillated between public

sociology and deep disdain for academic work, as opposed to more straightforward organizing. While the material contained here is particularly useful, I wondered about the utility of collapsing all of his varied political work under the catchall "public sociology," which even has the effect of defanging it a bit.

The book concludes on an important note, arguing for a contemporary Du Boisian sociological program that thinks about social theory from the standpoint of a racialized modernity. Certainly, this involves historicizing and contextualizing moves, as well as advancing a properly relational analysis from a subaltern standpoint, all of which Itzigsohn and Brown develop nicely in this chapter. I found the concept of racialized modernity really useful for thinking about what is distinctive about Du Bois's theoretical agenda and why he is central to any project of dismantling the existing canon. At the same time, I am often conflicted about the project of mere replacement—much, it seems, like the authors of this book. "In developing a Du Boisian sociology," they insist, "we are not urging that Du Bois be canonized alongside the existing 'founding fathers of the discipline.' We are calling for something much more transformational: to introduce into the discipline an alternative epistemological genealogy of the modern world, a genealogy that emerged from its peripheries and exclusions" (p. 207).

But is there a coherent peripheral genealogy? Can we really collapse Walter Rodney and Dipesh Chakrabarty into a monolithic category of "being peripheral" when they have such diametrically opposed theoretical orientations, class politics, backgrounds, and even activist histories? In what sense do contemporary academics like Julian Go and Gurminder Bhambra belong in the same category as Frantz Fanon and C. L. R. James? While I am certainly eager to see more authors of color on theory syllabi, is this really the same project as exploding the canon—*truly* decolonizing the thing—or even developing a distinctively Du Boisian sociology? Some of the authors listed certainly fit the bill. But I am admittedly wary of assembling a motley syllabus solely on the basis of authors' identities, which is quite a different enterprise from developing a properly decolonial orientation. Such an orientation would require moving beyond this or that figure and instead reconstructing entire theoretical lineages—much as Robinson does in his elaboration of the Black radical tradition. It is true that the authors of the present volume end by disavowing Du Bois as a founding father, but they also pepper the text with the demand that he be viewed as a "first" (pp. 14, 21, 22, 31, 102), "the founder of American empirical sociology" (p. 1), and so forth. This is a crucial tension to note as we continue to wage war on the existing canon. To be clear, I am firmly on the side of Itzigsohn and Brown, and, like them, I long to see the death of the Eurocentrism of contemporary theory syllabi. But I also think we need to be careful as mainstream sociology continues to co-opt Du Bois, adding his name as an ornamental flourish rather than fundamentally reshaping the discipline's theoretical orientation.

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The Social Side Effects of the Pill: ''Gendered Compulsory Birth Control'' and Reproductive Injustice

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Just Get on the Pill: The Uneven Burden of Reproductive Politics, by **Krystale E. Littlejohn**. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. 184 pp. $24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520307452.

In the COVID-19 era, an old social problem has reemerged under new circumstances: whose bodies should bear the risk and responsibility of sustaining our social lives? Should we attempt a return to pre-mitigation-measures ''normal,'' if it places immunocompromised people at heightened risk? Does mandating vaccines infringe on individual rights, or does it ensure others' rights to health by dampening rates of transmission? While the COVID-19 virus is new, the questions it raises about medical technologies, health justice, collective responsibility, and individual rights are not.

The anti-vaccination movement's gender-blind call to protect bodily choice against COVID-19 vaccine mandates overlooks numerous public health initiatives that have enlisted women to bear the side effects of medical technologies that mitigate biological risks to others' health and social well-being. The HPV vaccine, for instance, was promoted first in the United States for girls and young women, even as men are also carriers of and susceptible to the virus (Wailoo et al. 2010). Like vaccines, prescription contraceptive technologies come with potential risks and side effects, yet women are routinely asked to weather the discomfort of their use in the service of their sexual partnerships' reproductive autonomy.

Cultural beliefs about the rights enabled and constrained by medical technologies profoundly shape how people understand their bodily autonomy and responsibility. Krystale E. Littlejohn's *Just Get on the Pill: The Uneven Burden of Reproductive Politics* exposes the gendered beliefs and practices around contraceptive technologies that inform public health approaches to reproductive rights but counterproductively impede reproductive justice. Prescription contraception, once primarily seen as a technology of women's empowerment, has, beginning with Dorothy Roberts's *Killing the Black Body* (1997), been shown to be a tool both of liberation and of social control. Birth control has a coercive history, especially for women of color, trans and nonbinary people, and those with disabilities. However, since Kristin Luker's 1975 book *Taking Chances: Abortion and the Decision Not to Contracept*, few works have explored how women, in their own words, rationalize contraceptive decisions, making sense of birth control's relationship to their autonomy, agency, and responsibility to others.

The U.S. Supreme Court's recent Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision underscores the relevance of critically examining who is held accountable for unintended pregnancy and how sexual partners navigate contraceptive decision-making. While published before the 2022 Dobbs decision, *Just Get on the Pill* provides timely interpretative analysis of the ways contraceptive technologies, and their use, reproduce cultural scripts around gendered behavior and responsibility, leading to gender inequities. As Littlejohn compellingly argues,