



**BOOK REVIEW**

# Morris, The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. DuBois

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Aldon Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*

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W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963) is the subject of a burgeoning body of research and reappraisal in American sociology. In this new study, Aldon Morris advances several major new contributions in understanding Du Bois and evaluates his unique position in the history of the social sciences. In the introduction and first chapter, he provides a useful outline of much of this new research on Du Bois and on the importance of the concept of race to the development of American sociology. Through considerate and well-documented analyses over seven chapters, Morris argues that Du Bois developed what may be considered the first major empirical research project and founded the first identifiable scientific school of thought in American sociology, advanced a comprehensively sociological analysis of race, and influenced the thinking of Max Weber. These accomplishments would seem to place Du Bois at the center of the burgeoning field of sociology, but Morris traces how Du Bois was systematically excluded from institutional resources and rewards and how early American sociologists were complicit in this racism. The contradiction this seems to present – a scholar fundamentally excluded from the resources that produce high-level scholarship who nevertheless develops a major body of pioneering work and develops a school of thought – is utilized by Morris as an opportunity to contribute to the sociology of knowledge, above and beyond the important historical worth of the study. He develops the useful notion of “liberation capital” as a way of conceptualizing the unique intellectual possibilities and challenges of people in subjugated social positions.

In chapter two Morris presents a synthesis of Du Bois’s scholarship and gives details about his education and experiences that contribute substantially to understanding their context and importance. A particular highlight is Morris’s examination of the influence of the Gustav Schmoller’s branch of the German Historical School of Economics on Du Bois. As an exchange student at the University of Berlin, Du Bois attended Schmoller’s seminars, and drew from the Historical School’s “quintessentially sociological” emphasis, as Morris puts it, on empirical multi-method analysis of economic institutions over historical time rather than abstract concepts, deductive reasoning, and grand theories. This critical, empirical approach, which including training in statistical methods, continued to distinguish Du Bois’s work from other American



sociologists of the period, especially when examining race. In the secondary literature, there is considerable commentary regarding whether Du Bois fully developed an adequate, social constructivist approach to race. Morris deftly argues, against critics, that the larger body of Du Bois's research refuted the notion of inherent inferiority or superiority of races and treated biology as having no essential role in the causal analysis of racial inequalities. Instead, he stressed economic exploitation and political oppression as the producers and sustainers of racial inequalities. Thus, racial inferiority is caused by historical social forces subject to empirical investigation and political agitation rather than biological racial differences. Morris argues that Du Bois is perhaps the key classic reference point (more thoroughgoing than Franz Boas or Max Weber) for contemporary social constructivist theories of race. In addition, Du Bois was a "preeminent public sociologist," who sought to make sociology relevant to social change, and Morris points out how Du Bois's editorship of *The Crisis*, the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, for a quarter century provided a vehicle for the dissemination of a sociological perspective to millions of readers perhaps more effective than any that has since been seen.

A major claim of the work is that Du Bois's 1897 study *The Philadelphia Negro* is the first major empirical sociological research project conducted in the United States. For that study, Du Bois employed a massive, multi-method approach in order to examine African American institutions and cultural processes with a depth and precision that was unparalleled elsewhere in the social sciences of the time in the United States. In addition to Du Bois's pioneering individual scholarship, Morris argues that at the resource-poor, historically-black Atlanta University, Du Bois pioneered the first "scientific school of American sociology" beginning in 1897. In Atlanta, he developed a sociology department and taught sociology to a generation of eager African American students. The text highlights the careers of this "hidden" or "erased generation" of African American sociologists (Monroe Work, Richard R. Wright Jr., George Edmund Haynes, and others), who embraced Du Bois's empirical sociology as a weapon of liberation. Du Bois also developed a "research laboratory" in sociology at Atlanta University that produced the most thorough and reliable sociological analysis of race at the time. The laboratory held unique annual conferences, which led to a convergence of scholars and leaders (including Jane Addams and Franz Boas) every spring, during which they would debate the intellectual and political implications of research findings from the previous year's work on some aspects of African American urban life. Morris argues that what he calls the "Du Bois-Atlanta School" can truly be called a unique and pioneering school of thought, because it presented a novel theoretical position that differed from existing paradigms, and because its novel methodological approach enabled it to generate empirical findings that challenged dominant paradigms.

Despite his impressive credentials and body of work, and despite his continued attempts to get cooperation and employment from elite, white universities, Du Bois faced systematic racism that prevented even the most accomplished African American scholars from equality of opportunities and resources. Morris traces numerous ways in which the scholarly community was complicit in this racism, and especially noteworthy is his detailed examination of the relationships of Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Robert E. Park in chapter four. Washington served as a "gatekeeper" for resources to projects concerning African American higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was head of the Tuskegee Institute, a historically-black institution that promoted practical industrial and agricultural education. The "Tuskegee Machine," as Morris (following others) calls it, was bankrolled by many of America's wealthiest philanthropists, and dominated the press about African American higher education. Washington could, through his



dominant position and influence, silence or co-opt rivals and virtually control the allocation of resources. This had a profound effect on Du Bois and his sociology program at Atlanta University, because he and Washington were engaged in an “epic ideological struggle,” as Morris terms it, in the first decade of the 1900s over the proper course of action to achieve racial equality. While Washington favored a compromise position that emphasized advancement of African Americans through vocational education and labor, Du Bois favored immediate, full political equality and critical, liberal arts education that sought to expose inequalities. Robert E. Park stepped directly into the middle of this rivalry when he was hired in 1905 as director of public relations for Tuskegee Institute and ghostwriter for Washington. It was Park’s “occupational duty,” Morris points out, to be a political ally of Washington by exploiting his newspaper contacts and influencing coverage of Tuskegee and other African American institutions. In this chapter, Morris carefully documents the available evidence and concludes that Park was directly involved in negatively affecting Du Bois’s image in the press.

Park was later hired by the sociology department at the University of Chicago and became the “king of race studies,” and Morris shows how Washington’s mentorship was crucial to the sociological understandings of race that Park developed and taught. Through a side-by-side comparison of Park’s and Du Bois’s scholarship, Morris shows how Park’s “Chicago School” of studies of race implicitly adopted elements of Social Darwinist thinking, most directly in Park’s continued emphasis on biologically-based racial temperaments, his attempts to discern natural laws in racial conflict, and his notion of civilizational progress that uncritically accepted the hierarchical evaluation of cultural traditions. Moreover, Morris points out that Park inherited important institutional resources at the University of Chicago (including networks of colleagues, graduate students, and research funds) unavailable to Du Bois at the resource-starved Atlanta University. Because Park and his students were not ignorant of Du Bois’s research, as the text shows through an examination of citations, Morris is led to the conclusion that the Chicago School marginalized Du Bois from mainstream American sociology by ignoring his scholarship and excluding him from scholarly networks. Morris documents other major examples of the marginalization faced by Du Bois in the final chapter, such as the Carnegie Foundation’s decision to fund Gunnar Myrdal’s 1944 study *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* as its major contribution to race relations instead of Du Bois’s proposed *Encyclopedia of the Negro*, at least in part because of advice from white American social scientists who were concerned with the radical advocacy and supposed biases of Du Bois. Again, Morris provides historical documentation and traces the alternative epistemological and political implications of Myrdal’s and Du Bois’s scholarship.

Max Weber, in contrast to dominant American sociologists, took Du Bois very seriously. Lawrence Scaff’s 2011 *Max Weber in America* traced important aspects of the relationship between the two men, but Morris goes much further in his analysis in chapter six. Weber’s and Du Bois’s graduate schooling at the University of Berlin overlapped, but their real intellectual contact began in 1904 when Weber visited the United States in connection with the International Congress of Arts and Sciences and asked Du Bois to write an article for his *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* addressing the relationship between race and caste. Weber subsequently made repeated requests for publications and syllabi from Du Bois, which he apparently eagerly read. Morris makes a convincing argument, on the basis of the available documentation, that Du Bois strongly influenced Weber’s thinking about race in the early twentieth century, and that Du Bois’s influence can be seen in Weber’s mature writings on the notion of social status, especially as it relates to ethnicity and caste.



Chapter seven of the text develops the implications of this case for the study of schools of thought and scholarly fields. The Du Bois–Atlanta School lacked the conditions that sociological studies have identified as necessary for scholarly productivity and influence, such as positive reward structures and access to scholarly networks, and yet it developed innovative scholarship for a decade and retained a certain influence despite suppression and mainstream invisibility. Building upon Gramsci’s and Bourdieu’s work, Morris argues that subaltern intellectuals, who have been systematically excluded from recognized intellectual discourse, can develop “counterhegemonic” or “insurgent” intellectual networks, by drawing on a counterhegemonic form of capital, which Morris deems “liberation capital.” This liberation capital consists of donated resources and volunteer labor by scholar-activists, including providing scholarly tools to previously untrained students and creating media to make scholarship visible. The promise of group liberation through their efforts to develop and validate counterhegemonic ideas serves as a compensation for unremunerated work, perhaps even when faced with professional sanctions. By mobilizing liberation capital scholars may hold off resource challenges long enough to allow new schools of thought to take root, but such efforts cannot fill the need for resources indefinitely, nor can they ensure that the best scholarship will always be produced. While liberation capital was the “basic form of currency” that made possible the Du Bois–Atlanta School of sociology, it also depended on charismatic leadership and a minimal institutional infrastructure. When those resources are lacking the school of thought will ultimately fail to develop. With this theory, Morris has made a unique contribution to the sociology of knowledge, offering a critical tool that scholars can use to conceptualize and reevaluate the contributions of marginalized intellectuals who have until now been erased from the history of the social sciences and perhaps other disciplines.