

**Classical Sociology Theory**  
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**Lecture No. 54**  
**Du Bois and Question of Race**

Welcome back to the class. In today's class we are discussing Du Bois and the Question of Race. Now you, in the previous class, I briefly mentioned the reason why I decided to include Du Bois and Perkins Gilman in our discussion on gender and race, because these questions were not integral to the concerns of sociologists of that particular time. And when we critically looked at quite a lot of scholars, we argued that they either overlooked or they did not give sufficient or they did not sufficiently and rigorously analyse the question of gender and race in their arguments.

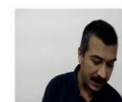
So, it is important that we get a decent familiarity with some of the scholars of the same time period, early, late nineteenth, and early twentieth century scholars who, what they have to say about these two very important teams. So, in the previous class we discussed about the early feminist, Perkins Gilman and in today's class, let us see, what was the arguments of Du Bois and his contribution to the problematization of race.

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- He was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University, but he faced racism his entire life, never teaching in a white-majority university. Du Bois eventually became disillusioned with the US and migrated to Ghana near the end of his life.
- Lived in an era where racial segregation and discrimination were legally sanctioned
- Social Darwinism, the "survival of the fittest," justified the privileges of whites and the poor treatment of African-Americans and other minorities. Much US social science was explicitly racist, drawing on dubious biology to "scientifically" demonstrate the alleged superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race.



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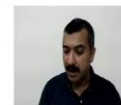
So, he was a, an African American sociologist, W E B Du Bois, 1868 and he passed away in 1963. Issues of race and cultural identity were his major focus areas.

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African-American sociologist W E B Du Bois (1868-1963)



- Issues of race and cultural identity.
- He also addresses the relationship between economic and cultural power. Du Bois formulates the idea of a black public sphere and its relationship to African-American culture.
- *The Souls of Black Folk* and *The Philadelphia Negro*, the first ethnographic and statistical account of a black community in the US.
- Du Bois reconstructs modernity from the slave's point of view, drawing on images and ideas that are often outside the purview of theorists such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.



He also addresses the relationship between economic and cultural power, a very important theme, especially quite a lot of, very Marxian theme, which tries to connect, or make a connection between the influence of economic power and cultural power. The relation between economic and cultural relationship and Du Bois formulated the idea of a black public sphere and its relationship to the American, African-American, culture.

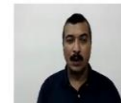
And, you know this public sphere as a major theoretical argument comes much later, basically by, Habermas, but, he was able to talk about the relevance for a American black public sphere and it's a role in the Genesis of American, African-American culture. Two very important books, one is this *The Philadelphia Negro* and *The Souls of Black Folk*. These two books are really are very famous and really popular, which really tells us what are the central themes of Du Bois. The first ethnographic and statistical account of the black community in the U.S.

Du Bois reconstructs modernity from the slave's point of view, drawing on images and ideas that are often outside the purview of theorists, such as Marx Durkheim and Weber. So, this is exactly what we have been seen. While these scholars and a host of others whom we discussed so far, they were clearly living at the peak of colonial, or colonialism. They were leaving at the peak of debates about slavery and you know the need to do away with slavery, but they did not really deem it worthwhile to explain, or to explore social phenomena from the point of view of a slave or for them, the racial difference was not the major central

concern. And the very fact that all these people, Marx Durkheim and Weber and whomever we discussed so far, they were the white males, look at this hardly any female sociologists, classical socialists of our time. And they were all, you know, European males. And that played a very important role in shaping their areas of interest and shaping their blind spots. So race and gender were important blind spots for these people.

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- He was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University, but he faced racism his entire life, never teaching in a white-majority university. Du Bois eventually became disillusioned with the US and migrated to Ghana near the end of his life.
- Lived in an era where racial segregation and discrimination were legally sanctioned
- Social Darwinism, the "survival of the fittest," justified the privileges of whites and the poor treatment of African-Americans and other minorities. Much US social science was explicitly racist, drawing on dubious biology to "scientifically" demonstrate the alleged superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race.



He was the first American, African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University. You know how prestigious, Harvard University is, but he faced the racism in his entire life, never teaching any white majority university. Du Bois eventually became disillusioned with the U.S. and migrated to Ghana near the end of his life. Now, this is the tragedy of the whole story, a person who comes from such a difficult background, such a marginalized community, and he becomes the first Ph.D. holder from the American, African-American group, from the prestigious Harvard University, but failed to secure a permanent job in the white majority university.

And, nobody would have told him directly that because you are a black, we are not appointed him, nobody would say that, rather they would enforce it. They would ensure that he is not selected. That is how power operates. That is how the dominance operates. That is the hegemony operates. So, he lived in an era where racial segregation and discrimination were legally sanctioned. And we know the stories of apartheid. We know that how in public transport seats were allotted for whites and blacks, how voting rights were not given to the blacks, how certain restaurants are earmarked only for the whites.

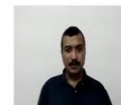
So, once there is a legal legitimacy for that, when there is a formal form of racism exist, it is very difficult for people from that particular community to thrive. So, social Darwinism, and again, I can refer context that kind of way a role of the signs in legitimizing this kind of a perception was a misinterpretation of Darwin and scholars like Herbert Spencer really have contributed to that when he used this term a struggle for existence and survival of the fittest, he was importing, he was translating the Darwinian idea into the society and extremely problematic one.

So, social Darwinism, that is a survival of the fittest justified the privileges of white and the poor treatment of American and other minorities. They would simply argue that if you have enough wherewithal, if you have enough resources within you, you will survive. Otherwise you will perish. We are able to, the whites are able to survive. We are able to able to dominate you because we are mentally occupied, or equipped. We are culturally more progressive. We have physically stronger, we are educationally forward. We are more intelligent than you. So, we, there is, and that is the law of the nature. We are there to survive. And if you lose out, you lose out.

And much of, much U.S. social science was explicitly racist drawing on dubious biology to scientifically demonstrated the alleged superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. And we also know that the science is like physical anthropology, physical anthropology, that scientifically categorized people into different races by measuring their body parts. By talking about a nasal index, by talking about cephalic index, by talking about the texture or the structure of the lip of the breast, of the hair. They categorized people into different groups with the implicit assumption that the Anglo-Saxon race or the Caucasoid, they are the most superior race.

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- Du Bois was influenced by Marx, Hegel, and the American pragmatist tradition. Like Marx, he sees that ownership of wealth often translates into social power.
- In *The Philadelphia Negro (1899)* and *The Souls of Black Folk (1903)* Du Bois often views immorality, manifested in alcoholism, prostitution, and crime among a large section of the African-American population as contributing to their problems and poverty. He traces this moral deficit to the legacy of slavery and racism.
- He argues that the world was becoming divided into master capitalists (primarily white) who control most wealth; the national middle classes of many countries (European, Hispanic, and Asian) who share bonds of common interests and history; and finally the oppressed workers of all nations (primarily black, Asian, and Hispanic). According to Du Bois racism is the major hindrance to a fair redistribution of wealth. White benefit economically from racism, and the profits of colonialism accruing to the West prevent social change.



So, Du Bois was influenced by Marx, Hegle and American pragmatist tradition. Like Marx, he sees that ownership of wealth often translates into social power. So, he was a Marxist to a large extent because he argued that the white dominance is built up on the monopoly over there or off of their ownership of the wealth. And if you look at the America then, and if you look at the American now as well, you see this kind of a very disproportionate distribution of wealth among the whites and the blacks and the blacks are predominantly represented in the poorer section.

And that kind of a segregation, even the places where they live are very clearly demarcated. And that was the situation even then. So, in his *The Philadelphia Negro* and in *Souls of Black Folks*, Du Bois often views immorality manifested in alcoholism, prosecution and crime among a large section of African American population as contributing to their problems and poverty. He traces this moral deficit to the legacy of slavery and racism.

And the kind of a the white discourse which are reflected in popular novels and movies and the thing as this, a black ghetto as the place of anarchy, place of sexual anarchy, place of drugs, place of poverty, crime, where no educated or no cultured white man or woman would venture into. And he argued that all these things, all these moral decadence, which are seen in quite a lot of alcoholism, prostitution that need to be seen in their larger background of slavery and races, because these people who are at the lowest sections of the society they have nothing much to expect. They do not have any easy opportunity to break from the

shackles and then lead a more dignified life.

So, Du Bois argues that the world has become divided, was becoming divided into master capitalists, primarily white, who control most wealth, the national middle class of many countries, European, Hispanic, and Asian who share bones of common interests and history. And finally, the oppressed workers of all nations, primarily black, Asian, and Hispanic, according to Du Bois, racism is the major hindrance to a fair distribution of wealth, white benefit economically from racism and the profit of colonialism accruing to West prevents social change.

An extremely powerful argument because we have, we know that are theories in development, including dependency theory and world system theory, which talks about how the colonial countries have been systematically able to able to extract profit through an equal trade from the countries in the periphery and in the semi-periphery, and through Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

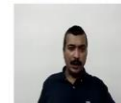
But the Du Bois argues that you cannot only say talk, you cannot only speak about that the beneficiaries are the European countries, but you need to look at what kind of people are getting benefited. And he is very clear that this enterprise of colonialism and the whole Trans-Atlantic slave trade primarily basically benefited only the white class. It only really benefited the white class at the expense of the blacks. The situation of the blacks, it deteriorated and the situation of the whites improved systematically.

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- In the opening lines of *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois writes that whites view him as a problem. This is typical of the stereotyping of blacks as a problem, rather than people with problems; blacks are viewed as abstractions rather than individuals.

- Du Bois also develops the ideas of double consciousness and the metaphor of the veil. The black and white worlds are divided by a veil that requires role playing on the part of blacks, rather than real interaction. African-American double consciousness, that of being black and American, is often conflicted, and blacks must suppress their rage at their oppression in order to assuage white anxiety.



In the opening line of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes that whites view him as a problem. This is typical of the stereotyping of blacks as a problem, but other than the people with problems, blacks are viewed as abstractions rather than individuals. It is a very, very powerful observation. You can even think about in the contemporary India scenario, an untouchable, a person from a lower cast is seen as a problem, okay, you, you do not want to look at what kind of a person he is. He could be a nice person. He could be a very intelligent person.

He could be an extremely studious person, but in the commercial understanding, you don't really ask this question. What kind of a person is that? The very fact that he belongs to this particular cast is sufficient to brush him aside. Or that is sufficient to assume that person is good for nothing, or to assume that person cannot come up in life, or he cannot, he will not be able to do well in education, or he should not come and then have any kind of relationship with him.

So in that sense, it becomes almost impossible for any lower caste person or in the case of Du Bois, any black person to break free from that perception and to prove himself how much ever different he is, here a person is evaluated, not on the basis of his personal qualities. A person is evaluated on the basis of something, which he cannot do anything about it. It is a stereotypical impression. It is a kind of stereotyping a whole population.

You do not really go into how different people are. So, that is a very, very terrible lesson, terrible experience, and only people who really suffer that will realize that. So, Du Bois also develops the idea of a double consciousness and the metaphor of the veil. The black and white worlds are divided by a veil that requests role-playing on the part of the blacks, rather than real interaction.

The blacks are always supposed to keep in the back. The blacks are always supposed to hide behind the veil because legally it is a sanctioned and popularly culturally as well, and African American double consciousness that of being black and American is often conflicted. And blacks must suppress their rage at their oppression in order to assuage white anxiety. So, the moment you question the white supremacy, you will be seen as questioning the integrity of America.

So, there is a kind of double consciousness. You are supposed to, supposed to work together with the white psyche in order to protect the American pride, but at the same time in your everyday life, you are facing the discrimination on your personal and your art social life. But the moment you talk about that, you will be easily branded as somebody who is sabotaging, the idea of a American greatness.

And that is a kind of a trap that the blacks are brought in. And, you know, the kind of, very recent upheaval that have, swapped across America, the white, sorry the, the black lives matter argument. And, even after these many years, these many decades that America is not, is being able to resolve the issue of black issue or issues of racism.

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- For Du Bois, the destiny of African Americans is not to be absorbed by the white majority, but to have their Particular contributions recognized and cultivated. Black colleges, news Papers, and other organs of education are necessary for such a culture.
- The power of a dominant culture to repress difference is demonstrated in the taken-for-granted beliefs of whiteness. Du Bois's analysis of whiteness has a contemporary resonance, as it has become a popular topic in cultural studies and critical race perspectives.
- Du Bois argues that more insidious form of the prevention of democracy is the practice of benevolent guardianship for those ostensibly unable to act for themselves. Du Bois contends that African-Americans and women have both been treated as weak minded subjects by white men who supposedly know better. But this "is simply the old cry of privilege" which must be abolished.



So for Du Bois, the destiny of African Americans is not to be absorbed by the white majority, the destiny of African American is not to be absorbed by the white majority, but to have their particular contributions recognized and cultivated, black colleges, newspaper, and other organs of education are necessary for such a culture. So, he was very clear that the white, the blacks are being able to make their own progress.

They have their own culture, they have their own arguments, and they must be able to empower. And it is not that they are given some kind of peanuts. They are given some kind of reservation. They are given some kind of a token forms, but he very strongly argued that blacks have to take their destiny into their own hands. And they cannot be at the mercy of the white. So, the power of a dominant culture to repress difference is demonstrated in the taken for granted beliefs of whiteness.

And he questions how this whiteness is constructed whiteness as equivalent to that of efficiency, whiteness as equivalent to beauty, whiteness as equivalence to naturalness, whiteness as equivalent to say orderliness, whiteness as equivalent to integrity, these are all kind of a cultural construct that Du Bois very systematically demolishes and deconstructs and Du Bois analysis of whiteness has a contemporary resonance as it has become a popular topic in culture studies and critical race perspectives.

So they, a host of new academic endeavours, especially from culture studies point of view, or media studies point of view, try to understand how this white, whiteness was equated with all these positive qualities or positive traits. And thereby by implication, black represents all that

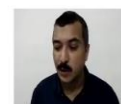
is negative. Du Bois argues that more insidious form of prevention of democracy is the practice of benevolent guardianship of those ostensibly unable to act for themselves. Du Bois contends that African Americans and women have both been treated as weak minded subjects by white men who supposedly knew better.

But this is simply the old cry of privilege, which must be abolished. The argument that okay we are talking for them. We are benefiting. They are not able to talk about themselves because they are educated. They are less intelligent. We are here to represent them. And this is an extremely problematic, dangerous trend that Du Bois identifies. And even now, these debates are extremely relevant in the contemporary discussions about caste, about feminism, about gender, about race, that who can speak for whom?

How can somebody from a privileged position claim to represent the less privileged, how do we understand, how do the less privileged represent themselves? What are their resources and why it is so paramount, how it is so important that the less privilege learn to represent themselves with whatever flaws and inadequacies there might be. So, some of these very current debates Du Bois is able to raise even during that particular time.

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- African-Americans, while they are subjected to racism, must develop their own sense of dignity and worth. African-Americans must be educated to be actional, as Nietzsche might say. Thus, Du Bois argues that the leadership of the African-American community must come from blacks themselves.
- Du Bois thought the future of the world "will rest ultimately in the hands of darker nations." He became an advocate of Pan-Africanism and developed a strong critique of the oppression of women.



And African-Americans, while they are subjected to racism, must develop their own sense of dignity and worth. African-Americans must be educated to be actionable as Nietzsche might say. Thus Du Bois argues that the leadership of the African-American community must come from blacks, themselves, a very, very important point, that they must empower something

similar to what Ambedkar has argued. You must educate, empower, and agitate. You must education and then self-empowerment is the only way through which the lower class or lower caste will be able to come up.

No privileged group is going to give away their privileges without struggle. That is a history of mankind, no privileged section, whether it is male or whites or upper caste or feudal lords, nobody is going to simply give away their privileges upon mere request. It is only through sustained efforts, sustain movements, sustained agitation that the powerful were forced to devolve some amount of power. It does not happen the other way around. Nothing has happened out of benevolence. Nothing has happened out of a sudden change of heart. That is a history.

So, Du Bois thought the future of the world will rest, ultimately in the hands of the darker nation, he became an advocate of Pan-Africanism and developed a strong critic of the oppression of women. So he, that is why he focused more in forming it a Pan-African, kind of a friendship, alliance, friendship and alliance, a sense of brotherhood. He believed that the destiny of the world ultimately lies with them.

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- For Du Bois. "one of the mightiest revolts of the century is against the devilish decree that no woman is a woman who is not by present standards a beautiful woman." Culture determines identities. It is a type of power that extends even to conceptions of the body, and such forms of cultural authority must be challenged.
- Much of Du Bois's thought can be interpreted as elitist. He tends to believe that a cultural elite must arise to lead people in a rational direction.
- Du Bois's sociological account of race, culture, and the individual provides a complex, socially and historically informed understanding of suffering, the relationship between power and knowledge, and the tribulations of a divided self.



For Du Bois, one of the mightiest revolts of the century is against the devilish decree that no woman is a woman who is not by present standards a beautiful woman. And Du Bois brings in the focus of gender in his analysis, and then looks at how a notion of beauty is created in a white centric world. Culture determines identities. It is the type of power that extends even to

the consumption of the body and such forms of cultural authority must be challenged. The very, you should practice to equate whiteness with beauty.

And I do not need to explain you that is not it. Our heroines are always been fair. We have been using Fair and Lovely cream all through, dark woman, a dark heroine is never accepted and dark woman is never seen, celebrated as a symbol of beauty. We have seen stories of a whole lot of such kind of stories. So, Du Bois criticizes that very vehemently. He says that it is a kind of a culturally constructed notion of beauty, much of Du Bois taught can be interpreted as elitist. Why? Because he believed that elites will be able to transform the society. He believed that a group of elites need to emerge and these elites will be able to change society.

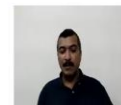
He tends to believe that a cultural elite must arise to lead people in a rational direction. And these, again, look, might look a contradictory the person who speak for the sake of the subordinated people still want a class of elite from there. Du Bois sociological account of race culture and the individual provides a complex socially and historically informed understanding of suffering, the relationship between power and knowledge and the tribulations of a divided self.

So, he, as a person who was born and brought up as a African-American, who belongs to this black community, who witnessed first-hand discrimination and subjugation from the whites, who studied social science, who studied society in a scientific manner. So he was in a far better position to make sense of all these issues.

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He focuses on colonialism and the intersection of race and class domination in a more powerful manner than the other theorists of his time. He implicitly raises the question of the black diaspora, of the problem of transnational notions of black identity in the context of racism and oppression. Such ideas must develop within and outside of the conventional accounts of modernity, taking racism and imperialism to be central components of the black experience and modernity itself.



So, his focuses on colonialism and the intersections of race and class domination in a more powerful manner than other theorists of his time. So, this is what makes Du Bois an extremely important sociologist even before many other people began to speak about the relationship between economy and race. He implicitly raises the question of the black diaspora of the problem of transnational notions of black identity in the context of racism and oppression. Such ideas must develop within an outside of the conditional accounts of modernity taking racism and imperialism to be the central components of black experience and modernity itself. And this is an extremely important point.

A kind of prophetic terms are prophetic themes. Because now if you look into the kind of rise of post-colonial studies or the decolonizing attempts, the they always want this racism and imperialism and colonialism to be to the fore. So, Du Bois as a black scholar was really prophetic in his argument that unless you address the question of imperialism and identity, the racial question of identity, the black identity, your, this entire discourse about modernity would become incomplete. It will be only, it would only remain incomplete because any amount of talk about class, any amount of talk about social structures will be insufficient, it will be incomplete without paying adequate attention to these questions. So, that is the relevance of Du Bois.

So, I hope by now why that we spent two sessions, one, discussing on Du Bois, the other one discussing on the scholar on gender. So, these are the themes that are generally you know, neglected by the mainstream sociologist. These are the themes that either they deliberately or unconsciously neglected or avoided, but now looking back now, we realize that they even then, during the times of the all the stalwarts, these themes were extremely relevant and that is why they continue to be relevant even now informing and infuriating some of the most intense debates of our times. So, so let us stop here and we will meet for the next class. Thank you.