

MORRIS A. D. (2015) *THE SCHOLAR DENIED: W. E. B. DU BOIS AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN SOCIOLOGY*, OAKLAND: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS. XXVII, 282 P. ISBN 9780520276352 9780520286764

*Daria Khlevnyuk*

PhD Student, Department of Sociology, Stony Brook University

Address: Stony Brook, New York, USA 11794-4356

E-mail: [daria.khlevnyuk@gmail.com](mailto:daria.khlevnyuk@gmail.com)

Today, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) is considered to be a classic scholar of American sociology. However, he has been overlooked by generations of sociologists in the USA. Aldon Morris, the author of *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*, recalls how he talked about Du Bois with his graduate school mentor, Lewis Coser: “Coser, always graceful and gentle when it came to students, softly replied, ‘Du Bois was not a master of sociological thought’” (p. xv). Du Bois used to be one of the “forgotten” sociological geniuses. Thus, the situation in Russian sociology is not surprising: references to Du Bois are rare in syllabi; his works have not been translated into Russian. Some of the existing mentions are erroneous. For instance, Batygin wrote<sup>1</sup> that race research in the US was initially not university-based and refers to *The Philadelphia Negro* that, in fact, was commissioned by the University of Pennsylvania and written while Du Bois was working there as a researcher. This neglect in Russian sociology is understandable, given that even in American sociology, Du Bois is primarily seen as a sociologist of race, a less popular field in Russia. Morris wrote a book to challenge the limited understanding of Du Bois’s heritage. He states that Du Bois was more than a sociologist of race; he was one of the classic scholars of American sociology and sociology in general. Moreover, there was nothing accidental in the “forgetfulness” of American sociology—it was deliberate and political.

Aldon Morris is a well-known scholar of social movements, including his studies of the civil rights movement. *The Scholar Denied* was published in 2015 and has already drawn a lot of attention. It has won several awards, including the PROSE award from the Association of American Publishers. Reflections on the role of Du Bois are timely. Du Bois’s prediction that the social problem of the century would be “the color line” seems to have been proven true, since the studies of race are very prominent in American sociology. Some of the most acclaimed sociological books are dedicated to current race relations in the USA, including Alice Goffman’s *On the Run* and *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander.

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1. Batygin G. (1995) *Lekcii po metodologii sociologicheskikh issledovanij* [Lectures on the Methodology of Sociological Research], Moscow: Aspekt Press.

The goal of the book is threefold. First, Morris shows Du Bois's contribution to the understanding of race relations and to the sociology of race. Second, he shows that Du Bois's influence was far broader than believed in that he was an innovative researcher who implemented new qualitative and quantitative methods earlier than most sociologists. Finally, Morris suggests amendments to the theories of knowledge production. Using Du Bois's career as an example, he shows how a lack of political and financial capital can impede the advancement of scholarly work; however, there are means to partly overcome these drawbacks due to activist capital.

Du Bois was the first African American sociologist with a degree from Harvard University. Yet, he could not get a job except at the Atlanta University in the southern American state of Georgia. Morris claims that it was not due to a lack of credible work, since Du Bois produced quality research. Moreover, Morris suggests that Du Bois was the first to outline a sociological theory of race, battling the eugenics and social Darwinist approach. Basically, he started describing race as a social construct. Thus, in his view, black population needed education as much as white did. These views stood in harsh contradiction with the dominant concepts of white superiority of the time, and, specifically with ideas of Booker T. Washington, a black scholar with established reputation at the time. "For Washington, Du Bois and Atlanta University represented precisely the type of liberal arts education that was irrelevant for solving the race problem" (p. 98). Morris describes Washington as the main gatekeeper, who, due to his conformity with the dominant social Darwinism ideas, was strongly supported by white scholars and philanthropists. Washington's ideas in Morris's rendition become simplified echoes of racial politics. Morris does not go into much detail about Washington's theories. He briefly discusses that Washington believed in the dominant position of the whites and that the black population needed to be educated over time to even have a chance of becoming equal. Thus, an industrial education should be the goal for black people, not a general education as Du Bois advocated. Morris underscores that these ideas were beneficial to have. Du Bois, being on the other side of the argument, found a powerful foe in Washington, one that deprived the Atlanta school of so much funding that it almost ceased to exist.

Here, a renowned classic scholar of American sociology comes into play. Robert Park, before becoming one of the pillars of the Chicago school, worked as a secretary and possibly as a ghostwriter for Washington at his Tuskegee Institute. Morris suggests that Park's job included publishing discreditable materials about Du Bois in the press. More importantly, Morris claims that working with Washington shaped Park's understanding of race relations and built the foundation for his scholarship for years to come. On the basis of the facts that Park worked with Washington and enjoyed his support and a letter in which Park does not really go into details of his views on race relations, Morris draws the conclusion that Park aligned himself with Washington's views: "The first principle he adopted from Washington was that blacks were a primitive people lacking the advanced civilization possessed by American whites" (p. 102). However, Morris rightly observes that Park and Du Bois, despite being contemporaries and working on similar issues, did not cooperate or even refer to each other. Morris attributes this fact to the Washington-

Du Bois rivalry and, more importantly, that Du Bois was fighting against academic and scientific racism. It is amazing Park was hired by Chicago University without having any publications, and that Du Bois, who was already well-published, worked in the underfunded Atlanta University. It is also curious that Du Bois was generally ignored by the Chicago school and was rarely, if ever, cited.

Du Bois had a chance to experience a different academic culture. He studied in Germany where he was surprised to be seen as an equal to white scholars and judged by his talents and work. Moreover, Morris claims that Du Bois influenced Max Weber to change his mind on the question of Polish migration. It must be noted that this statement seems a bit far-fetched because it is based on very little evidence: a letter from Weber and the fact that the maître changed his mind several times on this question in the course of his life. Nevertheless, Du Bois was obviously valued there. Weber invited him to publish in his journal and referred to him as one of the more important American sociologists. Indeed, Du Bois's reputation allowed him to gather influential thinkers to his Atlanta school conferences. Despite this, it is the Chicago school that is considered to be the flagship of American empirical sociology.

Morris shows that Du Bois's study of the black community in Philadelphia preceded not only that of the Chicago school, but also Thomas and Znaniecki's study of Polish peasants. In fact, *The Philadelphia Negro* was published two decades earlier. Methods and scope of the research were similar, and yet, later scholars attributed the innovations in empirical sociology to the authors of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Morris estimates that this groundbreaking achievement was not the only one made by Du Bois. He created a unique atmosphere in his Atlanta school and trained many young scholars to produce quality empirical research. Additionally, he managed to create a community of activists and leaders that participated in work of his "laboratory" (as Du Bois called his research undertakings in the Atlanta school). Morris notes that Du Bois's school was the first sociological center focused on the studies of the African American population: the Chicago school produced a dissertation about race relations two decades after its establishment and, thus, much later than Du Bois's students.

Du Bois was often criticized for his activist stance as a factor biasing his scientific research. Morris argues that there were benefits to Du Bois's activism. It is surprising that, even while being underfunded, the Atlanta school and Du Bois, in particular, produced a large body of work, including reports and a journal, and managed to organize a series of conferences over the years. This was accomplished not only with little funding, but also under political pressure. "Research funds were bountiful at Chicago, supported by enterprises such as the Rockefeller Spelman Foundation, the Social Science Research Association, and other local and national philanthropic organizations. Chicago professors were highly paid, receiving salaries far above those of their counterparts at other universities. Department heads such as Small were hired in the early 1890s with a salary of \$7,000, nearly six times the \$1,200 received by Du Bois for heading a sociology department and a research center for twelve years beginning in 1898" (p. 111). This supports Bourdieu's

view on knowledge production<sup>2</sup>: its success relies not only and necessarily on the quality of work, but on access to other forms of capital. Du Bois's work was strongly impeded by a lack of resources, and it was not accidental. On the one hand, his line of thought was marginal at the time, on the other—Washington as well as the Chicago school scholars fought with Du Bois. Nevertheless, he produced a considerable body of work. Morris claims that Du Bois managed to accumulate a different type of capital, the activist capital. Du Bois cooperated from the early years not only with black activists, but also with feminists. These people were eager to volunteer and conduct research, even though the Atlanta school lacked the resources to pay them. The activist capital could not overcome structural limitations, but partially compensated for the lack of resources.

Morris's book is a bold attempt to re-write not only the history of American sociology, but the history of sociology in general. He claims that Du Bois was the pioneer of empirical sociological research and many methods and approaches that he had already used were wrongly attributed to other scholars. Morris shows that the "forgetfulness" of sociology's history is not accidental. It is a result of the ideological struggles of the time, in which Du Bois was losing. However, he was not losing because of the weakness of his scholarly position or a lack of scientific evidence. He was losing because he was fighting against the dominant ideology of white superiority. He criticized the "value free" sociology propagated by the Chicago school: in his view, the underlying understanding of the inferior role of black population translated into the scholarly work of Chicago sociologists.

Yet, even though many of Morris's claims appear to be convincing and valid, one cannot help but wonder if the writer did not overdramatize his narrative while trying to right the wrongs. In Morris's description, Du Bois seems to be an ideal scholar who had no superstitions or misconceptions of his time. Morris easily undermines the arguments about the ambiguity of Du Bois's views. As an example, Morris writes off Du Bois's views about the inferiority of 90% of blacks in comparison with the 10% of talented blacks as a class argument (which, for some reason, is acceptable for Morris). In Morris's book, Washington's views are presented in a simplified manner. In fact, it is almost impossible to reconstruct his ideas. A reader is left with curiosity of why Washington, born a slave, reaffirmed white domination, and disdain towards Washington's comfortable conformity. Was there more to his ideas? If he was considered a black leader, were any of his ideas supported by the black population, and if so, why? Whatever the case, Morris does not speak of it. He also does not go into details about Park's ideas about race. We learn about Park's questionable employment at the Tuskegee Institute and his possible role in undermining Du Bois. In addition to Park's employment at the Chicago school, despite an apparent lack of credentials, this does not bode well for his reputation. However, it also does not lead us to believe that he promoted an aggressively racist approach to the study of race. Morris does not go into detail studying Park's work. On the contrary, every positive feedback Du Bois received is seen by Morris as a clear sign of Du Bois's genius. The lack of references to Du

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2. Bourdieu P. (2004) *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bois's work in Weber's writings, for instance, does not stop Morris from claiming that it is obvious that Weber was Du Bois's student and not the other way around on the basis of their correspondence, and Weber's change in beliefs.

Morris unveils a very interesting story and brings up a crucial question. This question is about value-free scholarship. Morris shows that the names of the founding fathers of sociology are involved in a very particular ideological struggle. In his view, Park and his followers, though called for a value-free research, were, in fact, propagating the dominant ideology. Morris suggests that Park was influenced by Washington and his very specific political standpoint. Du Bois, on the other hand, used his scholarship to find a solution to the social problem he saw as the most significant one. In fact, he left academia to focus on activist work that was informed by his research. His commitment to value-heavy scholarship had its benefits: his supporters and activists were able to help with the Atlanta school's projects despite a lack of funding and political power. In other words, Morris shows that there might not be a value-free sociology and might have never been one. Moreover, the results of a researcher committed to a cause can be, and in case of Du Bois, were more valid than results of the preachers of a neutral stance. While these particular conclusions might be debated by students of American sociology, the general question remains. Is biased research produced by a proclaimed ideological stance or is any research biased? Is value-free sociology possible, or does any scholar that studies social facts cannot avoid taking a stance? These questions, though almost as old as sociology itself, seem to still divide the scientific community. Morris's study of the biases and discriminations among the "classic scholars" of the discipline calls for a reconsideration of its history and foundations.

Aldon D. Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015)

*Дарья Хлевнюк*

Аспирантка факультета социологии Университета Стони-Брук

Адрес: Stony Brook, New York, USA 11794-4356

E-mail: [daria.khlevnyuk@gmail.com](mailto:daria.khlevnyuk@gmail.com)