

Itzigsohn, J. & Brown, K. (Eds.). (2020). *The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois: Racialized Modernity and the Global Color Line*. NYU Press, 304 pp. ISBN-978-1479804177

Reviewed by Elaine M. Eliopoulos¹

In this new and prolific work, Itzigsohn and Brown entice the reader to engage with the depth and breadth of W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), whose scholarly and activist work has rarely been recognized to the extent of his white contemporaries. His place in sociological circles remains marginal when compared to the depth of his contribution. European scholars rarely recognize his work, and he is only now beginning to have a presence in American sociology curriculums. As the first Black person to achieve a doctorate at Harvard, Du Bois struggled for recognition much of his life. The book presents a clear and navigable account (even for the non-sociologist) of his contribution to global sociological thinking and the concept of a sociology despite his being denied that status throughout his career. The book ends with a challenge for the future of sociology and proposes a new and contemporary Du Boisian sociology, raising the prospect of a public sociology going forward.

Itzigsohn and Brown detail DuBois development as a scholar over ninety years as a voice for an end to the marginalization of Black people. His approach to understanding the contemporary position of Black people in society integrated a critical analysis of the historical and systemic forces influencing individual subjective processes (racialized subjectivity) and thereby leading to macro-systems forming the structures of modernity (racialized social systems) - all of which resulted in a landscape which not only did not honour the work and contributions of Black people, but further marginalized their position in community.

In summarizing the books contents, in Chapter One, the authors explicate Du Bois concept of double consciousness in understanding the lived experience of Black people in historical and cultural context. The authors make a compelling case that Du Bois' analysis of subjectivity extends beyond the work of other classical theorists whose "ontological myopia" does not adequately address the 'color line' as a dominant social reality. Du Bois asked the question,

¹ Faculty of Brain Sciences, University College London, England. (elaine.eliopoulos.18@ucl.ac.uk)

"What does it mean to be a problem?"-an analytic lens intriguing in its possible application to other areas where the needs and interests of other marginalized populations may be ignored. The position of the oldest old immediately comes to mind. A discussion of Du Bois ideas about agency raises import and complex questions about its exercise facilitated by structural conditions which transcend the 'color line'.

In Chapter Two, Itzigsohn and Brown chronicle Du Bois involvement in a global arena and Marx influence on his thinking. With particularity, they distinguish the two in a number of ways. First, the role of colonialism and racism as a precondition for capitalism versus being constitutive of it. Secondly, the way in which subjectivity shapes the possibilities for agentic action and the implications for collective mobilization as a result of those possibilities. Lastly, the characterization of political power residing with the state and how that power is represented by different groups.

Chapter Three details Du Bois community and empirical studies placing his work in a global context, contrasting with what was happening at major thought centres of the time at Chicago and Columbia. His work highlighted the irony of the American ethos of "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness" as a society which systematically and legally excluded Black people in substantial economic and social ways. The authors engage with the possibilities for sociological education today and how a Du Boisian approach would necessarily build upon his earlier work but with increased examination of the role of agency, its constraints, and forms.

In Chapter 4, the authors chronicle 'Du Bois evolution' in the arena of public sociology and his focus on the harsh realities which persisted for Black people. His work for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) marked a shift in his approach to research with a clear activist, reformist agenda designed to liberate. His involvement with the Harlem Renaissance shaped intellectual thought through the Great Depression. This chapter evokes a sense of the emerging consciousness of the time and his vision for a more radical approach.

In the books final chapter, Itzigsohn and Brown advocate for a more inclusive sociology which necessitates a reflexive stance on how practice ought to be examining the ideals of a contemporary sociology. They argue that expanding the sociological imagination in knowledge production requires a position that all forms of oppression must be the object of investigation. An activist orientation results from such an approach that relies upon a systematic and empirical investigation of practices that exclude, and as well as taps into institutional and structural forces. They characterize a contemporary Du Bosian sociology as one guided by four pillars, namely contextualization, relationality, historicity, and subaltern standpoint.

Eliopoulos Elaine M.

There is no more apt time to consider the applicability of a Du Boisian orientation to the complex racial issues depicting current times globally, as well as their possible application to other contemporary social issues. Whilst admittedly, race and agedness does not present identical social ills, the problem of agedness and its growing complexity and nuance may benefit from a Du Boisian analytic in which fundamental values of humanity are at stake.

Itzigsohn and Brown have provided an invaluable work upon which sociologists and anyone interested in an inclusive society should be critically engaged. DuBois was a scholar and an activist. His unique contributions to melding his empirical work with advocacy presents fodder for sociologists and social gerontologists to consider as we navigate the emerging complexities of an ageing population. There is much to his work upon which sociologists and gerontologists may build upon for a fairer, more inclusive society.