

# Book Review: *W.E.B. Du Bois: Pioneer American Sociologist*.

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Wortham, Robert A. *W.E.B. Du Bois: Pioneer American Sociologist*. Lexington Books, Lanham, MD. 2022. Pp. 176. \$90.00 (paper); \$45.00 (ebook).

In *W.E.B. Du Bois: Pioneer American Sociologist*, Robert A. Wortham lays out the fundamental contributions made by W.E.B. Du Bois to multiple fields within the discipline of sociology. Wortham resituates W.E.B. Du Bois' early scholarship from 1897-1910 as being foundational to the emergence of fields of sociology such as urban, rural, and demographic studies, the sociology of race, and the sociology of religion and aligns this period of scholarship with a critical period of development within American sociology. Wortham also illuminates how Du Bois utilized his position and influence with the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, the annual Atlanta University Conferences, and the Atlanta University Press to plan and carry out an empirical research agenda that was to be focused on producing rigorous sociological data to inform and shape social justice-oriented government policies.

The book is well structured, and each chapter focuses on field-specific contributions made by W.E.B. Du Bois to the emergence of several fields of modern sociology. Most of the chapters include detailed tables that outline Du Bois' contributions to the topics discussed makes this book suitable for even undergraduate students in sociology or relevant courses. The tables offer a helpful resource for summarizing Du Bois' contributions to specific fields and methodologies within sociology. Chapter one of the book deals with the broad scope of Du Bois' early sociological work between 1897 and 1910. Much of the chapter discusses topics that are expanded in the following chapters. Still, the discussion of the contributions made by W.E.B. Du Bois to the fields of the sociology of social problems and sociology for public consumption is notable in Chapter One. Chapter two discusses Du Bois' contributions to scientific sociology, empiricism, and mixed methodological triangulation. This chapter pays much attention to Du Bois's interdisciplinary training as it influenced his methodological approaches and his commitment to empirical research. This chapter also illuminates the emergence of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and the Atlanta University Conference reports as sites of observing Du Bois' methodological creativity and the use of mixed methods to strengthen his analyses.

Chapter three focuses on Du Bois' contributions to demography and the study of social and economic conditions in urban communities. Here Wortham discusses Du Bois' historic analysis of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward in *The Philadelphia Negro* and outlines Du Bois' early successes in utilizing the "community study" approach. Du Bois' focus on using census data, neighborhood observations, surveys, and ethnographies to understand better "a neighborhood in transition" is highlighted as evidence of his innovative methodological triangulation. Chapter four discusses Du Bois' contributions to rural sociology, specifically his community study in Farmville, Virginia. This chapter aligns his methodological triangulation in the Farmville study with his methods in Philadelphia. It illustrates

how Du Bois took mixed methods and mixed approaches into communities within both urban and rural spaces. The Farmville study showcases Du Bois' skills in demography and community studies. Notable discussions in this chapter also include Du Bois' work with Department of Labor Commissioner Carroll Wright and Du Bois' desire to use empirical data to inform government policy.

Chapter five provides a unique contribution to studies of Du Bois's community sociology as it tries to recreate Du Bois's unpublished study of Lowndes County, Alabama, by using data that Du Bois analyzed. This study was never published due to being viewed as too critical of institutionalized sources of racial inequality. Still, Wortham creatively sheds light on this unpublished manuscript by stringing together census data, Du Bois' survey schedule, and his correspondence with multiple government officials and academics to paint an image of what Du Bois' lost study likely looked like. The retelling of this study presented in this chapter is among this book's most explicit contributions to studies of Du Bois' early work. It is a great resource for classroom discussions regarding ethics in research and publication, as well as the role of sociology in offering critical discourse and analysis aimed at creating justice-oriented social policies.

Chapter six discusses Du Bois' case study of religious economies among Black churches of Atlanta, Georgia. Notable discussions here include Du Bois' ethnographic descriptions of church membership by denomination, congregational analyses, and his survey of belief systems among various congregations and denominations. Chapter seven presents a discussion of Du Bois' transitions to public sociology and social justice-oriented scholarship through an analysis of prayers written by Du Bois for students at Atlanta University. Wortham utilizes prayer as a form of social commentary to gain insight into Du Bois' vision of the African American experience for the twentieth century. The analysis provided by this chapter is among the more creative contributions this book offers Du Boisian interests, as it strays away from the common approach of using Du Bois' peer-reviewed and professional scholarship and toward use of his artistic expression as a way of illuminating his views of race and social justice. This chapter offers a great opportunity for innovative discussions regarding scholarship, professional practice and personal interests, and the role of artistic expression in providing insight into the lives of public sociologists. Chapter eight discusses the overall legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois in sociology and his pioneering and lasting contributions, including the scope and methods of sociology, urban, rural, and demographic studies, the sociology of race, and the sociology of religion.

This book aligns with much recent scholarship that seeks to resituate Du Bois as a foundational figure in many fields of modern sociology and an early advocate for the systematic, scientific presentation of empirical research as a basis for social reform and justice-oriented policies. Overall, this book is an excellent selection for undergraduate and graduate courses focusing on Du Bois or any of the sociology fields discussed in each chapter.