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By DAN S. GREEN AND EARL SMITH

W.E.B. DuBois and the Concepts of Race and Class

The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental.

C.L.R. James

WILLIAM EDWARD BURGHARDT DUBOIS was born on February 23, 1868, five days after the Emancipation Proclamation in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. He was laid to his final rest in Accra, Ghana on August 27, 1963. His life span of ninety-five years is a beautiful and rich story of intellectual and scholarly accomplishment. As a propagandist dedicated to advancing the position of black Americans, he has few peers. By almost any standard, DuBois was one of the foremost scholars of the late nineteenth and twentieth century black experience in America. After a lengthy period of neglect, his work and cultural contributions are just now becoming recognized.¹

Less well known are DuBois' abilities as a theoretician, especially as his theories encompass problems with politics, economics, and racial and class oppression. This paper examines DuBois' use of the latter two concepts — race and class. As a social theorist, DuBois was carefully and knowledgeably following the empirical tradition, although this was not done solely at the level of empiricism.² His methodological scheme was built upon the method of deductive analysis, thus allowing him to bring into a closer union theory and empirical observation, a procedure that is only recently being revived in Western social science. Also, his writings indicate a distaste of grand and ungrounded theoretical generalizations that are so common in Western social science.³

From approximately 1890 until his death, some seven decades later, DuBois was the Dean of black scholarship. By virtue of his superior education and the intense devotion he nurtured for race "uplift," DuBois was ahead of his time with regard to his conceptualization of the race/class dichotomy. For most of his life this dichotomy was central to mainstream sociological theory.⁴

¹ DuBois was honored recently at the United Nations on occasion of his 110th birthday anniversary. This memorial, under the auspices of the U.N. Special Committee Against Apartheid, more recently has been published as a booklet. See John H. Clarke, ed., *Pan Africanism and the Liberation of Southern Africa: A Tribute to W.E.B. DuBois* (New York, 1978). A good biographical statement on DuBois' background and training can be found in Dan Green, "The Truth Shall Make Ye Free: The Sociology of W.E.B. DuBois" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1973), pp. 1-75.

² Empiricism is defined as work undertaken in relation to particular given objects: For example "the past" and "facts" of social life, and so on. The definition of the object of study, to put the matter simply, is the obviousness of the given (an *a priori* given). See, in particular, Barry Hindess, *Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences* (London, 1977).

³ See C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York, 1959). Chaps. Two and Three.

⁴ Bernard Magubane, "Race and Class: Further Theoretical Considerations" (Unpublished manuscript, University of Connecticut, Storrs, 1978).

DuBois' writings indicate a keen awareness of this dichotomy. This paper attempts to follow and analyze his reasoning in light of the recent publication of William J. Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race*,⁵ which reintroduces a similar conceptualization of race and class. Such a conceptualization of these key, intertwined concepts is a vital necessity in attempting to explain the life changes of African-derived peoples in the new world. With Wilson's poignant discussion and the counterclaims of those who argue against him, once again in American social science the issues of race and class have come to the fore. The similarity between DuBois and Wilson is not only in their analysis of race and class; it is also in the fact that both dared to challenge the existing ideology of their time. And for doing so, both were censured.

Those who may perceive this as a trivial debate need be reminded of the point made by a nineteenth century political economist: "All science would be superfluous if the actual appearance and the essence of things directly coincided."⁶ It is just as important to have well-defined, incisive theoretical concepts to guide empirical analysis as it is to have primary data. Concepts, as they relate to the race/class debate, are little more than the theories relevant to the specificity of the social relations of production. DuBois understood well that concepts which do not explore the social relations between exploiters and those who are exploited, or that ignore this relationship altogether, are unable to explain the reality of the human condition fully and, therefore, are likely to provide an empty or bankrupt perspective.⁷ Much in the way of this renewed debate over the significance of race and/or class in explaining the life chances of black Americans — with Professor Wilson now in the middle — began with the work of W.E.B. DuBois. Both DuBois and Wilson clearly recognized the importance of class and economic position in the analysis of race. Both attempted to clarify the structural position of black Americans based on the existing evidence.

Wilson's cogent and controversial argument is found in the work of DuBois, beginning prior to 1900 and continuing up to the decade of the 1960s. The central thesis of Wilson's argument is that:⁸

In the era of modern industrialism, neither the high-wage corporate and government sectors nor the low-wage sector provides the basis for the kind of interracial competitive conflict that has traditionally plagued the labor market in the United States. And given the structural changes in the American economy and the recent political changes that prohibit racial discrimination, the *life chances* of the individual blacks seem indeed to be based far more on their present economic class position than on their status as black Americans.

This well-articulated argument has disturbed many liberal academicians, both black and white.⁹ Wilson's perspective demonstrates the importance of a

⁵ William J. Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago, 1978 and 1980).

⁶ Karl Marx cited in Maurice Godelier, *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics* (New York, 1972), XLiii.

⁷ See DuBois' co-authored review-essay with Rushton Coulborn of Ptitirim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, 4 Vols., in *The Journal of Modern History*, 14 (December 1942): 500-21.

⁸ Wilson, *op. cit.*, emphasis added.

⁹ See, for example, the rather strong and negative position taken by the Association of Black Sociologists reprinted in Charles Willie, *Caste and Controversy* (Bayside, New York, 1979), pp. 177-178.

sound theoretical foundation combined with a solid empirical base — it aptly demonstrates what sociological research and sound empirical investigation should do. It is in this sense that the reading of Wilson has provided the impetus for undertaking a closer look at DuBois' work as it relates to the overall importance of the current debate.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to demonstrate DuBois' lasting utility in this sphere of his intellectual work. Of the two concepts, race and class, DuBois was much more explicit (and had more reason to be) on race. The concept of race was of central importance to all of his work; he considered race as the central problem of the greatest of the world's democracies and so the problem of the future world: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line — the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."¹⁰

It should be noted also that his autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*, is subtitled: "An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept." Less explicit, but just as important, was DuBois' understanding and use of the concept of class struggle. For example, he wrote that "the economic foundation of the modern world was based on the recognition and preservation of so-called racial distinctions."¹¹ His writing about class, however, never received the kind of attention that he gave to the concept of race. It is important to note, nevertheless, that he was fully cognizant of the close relationship between the two concepts.

An early paper, written in 1891 while DuBois was a graduate student at Harvard, delivered at the American Historical Association, indicates a clear perspective (which was to sharpen with his own intellectual development) on class distinctions, not only in American society but also internationally. The conclusion to this paper, "The Enforcement of the Slave-Trade Laws,"¹² demonstrates this point:

It is the history of . . . acquiescence in an unfortunate economic situation into dogmatic belief in a great economic fallacy. This fallacy intertwined itself with the economic history of the whole country. If slave labor was an economic god, then the slave trade was its strong arm; and with Southern planters recognizing this and Northern capital unfettered by conscience it was almost like legislating against economic laws to attempt to abolish the slave trade by statutes.

About the same time that this paper appeared in print, DuBois was further developing his understanding of class distinctions at the deeper level of

¹⁰ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1973), p. 13. DuBois used the same phrase in an earlier article: See, "The Freedman's Bureau," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 87 (March 1901): 345. According to Herbert Aptheker, literary executor for the DuBois estate and Editor of the Krause-Thompson and University of Massachusetts Press editions of DuBois Collected Works and Letters, *Souls* attracted considerable attention both in the United States and abroad. Max Weber, the renowned German sociologist was impressed with the book and when visiting the United States in 1904, while attending the DuBois Atlanta Conference, made plans with DuBois to publish the book in Germany. At the same time Weber commissioned an article from DuBois entitled, "The Negro Question in the United States," which appeared in *Archiv Fur Sozialwissenschaft Und Sozialpolitik* (1906), XXII, pp. 31-39. See, especially, Aptheker, ed., *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 35.

¹¹ W.E.B. DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward An Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York, 1968), p. 103.

¹² W.E.B. DuBois, "The Enforcement of the Slave-Trade Laws," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (Washington, D.C., 1892), p. 174.

economics. An unpublished 1891 notebook manuscript entitled, "A Constructive Critique of Wage Theory: An Essay on the Present State of Economic Theory in Regards to Wages," further revealed his understanding of the concept of class. This work is a critique of the writings of leading European scholars of political economy. DuBois' major concern therein was that these scholars had not offered a systematic theory of wages. Here, he took on such leading theorists as Caines, Giddings, Bonar, Marshall, Jevons, The Austrian School, and Karl Marx. The manuscript, written in long hand, deals with what DuBois denotes as the larger question — that is, "What is the cause of wage differences in the higher classes of labor?" He believed that wage differences had to have a scientific rationale and the question he posed regarding this was: "Is there any discernible scientific law regulating the amount of return to personal existence in the world of industry?"¹³ He concludes with the comment that "wages are determined by the wants of the capitalists."¹⁴ This view, although showing certain limitations of his early thought,¹⁵ evidences DuBois' maturation as a social scientist, who shortly after he started his teaching career at Wilberforce, began to grasp the true nature of white racism as it was embedded in the socio-historical development of capitalism.

DuBois' initial break with "racial provincialism" came when he was hired as an "assistant instructor" at the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁶ While there, he produced his first and foremost sociological monograph, *The Philadelphia Negro*, a work which has stood the test of time. The interrelation between race and class is clearly demonstrated in this work. In the book DuBois was able to comprehend the social reality of black Philadelphia:¹⁷

The student of these questions must first ask: what is the real condition of this group of human beings? Of whom is it composed? What sub-group and classes exist? . . . Further, the student must clearly recognize that a complete study must not confine itself to the group, but must specially notice the environment — the surrounding world of custom, wish, whim, and the thought which envelopes this group and powerfully influences its social development.

DuBois' analysis of class differentiation among black Philadelphians is sound and perceptive; it is evident that he was attempting a class analysis of the social problems confronted by blacks in a Northern urban ghetto. In *The Philadelphia Negro*, after analyzing the class structure of black Philadelphia, he noted that whites consistently failed to recognize the important social distinctions in the black world and chose, instead, to judge blacks by their poorest example, the lower class: "Nothing more exasperates the better class

¹³ W.E.B. DuBois, "A Constructive Critique of Wage Theory: An Essay on the Present State of Economic Theory in Regards to Wages" (Unpublished manuscript, 1891), p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁵ "I sense two matters which are not so much omission on my part as indicators of what I then did not know or did not realize: one is the influence of Freud and his co-workers in their study of psychology; the other is the tremendous impact on the modern world of Karl Marx . . . my college training did not altogether omit Karl Marx. He was mentioned at Harvard and taken into account in Berlin. It was not omission but lack of proper emphasis . . . among my teachers of the revolution in thought and action which Marx meant." See DuBois' "Fifty Years Later" in *Souls of Black Folk*.

¹⁶ Interesting in this respect is the following: "It made no difference to me that I was put down as an 'assistant instructor' and even at that, that my name never actually got into the catalogue; it goes without saying that I did no instructing save once to pilot a pack of idiots through the Negro slums." W.E.B. DuBois, *Autobiography* (New York, 1968), p. 197.

¹⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (New York, 1968), p. 5.

of Negroes than this tendency to ignore utterly their existence."¹⁸ This monograph, which can still be read with profit, also brings out many of the early contradictions that were ever-present in DuBois. For example, at one moment he shows nothing but acclaim for "black capitalism," yet he still reflects on this in such a way that one is immediately impressed with his own self-criticism. He notes that black capitalism "would be vastly more successful in another age."¹⁹ Some of the specific points made in *The Philadelphia Negro* are now seriously dated; yet the overall tenor and the methodological rigor, which was a pioneering effort to study history as social process, and the author's rare ability to couple social scientific research with the diabolical race problem are lasting achievements.

The intensification of racism, especially during the early years that DuBois was in Atlanta, is reflected in his classic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*.²⁰ If one can get beyond the mesmerism of the important essay on Booker T. Washington, significant in and of itself, one finds deeper relevance in this work, for it is at this time (1902-1903) that DuBois began to confront the contradictions of his own bourgeoisie education and the escalation of racism.²¹

I saw the race hatred of the whites as I never dreamed of it before — naked and unashamed! The faint discrimination of my hopes and intangible dislikes piled into nothing before this great red monster of cruel oppression. I held back with more difficulty each day my mounting indignation against injustice and misrepresentation.

He cements this with the following: "For the laborers as such there is in these new captains of industry neither love nor hate, neither sympathy nor romance; it is a cold question of dollars and dividends."²² It is clearly the race and class issue with which DuBois is concerned from *Souls* onward, especially as his work became more and more connected to the Pan-African Movement. His writings from this point, slowly but relentlessly, began to deal with the growing division of labor, worldwide, and the intensification of labor exploitation. As DuBois studied these new events, he explicitly accepted and used the concepts, race and class.²³

In an editorial in the *Crisis*, "The Class Struggle," he asked how far the dogma of the class struggle could be applied to black Americans. He answered his query replying that:²⁴

Theoretically we are part of the world proletariat in the sense that we are mainly an exploited class of cheap laborers; but practically we are not a part of the white proletariat to any great extent. We are the victims of their physical oppression, social ostracism, economic exclusion and personal hatred.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 310.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 123.

²⁰ DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*.

²¹ See the essay, "The Shadow of Years" in *Darkwater* (New York, 1969), p. 21.

²² *Souls of Black Folk*, p. 69.

²³ See Earl Smith, "DuBois and Africa, 1933-1963," *Ufahamu* 8 (August 1978): 4-33, for an overview of this period in DuBois' life.

²⁴ W.E.B. DuBois, "The Class Struggle," *The Crisis*, 22 (August 1921): 151.

He also noted that the “class struggle” referred to “the natural antagonism and war between the exploiter and the exploited; that is, between those . . . who own capital in the form of machines, raw material and money, and those who can command credit, and that other large mass of people who have practically nothing to sell but their labor.”²⁵ There can be no peace between these two classes, he notes, because the capitalists’ profit is contingent upon the amount of surplus value that they can extract from the laborers’ work. Superficially, he wrote, it would seem that there is no class struggle among black Americans; however, “On second thought . . . the occupational differences of American Negroes show at least the beginnings of differentiation into capitalists and laborers.”²⁶ In an article entitled, “The Nucleus of Class Consciousness,” DuBois claimed that “so long as American labor is more conscious of color and race than it is of the fundamental economic needs of the whole laboring class, just so long the development of labor solidarity is impossible.”²⁷

The work that stands above all others in bringing DuBois’ analytical skills into sharper focus is his *magnum opus*, *Black Reconstruction*.²⁸ It is this work that sets DuBois apart from most other historians of colonial America; in it he anticipates most of the recent waves of work on this era. The content of *Black Reconstruction* is superb but, for the most part, has gone unnoticed due to the continuing criticism regarding less important matters.²⁹ DuBois’ historical analysis in this work, global in perspective, predates the work of the “World Systems” scholars.³⁰ In *Black Reconstruction*, DuBois is concerned with slavery as the motor of worldwide industrialization. With regard to the United States, he was able to bridge the gap that many still cannot cross — the interrelationship between the slave South and the industrial North. For DuBois, this was a dialectical relationship which, he claimed, posed a serious question for the further development of hegemonic capitalism. In the third chapter, “The Planter,” he lays out schematically the internal class struggles that existed over the mode that capitalist development would take: agriculture or industry. He writes:³¹

The argument went like this: raw material like cotton, tobacco, sugar, rice, together with other foodstuffs formed the real wealth of the United States and were produced by Southern states. These crops were sold all over the world and were in such demand that the industry of Europe depended upon them. The trade with Europe must be kept open so that the South might buy at the lowest prices such manufactured goods as she wanted, and she must oppose all Northern attempts to exalt industry at the expense of agriculture.

²⁵ W.E.B. DuBois, “Our Class Struggle,” *The Crisis*, 40 (August 1933): 164.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, “The Nucleus of Class Consciousness,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 5, 1937, p. 23.

²⁸ W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York, 1935).

²⁹ For example, DuBois’ use of secondary material. This, one can guess, drove Kenneth Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York, 1965), to declare that the book is “disappointing” and “naive.” One exception to this trend is the estimation by black scholars Rayford Logan and Charles H. Wesley. In his well-reasoned review of *Black Reconstruction*, Logan felt it was both brilliant and eloquent. Wesley, spending more time on the book, offers a sound critique of it. A point he makes, and a good one, is that it is much easier to criticize a good controversial book than it is to write one. Logan’s review appears in *The Christian Register*, September 5, 1935 and Dr. Wesley’s in *Opportunity* August, 1935.

³⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York, 1974) and Daniel Chirot, *Social Change in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1977). These works represent the best of this tradition.

³¹ *Black Reconstruction*, p. 37.

Some of the more salient points of *Black Reconstruction* such as the above have been largely ignored; the cry over its "lack of scholarship" or "partisanship" and the disdain for his use of secondary sources were all criticisms which DuBois acknowledged. The latter criticism should be particularly noted by contemporary scholars, especially by those who are white, for many Southern research centers and libraries were not open to black scholars. The former criticisms are just as damaging, for these relegate the work to the dustbin because of DuBois' use of Marxian concepts and methodology. The book is seen as a Marxist polemic and therefore not worthy of recognition. But, who is being partisan? It should not be for scholars to choose, willy-nilly, this or that book because they like or dislike some author's particular ideological bent. The real question is whether a work has the necessary conceptual apparatus to ask the appropriate questions. And, can it begin to answer these questions, or, better yet, push other researchers into conducting deeper analyses of the same questions? Understanding of a particular theoretical perspective comes when one asks if a theory can explain contradictions such as that which exists between capital and labor, and in the final analysis can overcome them.

It would be marvelous if all sociological constructs could explain race and class contradictions; most cannot, as we know, and it is the mark of true scholarship to probe onward until one finds a theory which can help explain questions of significance. Had DuBois, and Wilson for that matter, taken the straight, structural-functionalist perspective which has dominated American sociological research and had this perspective been adequate in explaining race and class oppression in the post-bellum South and today in the contemporary world, these scholars would be heroes endowed with chairs. Instead, they choose to challenge the usual mainstream ways of examining the position of black Americans, and for that, their work has been attacked and often rejected.³²

It was not only as a serious scholar that DuBois worked with the race and class concepts. In his work as editor of the *Crisis*, and in his political activity one grasps the totality of how he used these concepts. For example, while working with the Council on African Affairs after World War II and with the Peace Information Center, DuBois left the solitude and clinical environment of research and scholarly writing and dealt with the day-to-day realities of race and class oppression. He did not see race and class as accidental or dependent upon individual feelings; for him, these were part of the basic foundation of capitalist social relations. He wrote, in 1948:³³

³² For DuBois' *Black Reconstruction* see Herbert Aptheker's introduction, which adds more to the controversy, helps to clarify it and as such allows us to direct readers to it. It should be noted that the most widely read, and used, textbook in Afro-American history by John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1947 and reprinted many times since), is reactionary on this issue. In the latest edition, Franklin did not see his way to removing the negative remarks about *Black Reconstruction*. For the controversy surrounding the Wilson Book, see note 9 above.

³³ W.E.B. DuBois, "The Talented Tenth Memorial Address," *Boule Review* 25 (October 1948): 3013. See also DuBois, "Race Relations in the United States," *Phylon* 9 (September 1948): 234-47 and the passionate letter to his granddaughter DuBois Williams in Herbert Aptheker's ed., *The Correspondence of W.E.B. DuBois, Volume III, Selections 1944-1963* (Amherst, Mass., 1978), pp. 117-18. In this long letter one will find a very

As the philosophy of Karl Marx . . . seeped into my understanding, I tried to apply this doctrine with regard to black people. My Talented Tenth must be more than talented, and work not simply as individuals. Its passport to leadership was not learning, but expert knowledge of modern economics as it affected American blacks; and in addition to this and fundamental, would be its willingness to sacrifice and plan for such economic revolution in industry and just distribution of wealth, as would make the rise of our group possible.

DuBois was a constant pursuer of new ways of thinking about and analyzing the problems of black people. As was so common throughout his life, his ideas were usually ahead of his time. When others caught up, he had moved on, and his former innovations and deeds were seldom accorded the significance they justly deserved. For example, he was an empirical sociologist over two decades before the Chicago School became noted for the practice of empirical sociology. His study of black Philadelphia is the first community study by an American sociologist.³⁴ Also, his empirical analyses of social class among blacks are the first in American sociology, long before the important studies by W. Lloyd Warner on "Yankee City."³⁵

DuBois was America's foremost knight-errant of racism. For over three-quarters of a century, he grappled with exploitation, or, as he was fond of stating it, "the relationship of the darker to the lighter races of the world." It was recently stated that:³⁶

Central to the DuBois vision of a free and united humanity — rid of exploitation and war — was his plan of the unity of all colored peoples. His view never was exclusio-nary; it was rather interdependent. One great foundation was the liberation of the American Negro people; another was the liberation of the colored peoples of the Western hemisphere; a third was the liberation of the peoples of Africa, embodied in his Pan African movement. A fourth was his vision of the unity of the American Negro, the Latin American masses, and those of Africa, with the multi-millions of Asia; and all this, as . . . part of and culminating a worldwide unity of all who labor and create, regardless of color.

DuBois' entire adult life was absorbed in the solution of the race and class contradiction. He carefully analyzed it, wrote widely about it, and avidly fought against it. Overall, he favored integration as opposed to separation for black Americans. This is clearly evident in his many analyses of the race situation. He favored a non-racial as opposed to an approach based solely on skin color as the appropriate manner with which to confront the complex problems of black Americans — which he fully realized went far beyond mere skin color. By integration he meant equal opportunity, respect, and full

succinct statement on race relations and the class question. In response to the young lady's asking how to deal with the setting at the exclusive school for girls and in his reply to her request for intellectual information, DuBois sums up her confusion this way: "There is on the other hand, the matter of 'race relations' . . . they are not necessarily better people; they have had better opportunities."

³⁴ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1944). In this text Myrdal resurrected DuBois' study of Philadelphia, thus helping to place it in its proper place among community studies in American sociology. DuBois' work is cited approximately eighty times by Myrdal. See, also, the important introductory essay by Dan Green and Edwin Driver in Green and Driver, eds.; *W.E.B. DuBois on Sociology and The Black Community* (Chicago, 1978), pp. 1-48.

³⁵ See, especially, W. Lloyd Warner, *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (New Haven, Conn., 1941). For a well-rounded critique of the five volumes in Warner's studies see Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964).

³⁶ Herbert Aptheker, "Some Unpublished Writings of W.E.B. DuBois," *Freedomways* 5 (Winter 1965): 115.

citizen rights. In his posthumously published *Autobiography*, he sheds some light on his philosophy:³⁷

The U.S. is my country and the land of my fathers. It is still a land of magnificent possibilities. It is the home of noble souls and generous people. But it is selling its birthright. It is betraying its mighty destiny. I was born on its soil and educated in its schools . . . at the same time I have pointed out its injustices and crimes and blame it, rightly as I believe, for its mistakes.

The result of a lifetime of struggle is that too many Americans are ignorant of this champion of peace, of his staunch and unswerving dedication to human rights, and the significant contributions he made toward solving the race and class conflict. DuBois' work can help us gain insight into the knotty problems which William Wilson is now facing for daring to raise appropriate questions — at a time when being appropriate, precise, and seeking the truth about so many of the ills that plague America can be dangerous.

Another black scholar who along with DuBois and Wilson faced similar problems for seeking the truth, which contradicted the views of mainstream sociology, was Oliver Cox.³⁸ Although it is impossible in this journal article to do justice to Cox, it can be stated that the impact of his trenchant critique of mainstream sociology (in his book *Caste, Class and Race*), especially where he examines the way theories had been worked out to examine the life-styles of black people, has gone unpronounced. Professor Cox, in 1948, knew full well that there was more to the degradation of black Americans than the conceptualization of the sterile "race relations" theories of Robert Park and his associates at the University of Chicago. In fact, Cox was vehemently opposed to this type of work and, in print, said so.³⁹

To close, let it be stated explicitly that the entire tradition of social scientific research on race relations is in need of serious overhauling. It is unsound to use tired, worn out and outdated modes of analysis. Moreover, as the unprecedented heights of power and prestige become more compartmentalized in the hands of fewer and fewer people, the task of objective social scientists becomes more and more critical. The test of any theory lies in the extent to which it aids in the comprehensive understanding of concrete social reality, historical and contemporary, and in its ability to be a reliable guide to the future.

This examination of DuBois' work shows that throughout his long life, race and class remained key sociological concepts used by him to examine the place of blacks in America. No other social scientist, or sociological concept, has removed DuBois and/or race and class from the centerplace of helping us to further examine black America. It is, then, with William J. Wilson's work that we have again been forced to transcend the narrow confines of uncritical

³⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, *Autobiography* (New York, 1968), p. 419.

³⁸ Oliver Cox, *Caste, Class and Race* (New York, 1948). "The present writer . . . believes that there is serious maladjustment between technological potentialities of Western society and the possibilities of bringing them into the service of human welfare, and that this maladjustment is an inherent trait of the social order."

³⁹ See, especially, Cox, "The New Orthodoxy in Theories of Race Relations," in Cox, op. cit., chap. 21.

sociological thinking and research to grasp, at the root, the ever changing nature of American society.

The fundamental economic and technological changes that moved the American economy from goods production to service production remains one of the most profound transitions since DuBois wrote. Wilson, picking up on this, dazzled the sociological community with his *Declining Significance of Race*. It was the first full-length treatment of the changing American political economy and must be judged by its strongest link, not the weakest.⁴⁰

We sorely need more work such as Wilson's book. His analysis is not concerned with the psychological consequences of structured social inequality. Race and class are not, as some have argued, opposed to each other in his work, but are clearly analysed in terms of their shift in relative weight as explanatory concepts. The overlapping of race and class categories tends to be characteristic of, although not exclusive to, capitalist societies. Wilson shows, among other things, that black life chances are not as heavily weighed in terms of race as was the case two or three decades ago. Because of the changing constraints that shape intergroup relations, the decline in racial solidarity and, overall, the growing differentiation within what was once considered a homogeneous black caste⁴¹ with the move toward societal deracialization, Wilson, like DuBois before him, has made a substantial contribution to the clarification of the structural position of black people in the United States. According to Wilson:⁴²

What is not so readily understood, or in some situations even recognized, is that the economic class position of minority group members frequently shapes the way they perceive and define problems of racial inequality . . . the economic class position of minority group members is also related to the benefits they receive from changes in a society's racial policies.

The socioeconomic changes that have taken over (in some instances by surprise) the United States social system in the last quarter of the twentieth century forces us to rethink the race concept. In his era DuBois notably rethought both the race and class concept; recently Wilson has continued the tradition. It is not fortuitous that their work has not received the acclaim that is due it.

The brief look here at the work of DuBois will hopefully serve to help keep his tradition and vision alive. In Germany on his twenty-fifth birthday, DuBois made a brief notation in his diary which is a fitting memoir to close this paper:⁴³

I wonder what the world is — I wonder if life is worth the sturm. I do not know — perhaps I never shall know: But this I do know: Be the truth what it may I will seek it on the pure assumption that it is worth seeking — and Heaven or Hell, God nor the Devil shall turn me from my purpose till I die.

⁴⁰ The weak link is the title of the book. See Wilson (2nd ed., 1980), pp. 155-82.

⁴¹ Bernard Anderson, "Blacks Hardly Monolithic," *New York Times*, February 4, 1979.

⁴² William J. Wilson, "Deracialization and Minority Mobilization: Color Class Issues in Anti-Discrimination Movements." Paper read at the Indo-US Symposium on Ethnic Mobilization, Social Science Research Council, New York, November, 1978.

⁴³ DuBois, *Autobiography*, p. 170.

This paper has attempted to show that racism cannot be analyzed as a phenomenon in-and-of itself; this tendency from the various "race relations" schools has not taken us very far in our understanding of black America. Racism is the effect of capitalist social relations, not its cause, and the work of both DuBois and Wilson must be taken seriously if we are to transcend the narrow and myopic limitations imposed by the existing categories of most present day race relations analyses.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ We have had the opportunity to read portions of Wilson's new manuscript, *The Hidden Agenda: Race, Class and Public Policy in America* (forthcoming) and feel ever more confident that the present contribution to the debate is sound.