The Lost World of Development Theory

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The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology. By Aldon Morris. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015. 320p. $29.95.

Professors can be remarkably undisciplined when it comes to the history of their disciplines. Intellectual historians call the genre of insiders writing about their own fields "practitioner histories." Sociologically thin, they rarely deal with institutions. They tend to read the present back into the past, whether in terms of the journals that matter or the operation of their professional associations. Insiders virtually never consult archives of professors, departments, universities, research organizations, or the foundations that fund them. It is true even of histories of the history profession. Instead, they typically trace a set of insights by past thinkers that achieve their highest expression in the works of the leading lights of the present. They also recount "war stories," between modernization theorists and *dependistas,* idealists and realists, Orientalists and Saidians, and so forth. These highly stylized accounts get passed down to new cohorts of graduate students in the form of syllabi and, after, when the seminars reconvene at a local bar. Undergraduates get watered down versions in the introductory courses that new assistant professors and graduate students teach. Call them origin myths.

Consider some additional characteristics of practitioner histories. They rarely if ever include women or people of color among the innovators, or think the efforts by these men and women to end the segregated campuses, departments, and professional associations worth discussing. And lest one think that gender and racial segregation explains why there are no women or people of color to discuss, think again, because women taught the social sciences in women's colleges beginning in the early twentieth century, and African Americans at the historically black colleges and universities beginning around the same time. None of the practitioner histories I know has ever surveyed the journals started by black scholars to disseminate their work, including the *Journal of Negro History* (now the *Journal of African American History*), the *Journal of Negro Education*, and *Phylon*. Needless to say, nor do they analyze the important contributions made by the discipline's white leading lights in advancing scientific racism.[1]

There is one more predictable feature, at least in those fields that practitioners see primarily as concerned with places beyond the so-called water's edge (i.e., area studies, development, international relations, and so forth). History gets going, virtually always, around 1945, following a sketchily rendered "prehistory" of the prior decade or two. The main intellectual and institutional innovations all seem to originate elsewhere, in the European colonies and dependencies, and in Berlin, London, and Geneva, before émigrés such as Carl Friedrich, Hamilton A. R. Gibb, Gustave Von Grunebaum, Albert Hirschmann, Bernard Lewis, Hans Morgenthau, Stefan Possony, Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, Robert Strausz-Hupe, and Karl Wittfogel take up positions at the leading East and West Coast universities. Thus, though it goes unnoticed, practitioner histories rehearse the conventions of post-World War II American exceptionalism.[2] That is, they don't illuminate the past so much as efface it.

If asked to sketch a history of the field of development studies or of development theory, a colleague who studies and teaches it today is apt to identify a putative set of eighteenth or nineteenth century founders and then list the key controversies and must-read books and articles of the last one or two decades. He will not be able to say much about the period between the heyday of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim (or Smith, Marx, and List) and the time that he or his mentors began graduate school.[3] None of these thinkers of course identified themselves as working in something called development. My colleague doesn't actually know the names of any of the scholars in this country who founded the first journals, convened the

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first conferences, raised the first funds in its name, and so on. Thus, the account will unfold as if the great field-defining debates and current research puzzles were unconnected to events and as if institutions did not matter. Were she to become conscious of these validity problems, there would still be nothing to turn to for a better historical sense or, to put it more plainly, a *real history* of American development theory.

One reliable consequence is that the professors are free to make seemingly important discoveries all over again. Late in the 1990s, the geographer Martin Lewis sought to trace the putative origins of the idea of a global North-South divide, which he says "originated in the 1970s" when environmentalists and others began to condemn the socialist states for having taken the capitalist road to military-industrial ruin.[4] Nonetheless, at a meeting of the American Economic Association in 1964 this country's most famous development economist in a profession not well known for protesting the heresy of Russian state capitalism had already called on his colleagues to give up the "overly fashionable" North-South binary.[5] He was doing so at a moment when use of another abstraction, the Third World, could hardly be found in scholarly discourse in the United States, and then always with quotation marks surrounding it. And it is perhaps a tribute to Albert Hirschman that Lewis's main point in his 1999 article can be seen as a virtual word-for-word rehearsal of the one that Hirschman had made thirty years earlier, that the North-South dichotomy is "incapable of carrying the burden assigned to it."

We suspect that the lineage of the North South binary in American development studies is radically different from the one Lewis has internalized and its burden even heavier than he imagines, because empire and what the professors called "race subjection" shaped U.S. academic institutions so profoundly.[6] Contemporary writing about development theory in the United States shares with all other domains of American culture a powerful tendency, in Toni Morrison's words, toward "silence and evasion" about that racist past. Intellectual life is governed by the norm "against noticing."[7] The norm is enacted silently and efficiently in two basic, taken for granted claims about development studies in the United States. The first is the idea that it is a field of knowledge exclusively concerned with spaces beyond the territorial boundaries of the republic. The second idea is that the story of development properly begins after 1945. These are claims that would make little sense to those who were teaching, writing, and building institutions at the turn-of-the-century dedicated to reforming the administration of colonies and dependencies by using new techniques of race development and uplift. Thus the lead article of the premier 1910 issue of the *Journal of Race Development*, a forum for analysis of the progress of backward races and states, begins by noting that the U.S. "has as fundamental an interest in races of a less developed civilization as have the powers of Europe. The key to the past seventy-five years of American history is the continuing struggle to find some solution for the negro problem—a problem still unsolved."[8]

As in other ostensibly better known moments in the history of development theory, the creation of courses, programs, and journals dedicated to the new science was part of a larger story involving foundations and other private associations as well as the interests and agencies of the state. The central tendencies are clear enough from the record of the gatherings of activists and scholars at the Lake Mohonk Conferences, near New Paltz, beginning in the 1880s, devoted at first to Indian policy and gradually expanding to include "Other Dependent People" of the U.S., to the Universal Races Congress held in London in 1911. The most important early donor agency was the Phelps Stokes Fund. The Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes were the renown sites of experimentation and practical dissemination of policies. The visionaries, institution builders, and "action intellectuals" of the field-information included Booker T. Washington, Jesse Jones, Samuel Chapman Andrews, E. P. Tyler, Dean Worcester, G. Stanley Hall, Franz Boas, Paul Reinsch, and W. E. B. Du Bois, among others.

At Lake Mohonk, in the seminaries at Clark, where the *JRD* was published, and in the pages of the journal, positions were taken for the first time in the grand field defining debate that continues into the present day: is development of backward states and races possible and what kinds of interventions if any are effective. For the first time, scholars in new graduate research and technology institutes in the United States, together with their counterparts in the foundations and government agencies, argued for and against land reform and democracy promotion schemes, debates that, again, continue to this day. A third, extremely important debate—probably the one that was most controversial at the time—about the kind of education appropriate for development—raged furiously from about 1870 to 1950 but is no longer an issue most courses in development even touch on today. A forth debate, about the appropriate roles of government, faith-based institutions, and industry in race development and uplift, cut across the technical ones, and continues to do so now.

Parts of this history are exceedingly well known but only by those who call themselves specialists in Native American history and in the American West and Southwest in the Dawes Era, in the history of Reconstruction, and in African American politics, culture, and society in the era of Jim Crow. No significant body of work yet exists that links these subjects to the expansion of Jim Crow development strategies abroad (which are never described in these terms) in places such as Panama and the Philippines or that brings the comparative imagination to the debates on education policy in the various

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zones of Northern (Eastern) American capital and state expansion.[9] Were it the case, then it might be possible to imagine taking the next step and beginning the research program on the international roots of progressive era race development theory and practice, but all we can do here is remind historically-minded development theorists of what has long since been forgotten. The Hampton-Tuskegee experiment of Booker T. Washington was at the heart of "reforms" in British colonial settings in the 1920s and 1930s, the same reforms that are now conventionally imagined as part of the near "prehistory" of the post-World War II invention of development theory in the United States![10] In fact all that would seem to remain visible of "the underground and unwritten history" of development is the North-South binary around which most Americans then organized their understanding of the "race problem," more precisely, the threat to world-wide white supremacy that Charles Merriam, the first political scientist hired at the University of Chicago, said was one of the most pressing challenges for contemporary theory.[11]

In his remarkable *The Scholar Denied*, Aldon Morris sets the record straight about the role of W. E. B. Du Bois in pioneering modern scientific or empirical sociology in the United States, a legacy denied him by generations of practitioner histories. Morris traces that history of denial back to Du Bois's attack on the race development orthodoxy of the day, although this is my characterization, not his.[12] Du Bois was a 35-year-old professor of economics and history at Atlanta University, with two books behind him—*The Suppression of the Slave Trade in the United States* (1896), his PhD dissertation at Harvard published essentially as is, and the massive survey work *The Philadelphia Negro*, which Morris rightly calls the first major empirical work in sociology—when he published his first collection of essays *Souls of Black Folk* (1903).

Its most famous chapter, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," is a blistering attack on Washington, the Tuskegee machine, and its advocacy of limited education—in industrial arts, the rudiments of reading and writing—for black people that "progressive" white philanthropists, backed by the scientific racism of the day, had deemed appropriate for all the "tribes" and "races" at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder. The theory was that the lesser stocks might conceivably climb a rung or two higher, proving wrong all those who instead argued that advancement for blacks was impossible (or else that slavery itself was responsible for the race's modest developmental gains; nothing more was to be done). Du Bois charged Washington with effectively acquiescing to African Americans' disfranchisement, demobilization, loss of civil rights and the institutionalization of Jim Crow. He sought instead to build a social movement that would restore the voting rights won during Reconstruction and gain African Americans access to all white ruling institutions of power nationally. A crucial part of that project was a radically different vision of education for self-determination: the creation of black universities and the nurturing of an elite of teaches, writers, lawyers, doctors, and the like. The same debate would reoccur across the colonies and dependencies as colonial officials, foundations, or large mining capital responded to popular mobilizations with "reforms" like vocational training while national liberation movements and their western educated cadres sought their countries' commanding heights.[13]

Robert E. Park, the white scholar conventionally identified as the pioneer of urban sociology in the U.S. and the discipline's leading theorist of race relations through his role in founding the "Chicago School," completed his PhD in philosophy the year Du Bois published *Souls*. He then worked as agent for Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Institute for the next decade, rising to head of public relations, before his initial Chicago appointment as lecturer in 1914. According to Morris, at the time of his appointment, "at age forty-nine" Park "had no major sole publications" nor other significant "scholarly achievements."[14] Du Bois had already published three books, was running an annual conference on black life at Atlanta and oversaw the research and publication of a dozen sociological monographs on the same subject. In addition, he founded two new journals, began editing the *Crisis,* published a novel, and came out with his fourth book, *The Negro*, in 1915, not to mention the dozens of articles he wrote for popular and scholarly venues during the decade.

Park and his colleagues at Chicago would proceed to marginalize Du Bois and the work of the other now forgotten researchers of the "Atlanta School" over the next decades. Park certainly knew Du Bois's pioneering studies, as his original and thereafter dwindling citations attest. Still, he and his coauthor Ernest Burgess omitted discussion of Du Bois and his work in their 1000-page survey of the discipline, *Introduction to Sociology* (1921), dubbed "the Green Bible" by Chicago graduate students, that profiled the most important figures in the field, Park prominently included. Later Chicago-produced practitioner histories followed suit. Du Bois's path-breaking *Philadelphia Negro* (1899) disappeared from syllabi and the *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–1920), written two decades later by one of Park's colleagues at Chicago, came to be canonized as the "earliest major landmark of American sociological research."[15] In it, William I Thomas and his coauthor Florian Znaniecki describe an academic field in which no equivalent and, they argue, desperately needed monograph on the Negro ("with his lower cultural level") yet existed, making their own generalizations about "social reality" tentative at best.[16] The Chicago school's reputation for bringing theory and fieldwork to the study of U.S. cities for the first time is built upon a consummate act of silence and evasion.

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The widespread recognition today of Du Bois contributions to history, criticism, and theory, and the restoration of his place in the history of twentieth century political thought more generally, are consequences of the black power movement's rise on American campuses.[17] Africana studies and faculty of color in the United States have driven the creation of new research fields and reoriented existing ones, from the sociology of the Black Atlantic and the political science of race and immigration to literary studies of the Harlem Renaissance and the historiography of the U.S. Civil War. Today Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935) appears on virtually any syllabus on the subject, although it went unreferenced in sociologist Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966), by which time sociologists had come to believe in an origin myth of a holy trinity of "classical" thinkers—Durkheim, Weber, and Marx—that brought the discipline into existence.[18] In the real world, as Morris shows, it is Du Bois who impacted Weber's ideas about American racism, back when the latter was just another sociologist, more ignored than worshiped at Chicago, Harvard, the University of North Carolina (where Howard Odum founded the *Journal of Social Forces*), and other departments. No wonder that Weber judged Du Bois "the most important sociological scholar anywhere in the Southern states in America, with whom no white scholar can compare."[19]

Practitioners' understandings of the effects of racism on the past of their own disciplines have been slow to change, even in fields where black scholars have come to occupy leading positions. It is just one of the reasons that Morris's *Scholar Denied* is so important. Other disciplines and fields in the United States, international development studies among them, have remained largely insulated from the black studies revolution. In certain respects, therefore, the history of development theory today looks nearly the same today as it did in the 1970s.

Notes

1 For the first such account of the political science discipline, decades after Stocking published his path-breaking *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*, which, the title notwithstanding, discusses the work of leading historians, political scientists, economists, and sociologists, see Blatt 2017, forthcoming.
2 Vitalis 2007, 7–9, Go 2011.
3 Many accounts see no particular difficulty in tracing the intellectual sources of development theory and U. S. policy after World War II to Adam Smith or Hegel without explaining what happens in the intervening 100 years. Others pair the story about the post-World War II U.S. project with one about an original postwar intellectual cohort, including Paul Rodenstein-Rodan, Arthur Lewis, Gabriel Almond, Albert Hirschman, and Samuel Huntington. For recent historiographical treatments of development theory that reproduce assumptions about the United States as a late comer see Cooper 2010, Frey and Kunkel 2011, and Hodge 2016.
4 Martin 1999, 355–358.
5 Hirschman, et al. 1964, 428.
6 Steinmetz 2013, Vitalis 2015.
7 Morrison 1992, 9.
8 Blakeslee 1910, 1–2.
9 See however King 1971, West 1992, Kramer 2006, and Zimmerman 2010.
10 For example, Escobar 1995 rehearses the conventional narrative of the Truman Doctrine-era origins of development while noting "indeed, important precursors that presaged its appearance in full regalia after World War II." But these still "ill-understood" precursors are the result of challenges to interwar British colonial policy in "the period between 1920–1950" and the expression of America's Good Neighbor policy in Latin America under FDR. 26–28. See Cooper 2010 for a similar account.
11 Merriam 1924.
12 As Steinmetz 2013 discusses at great length, methodological nationalism is entrenched in sociology, naturalizing the United States as a self-contained unit of analysis.
13 Vitalis 2007, 38–40.
14 Morris 2015, 110.
15 Morris 2015, 68.
16 Morris 2015, 141.
17 Biondi 2012.
18 Connell 1997.
19 Morris 2015, 162.

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