OMAR: Hello. Welcome to the Social Breakdown, the podcast where we break down our complex world one topic at a time using our social imagination. We're your hosts:

PENN: Penn.

OMAR: Omar.

ELLEN: And Ellen.

OMAR: In the spirit of Black History Month and last weeks, today's topic is introducing a book and a scholar by the name of W.E.B Du Bois. The book is titled “The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology” by Aldon D. Morris.
Today will will briefly discuss the author, the book, alongside the accomplishments and legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois, as well as some popular theory of Du Bois and double consciousness. As the title suggests, and the author argues in these fascinating study, Du Bois was a prominent scholar who not only played a pivotal role in the birth of modern scientific sociology in America, but was the founding father. He will also talk about the interactions between Max Weber and W.E.B. Du Bois.

PENN: In terms of founding fathers of Sociology, there is usually Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim which we have talked about and then Max Weber. Du Bois is considered the forgotten founding father because even in Sociology classes he's not discussed very much or he's not talked very much, especially in introductory courses.

ELLEN: Exactly, but we'll talk about later on in this episode how he indeed played a huge role in Sociology, especially in quantitative Sociology where we are using statistics and numbers, maps, etc. to find social patterns.

The book that we're going to talk about, like Omar said, is called “The Scholar Denied” and that was written by Aldon Morris who's really distinguished scholar in the field of Sociology. Most of Morris's research is focused primarily on W.E.B Du Bois, but he also writes about social movements, the civil rights movements, and that kind of field of study.

A little bit about Aldon Morris: He was born in 1949 - he's around 68 years old now - in Mississippi, where as a child he experienced Jim Crow racism, segregation. In an interview he did in 2015, he talks about remembering the lynching of Emmett Till who was a 14 year old boy. Later on, he moved up north to Chicago and then over to New York, where he ended up getting his PhD in 1980 from the State University of New York Stony Brook. Right now he teaches at Northwestern. Along with “The Scholar Denied”, another one of his famous books is titled “The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change”.

The other thing that I wanted to say before we move on to Du Bois, is that Du Bois should be pronounced [Du: Boa] and a lot of people will say W.E.B. [Du: Boa], because his last name is French. But he was an American, and he preferred the American pronunciation of [Du: Bois]. So

if you don't want to sound like a newb, don't say W.E.B. [Du: Boa], even though it's technically correct.

PENN: On to W.E.B. Du Bois himself - now that we know how to pronounce his name - he was an American sociologist as we know historian, civil rights activists, Pan-Africanist, author, writer, editor. He did all these things. He's originally from Massachusetts, and he completed his graduate work at the University of Berlin and Harvard where he was the first African American to earn a doctorate from Harvard. So that's pretty impressive. He became a professor of History, Sociology and Economics at Atlanta University, and was also one of the co-founders of the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909.

Before getting his PhD from Harvard, he actually studied in Berlin in an effort to bring about new foundations in the social science research. This is in the late 1800s when Sociology was still a fledgling field and that's why he played such a pivotal role in establishing Sociology as an actual modern science. He wrote one of the first scientific treatises in the field of American Sociology. He published a bunch of other books, including insightful essays on Sociology, Politics and History. He believed that capitalism was the primary cause of racism. Then we're going to talk more about some of his theories and his perspectives, but his prominent works include “The Souls of Black Folk”, “The Philadelphia Negro” and “Black Reconstruction in America”.

ELLEN. One thing that you threw out that I want to touch on is the fact that Du Bois was a Pan-Africanist, something that you'll see a lot. It's not a really commonly used term. Pan-Africanist is somebody who believes that African countries deserve and need sovereignty, especially during this time period. You have to keep in mind that African countries were primarily European colonies.

PENN: Late 1800s.

ELLEn: A Pan-Africanist believes that all people of African descent, regardless of where they're living, if they're still in Africa, if they're in the US, if they're in Europe, should stand in solidarity and support each other and the freedom for African people. That was his big thing and he traveled pretty regularly to Africa. I believe he died in Africa.

OMAR: A lot of his work tried to undo a lot of the stereotypes that were placed on the black community. This work might not feel super groundbreaking today, but in the beginning of the 1900s, in the late 1800s, they were hugely prominent. Even in his book “The Scholar Denied”, a lot of scholarship now is taking up a lot of Du Boisian type analytical techniques. “The Philadelphia Negro” is a prime example of breaking down these stereotypes about black people being a homogeneous group, which of course they were not. There were black leads, there were poor black, there were black people who internalize negative stereotypes, there were people who resisted those things. He really tried to get at the lived experiences of people in different contexts, but we'll talk about that a little bit once we talk about this book.

So “The Scholar Denied”. I'm going to read the first paragraph of the preface because I think it gives a good grounding as to why the author wrote this book. The first paragraph of the preface reads as follows:

“The origins of this book lie in my childhood in the heartland of Jim Crow racism in rural Tutwiler, Mississippi, where I was born in 1949. As a boy, I experienced and witnessed black life in the Deep South of the 1950s, drinking from the “colored” water fountain and receiving ice cream through the small shutter in back of the segregated Dairy Queen. I attended the small, colored elementary school, where during fall terms my classmates, who had not yet reached puberty, disappeared for several months to pick cotton so their families could survive. I was aware in the early hours of fall mornings that white men drove pickup trucks to the black side of town and loaded blacks to drop off on farms. I remember in blistering hot weather how whites sat under shade trees while we worked the fields dripping sweat from sunup to sundown. Yet, with all the backbreaking work, we never had enough to eat or adequate clothes to wear. As a young child, I tried to make sense of why we had it so bad while white children seemed to have it all. As an adult I now understand that I experienced a predicament that Du Bois had conceptualized as a caste system and a new slavery of debt peonage.”

Aldon Morris, within a lot of his speeches, talks about the reason why he wrote this book, because he has felt a lot of the institutional personal racism just from being black in the South. And then obviously being very confused as to his place versus maybe other whites in his social circumstances.

And that was also a similar experience to W.E.B. Du Bois as well. He was treated very differently as a black person in the United States compared to how he was treated in Germany. In Germany, he was treated way more like a social equal, and the connotations of being black were not the same in Germany as they were in the United States at the time.

The book is an actual study. It's not just a narrative book. The author took a lot of primary and secondary sources, autobiographies, letters, journal articles. He was able to collect a lot over the six decades of W.E.B. Du Bois’s prolific career. Du Bois’s intent was to leave behind a lot of his work and a lot of work that was not allowed to be made particularly public at the time for future generation of scholars. The main thesis of this book is that through various levels of discrimination and racism, Du Bois was not given the credit he deserves in being The Founding Father of American modern sociology, though all that discrimination and racism that he experienced did not stop him from being a prominent figure in the field.

The takeaway of the book is that a lot of schools of thought that are being developed around this time and then also any school of thought really is a product of social factors and also obviously the people who are included, the social factors like in his time, can we have a black person who is a scholar - but we're not going to see him as a scholar - allowed to talk about social processes in the United States, this also obviously implicates women as well.

But of course, under certain conditions powerful ideas will trump, even in the face of tremendous political and economic odds - and that's the real point of this book - that no matter what, certain ideas and certain figures and certain movements. Of course the book ends with how a lot of his scholarship is being part of American Sociology today, as Penn mentioned earlier, how a lot of intro classes and other things have not talked about him.

That is slowly starting to change and the author acknowledges in a lot of his interviews that he's been getting email increase into how to incorporate Du Bois into syllable, into lectures, into research on health and black identity. He believes that this systematic leap of denial of access into Sociology, into society in general, will slowly change, what's really interesting though considering one of our earliest episodes talking about the three scholars in Sociology.

Penn, can you give us a little talk about the myths about Weber and Du Bois because they did interact with one another.

PENN: Weber and Du Bois were actually contemporaries and they were in graduate school at the same time in Germany. They were both graduate students at the University of Berlin. Weber was four years older than Du Bois. And even though Du Bois sat in on Weber's lectures, Weber was actually not Dubois's mentor. So I think there's this idea that Weber and Du Bois have the same intellectual path, and that they fed off each other.

But they did share a lot of the same intellectual and political views such as races as a social construct. Go listen to our last episode on Black History Month. They both promoted women's careers at the time by giving them publishing opportunities, because that's what good scholars should do. Unlike Robert races Park who thought that it would be dangerous to give voice to the marginalized groups of society, both Weber and Du Bois gave opportunities for women to actually publish.

ELLEN: Those who don't know who Robert Park is, who is Robert Park?

OMAR: Park was a sociologist who was a prominent figure in the birth of the Chicago School of Thought. He was one of those people that said society is like an organism, or society is like a cell. I don't think he's credited with structural functionalism, but he would definitely be there in early mutterings of that type of framework. And of course he was also, along with other theorists at the time, we're not people who were going out and seeing society in its real form. He, and along with other scholars, really were on the fence of social philosophy. He didn't find it necessary to talk about how society is developed by going out and counting people, observing society, talking to people, interacting with them, living in their communities, etc etc etc. So those two diverge in that way.

PENN: Back to Weber and Du Bois. Du Bois actually wrote an article in Weber's value-free journal and talked a great deal about racism, the plight of African Americans and what should be done about it. Do you have a quote that you want to read out aloud, Omar?

OMAR: Yeah, he says: “In the struggle for it is human rights”, meaning black people “In the struggle for human rights, the American Negro realize, above all, on the feeling of justice in the civilized world, we are no barbarians or demons, you're educated in our education, economic abilities have proven themselves. We too want to have our chance in life. Whoever wants to get acquainted with our living conditions, be welcome. We demand nothing other than one gets acquainted with us, honestly and face to face, and does not judge us according to hearsay or according to the verdict of our despisers.”

He was very clear in his message for black America but then also for the social understandings between white and black people, and black identity. One of his biggest argumentative points was that black institutions like the church and music were really important for protecting black people's identity and sense of self, and that the preacher in black communities at the time was a very very prominent figure for maintaining positive social order that there actually is something - which is such an insane thing to say - but there actually is like a quote unquote culture within black communities, we are not just this victim beaten down, you know, we need help from government or white people, the whole idea of the White Man's Burden. He fought tirelessly to upend those stereotypes.

PENN: I'd like to hear more about about Du Bois’s theories then.

ELLENA: This segues well into Du Bois’s theory of double consciousness. This is the one where if you take a Sociology theory course, odds are this is going to be one of the theories that you get taught. So double consciousness pops up in Du Bois’s writing “The Souls of Black Folk” which came out in 1903 and is a collection of essays on race, social progress, religion, music, motion, spirituality. It's a very broad ranging collection of essays.

In “The Souls of Black Folk”, he argues that despite the fact that first, black people embody the “pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence”- meaning freedom; second, that America was built on the backs of black slaves; third, that American music is based off of the “wild sweet melodies of slaves”; and forth, that American fairy tales tend to be based off of African and Indian folklore. Despite all of these things, black people are still not fully accepted by the racist American society. And this was a big problem. That was something that he wanted to overcome. What this leads to, is the idea of double consciousness.

Now double consciousness, Do Bois defines as the plight of being “both a negro and an American”, and describes it as “It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”.

Double consciousness, Du Bois thought leads to self-questioning, self-disparagement, contempt and hate towards oneself and thought of it almost as a veil, a veil that kind of covers and masks black people, black Americans, but he said that there was a possibility to remove that veil, and he had three different ways that he thought you could do that.

The first one was for black Americans to gain freedom from slavery, basically to emancipate themselves. The second was suffrage, so voting rights. And the third one was through education. And education, Du Bois believed was perhaps the most effective way to understand and resist the internalization of this kind of double consciousness identity, and all of the kind of awful things that go along with it, like self-hatred.

PENN: So this is because being a negro and an American, essentially, is kind of a contradiction. It's cognitive dissonance, what it sounds like to me, which is basically that the two identities don't mesh very well, that you can be a negro, but that you are not accepted in American society despite all the things American society owes to black folk.

And so you have to go through these things such as emancipation suffrage, education to kind of fix that dissonance to try and merge the two identities more.

OMAR: And then of course on an individual level, you know, living in a world where you'll learn very quickly that there is a difference between people who look like with dark skin get treated very differently than people with lighter skin, and then that moment when you're like, wait, what is going on, like how Aldon Morris has described in his book that he was out there working, sweating constantly, always white kids just sitting around chilling. This didn't make any sense to him.

And then of course as you get older, in every interaction that you might have, whether it be, you're going to talk to your neighbor for the first time, or you're going to talk to a teacher, well, I'm so and so, but are they going to view me as just this regular black person, and then having to constantly deal with both of those interpretations of yourself all the time.

ELLEN: In terms of Black Folk, he talks about the “Negro problem”, which is black Americans’ main problem. Just because he is black, he is forced in any and every interaction to be a representative of all black people to others. So despite the fact that, you know, Omar is Omar, because you are the color that you are, you are a representation of that color or just as Penn is Penn, Penn becomes a representation of all people who look like her.

It's one of those things where there are assumptions that are placed on you, and you have to deal with those assumptions and you also have to kind of mitigate those assumptions or try and turn it around, versus other races like if you're a white person, there are far less assumptions that you need to deal with or that you need to mitigate.

OMAR: That's tokenism. That's classic, like you're the the one and only person representing that “race”. I mean if you're in a predominantly black classroom and there's one white kid, and then a topic of KKK comes up, everyone is like woah, look at that white kid like woah. And the same thing happens if I'm in a classroom with a bunch of white people and slavery comes up and I want to raise my hand, make comment, there was a woah, what is he going to say.

So it's the same thing, I'm sure the same thing happens with women. Yeah, but I think this idea of double consciousness is important because if you are someone who is aware of those things and you are continually grappling with them, it is very stressful and psychologically taxing but to be honest you are going to be better off as long as you can continue to be aware of that but then work with it and move beyond it because if you feel uncomfortable by those types of external identities imposed on you, you should be because, as we talked about extensively, that those things are the social construct which makes that difficult as in how do you then go beyond that, especially if you've been socialized to be a woman or be black or be any of these things. How do you then go about your way of life differently because if by doing that you almost feel like you're getting rid of something, or losing something or denying something else that once was. But I don't think people should get upset with that kind of feeling like they're leaving something behind, rather than orient yourself towards the future and think were going to make something new, we're going to make something better and that new and that better is going to include more people in my life. I should be able to make way more connections with the poor white person in the middle of Kansas, than the black politician in Washington, because I'm way more like that poor white person than that rich black person in Beverly Hills, as far as the things that we need to get ahead in life, as far as the problems going on right now in America with growing economic inequality and things like that.

It would be great if I could identify with that black person who's a millionaire, but often what happens when people get more money, they move out of certain neighborhoods, not only do they not come back and give back to their communities, their whole habitus and their whole way of thinking totally just changes. Oh, I work hard enough to get out. You should have worked hard enough to get out. And now you have this division, meeting people and that's exactly what America will do to you. They want me to see myself in that black person. They don't want me to see myself in that other poor white person. They want us to see each other's as separate “races”. I think that's something that W.E.B Du Bois wants to not continue to perpetuate.

ELLEN: His big argument, when he talks about black identity in “The Souls of Black Folk” is that up until then, black identity was seen as completely separate from American identity. You could either be a black person, or you could be an American person, you know, theoretically. But W.E.B. Du Bois was the first to say, no, no, you can be black and American. And this is a new concept that you can have more than just one identity. And once you have more than one identity, then, like you said Omar, then you're able to identify with other people that aren't just your same skin color or aren't just your same social class or aren't just the same nationality as you. So it's a much more inclusive way of looking at identity because you're able to put yourself in so many other pots. You're not just stuck in this one silo of I am Asian, but I am an Asian American woman who likes biking and has a dog, and so I'm able to identify with all the other people that fit in those pots and you can connect more with other people.

OMAR: And you're not static.

ELLEN: Exactly, exactly, they're not static and you can transcend them which is a powerful idea that you can overcome something that you think is permanent. It's empowering.

OMAR: When I were in high school, I used to think to myself, you know, all the black people should just go back to Africa. We need to just start over and I would slap myself. Now, looking at myself then, I felt that so intensely then. But as he said, education is really a really big way to get out of those internalized identities through education. I see that that idea is so flawed and really not doing anything like going back to the “homeland”, as if all black people in Africa is going to pop in where chattel slavery definitely happened all over Africa and that was not white people oppressing black. If anyone thinks that slavery was because white people didn't want black people to have a, b and c, d, e, f, g, they are wrong. Slavery happened because it was profitable, and it works. White people came by and exploited it of course, but black people were definitely enslaved by people in Africa for very economic and capitalistic reasons, so it's not just this whole white-black thing.

PENN: Going back to Du Bois, can you guys share a little bit more about how did he shape modern Sociology?

OMAR: One thing that he did, that was really important for Sociology, and one of the core things, there's two things: One was his academic rigor and tediousness with empirical data. He gave surveys around and in Philly and really took the time to go into environments, do a lot of participant observation, live and be around those communities, instead of just theorizing for philosophy’s sake. He actually would have numbers to prove to people, and in his book “The Philadelphia Negro”, you will actually see because back then they didn't have computers, his hand-drawn census maps. He really was the only social scholar who was doing this at the time.

ELLEN: And these are techniques that he learned while he was studying in Germany with Max Weber. These were quantitative methodologies that were being taught in Germany. Du Bois went and brought them back to America where they were not being used and started using things like surveys, interviews, mapping, data collection for the first time. So this is where we see a term from theoretical philosophy type Sociology to actual, like Omar said, empirical evidence being collected to create theory.

OMAR: In addition to that, he was not doing this type of academic rigor or tediousness to be in opposition to theory. He was actually buttressing theory and improving on it by giving it the empirical weight to say, okay, we can say these things and then we're going to show the data to say that these theories or these stereotypes either exist or don't exist. Not only that, he also in “The Souls of Black Folk” I think every single chapter has a poetry or some type of musical introduction into the chapter.

ELLEN: There's a poem and then there's a notation to a negro spiritual song without the lyrics.

OMAR: He also was an author that tried to incorporate a lot of poetry narrative, social history, human history type writing into his work because he found a lot of the numbers stuff to just be kind of dry. And these are real people that he's studying. He was not an armchair theorists. He really wanted to also give voice and actual realness to the numbers and the data that he's giving

so he also wrote in a very poetic kind of James-Baldwin-asked way and that's also something that I don't think Sociology does enough. I think there's a very hard line between quantitative and qualitative research and then also the writing styles.

Quantitative research are a lot drier, boring, compared to the richness of qualitative data when in actuality, when you read a lot of Du Bois's work, he doesn't try to distinguish himself into, I am a quantitative researcher or no, no, I'm a qualitative researcher. He is a sociologist. Sociologists should be able to do both those things and do both those things effectively.

ELLEN: He has some amazing, amazing work that is very readable. So, for Du Bois, I would recommend reading “The Souls of Black Folk” first, just because they're short essays, so you can skip around and find one that you're interested in and read that.

OMAR: If you want a traditional sociological work with empirical data, I would read the Philadelphia Negro.

The only thing I would say about Du Bois, and this is partly because of the time, and probably partly because of the sexism in general, when you read his work, it's hard to read because of the language he uses, a lot of Negro this, black this and a lot of male-oriented language. He uses the words “he”, “man”, “his” a lot when he's talking about black people and it makes you think, what about the women? He himself would not deny women their rightful place. He also talks about them at great length, but his grammar doesn't necessarily show that. So it is hard to read a book in 2017, a book that was written in 1900s.

ELLEN: Even when I write myself and I try very hard not to do this but I do find myself saying, one that, you know, as an individual, he can do this, and I'm just like, no, I'm going to write she from now. That's been one of my resolutions for the new year that if I have a hypothetical individual I'm writing about, I'm going to make her a her.

PENN: I always pluralize it. And it is super ungrammatical.

ELLEN: People are nitpicky about that kind of gender language.

OMAR: Alrighty, that sounds a signal at the end of this week's show. Per usual, we're going to end with some quick breaks. These are random topics, possibly current and newsworthy. Our threat Penn and Ellen today, who then must break it down in five words or less. But instead of giving you both separate ones, I'm giving you both the same one. I will allow you to use more than the five words because I am also interested about your reaction to this, if anything.

Okay, so I was talking to one of my friends about a bet that he and his friends were having and I'm curious to know what do you think of this. Would you shave your dog completely, like to the skin, like no hair, for $1,000 bucks?

ELLEN: Yes.

PENN: No.

ELLEN: Yes.

PENN: No. Wait, which dog are you talking about, Ellen?

ELLEN: Any. A thousand smackeroons just to shave my dog? Yes please. I'll do it four time.

PENN: Oh my God, no! No, Smokey is beautiful. It would totally take away what made him him.

ELLEN: For $1,000? You won't do it?

PENN: He looks so pathetic to me. He already looks so pathetic half the time. He would just look like this mangy little nothing.

OMAR: All right, I got one more. I asked Ellen this not so long ago. I don't know if you have any cultural background with this particular act?

ELLEN: Everybody has a cultural background with the act though.

OMAR: Would you, now, you can tell him afterwards, but you and Ryan are sitting down, you have to spit in his face for $500 bucks? You can tell him afterwards, but you just straight up have to spit straight in his face.

PENN: I would do it, but I am not a very good spitter. It would just land on the table, just dribble down. And he'll be like, what is wrong with you.

OMAR: Ellen, I'm actually surprised that you wouldn't do it. I would do it.

PENN: But you can't explain to a dog why you took away the dog's beauty.

ELLEN: The dog does not care. This is the beauty of it, the dog is not conscious.

PENN: You can lose trust, that will break trust. But the spitting, you can explain and then you can laugh about it. And then you can use the 500 bucks to take them out for a meal.

ELLEN: Okay but flip side, if somebody spits on you, Penn, and actually achieved it, not just dribbled down their cheek and then he is like ha ha ha, that was for 500 bucks, how would you feel?

PENN: I'd be like, you have to give me the 500 bucks. That 500 is mine.

OMAR: Okay. What if you had to wait a day, if you couldn't tell Ryan for a whole point for hours.

PENN: If I couldn't tell Ryan for 24 hours.

OMAR: So when he goes, why did you do that, you go on. I didn't, I didn't agree with anything you just said.

PENN: That would be really bad. I could not do that. Yeah, I would have tell them right away.

ELLEN: Yeah, some weird ass priorities - you will not shave the dog who is not even aware of it for a $1,000, but you will spit on somebody that you love for $500.

PENN: I can apologize and say sorry.

OMAR: I will do it all. $1,500 bucks in my pocket. I'm just seeing all these memes like, would you punch this old woman for $20 million? F*** yeah, I would. F*** yes, I'm sorry, old women. The interesting thing about it like what's the minimum, that's what I want to know, I wonder the minimum of how much money you would do that for. That's where it gets interesting.

Thanks for listening to the Social Breakdown. We really appreciate it. If you're interested in topics regarding W.E.B. Du Bois, double consciousness, black identity and like to get some more information on those works we cited today, you can check out our website thesocialbreakdown.com

We list all the articles, scholars and books discussed in today's episode, as well as provide links to other relevant materials. Find us on Facebook, Twitter, send in your questions and emails at @socbreakdown and socbreakdown@gmail.com

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ELLEN: Stay social.

PENN: Think social.

OMAR: And go read a book. Yes “Scholar Denied”, read that book.