

Professor John Solomos



John Solomos is Professor of Sociology and Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick. His most recent book (with Alice Bloch and Sarah Neal) is *Race, Multiculture and Social Policy* (2013). He is co-editor of the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

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Your first book is *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* by W. E. B. Du Bois – why did you choose that?

This is a book I have read a number of times and it still enriches me and feeds my curiosity each time. I read it initially when I became interested in the history of debates about slavery and its aftermath in the United States of America. I did not know that much about Du Bois and his work at the time but I still remember the impact it had on me when I read it. Although it is very much a book of its time I still find its core narrative fresh and interesting.

Du Bois' role as a figure in the sociological canon has been a topic of discussion over the past few decades, but it is perhaps more important to frame his contribution from a wider perspective. To my mind this book, and his other key contributions, can be read as a call for a fundamental rethinking of the role of race in shaping modernity and its aftermath. It is this facet of his work that strikes me every time I teach about or read this book.

Your second choice is *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt – what made you select this?

Arendt's work has been a constant point of reference for me since I was a student at Sussex and came across *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. I will remember discovering the treasure trove of books and journals at Sussex on my second day on campus.

After that I spent lots of wonderful days and evenings for about six years exploring a whole range of authors that I knew little about. In those days Sussex had few lectures and lots of seminars, so reading and being able to speak in class were essential skills. What struck me most about Arendt's book at the time, and every time I look at it again, was the breadth of her interests and the ways in which she sought to shed light on a phenomenon like totalitarianism.

In developing this theme it is interesting to note that from the perspective of today

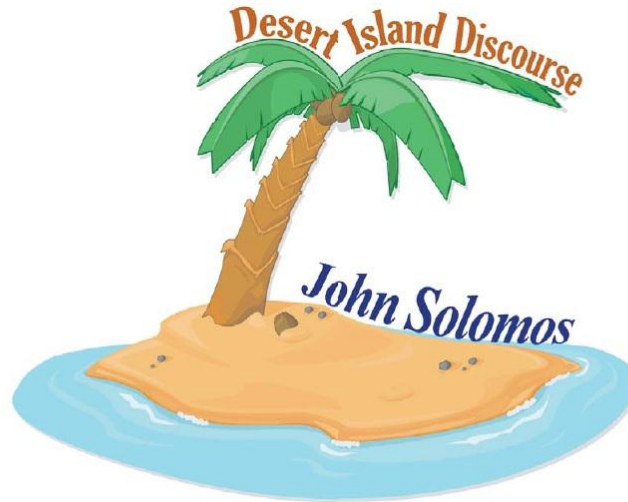
her work has become a fundamental point of reference for all those working on issues such as human rights, political power and anti-Semitism.

Your next choice is *The Hidden Injuries of Class* by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb – what made you choose that?

Sennett may have become a celebrity in the period since this classic book was published, but to my mind this remains his most innovative contribution.

Sennett and Cobb provide a subtle and nuanced account of the everyday meanings attached to class. By drawing on detailed life histories of a group of working class men it provides an account of how class is both a social relation and a lived experience at the same time. Framing the book around the notion of the 'hidden injuries' of class, they explore with some feeling and insight the ways in which blue-collar workers saw their lives and their everyday sense of self.

Written at a time when much discussion of class remained either constrained by abstracted theory or by a search for quantitative measurement, Sennett and Cobb's classic study brought home to me the idea that class identities evolve and change in a social and cultural environment.



Why did you choose for your fourth book *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* by Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts?

Policing the Crisis is a book that can be read from a number of angles. It is an account of the moral panic about street muggings by African Caribbean young men that became a focus of media and policy debates in the 1970s. It can also be seen as an account of the changing politics of race and everyday multiculturalism in cities such as Birmingham.

Its influence on my own thinking about the politics of race and racism was, and remains, important as evidenced in my contributions to *The Empire Strikes Back* (1982) and in my study *Black Youth, Racism and the State* (1988). It remains a point of reference in a whole range of scholarly fields, including sociology, race and ethnic studies, cultural studies, media studies and criminology. The power of its analysis can be seen through the ways in which it remains a point of reference in contemporary discussions of racialised forms of policing in our cities and towns.

Your last choice is *George L. Mosse's Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* – what led you to this?

This is masterful overview of the origins and development of European racism from the period of the Enlightenment to the present day. When I first read it what struck me most about Mosse's style was the way in which he managed to capture complex historical processes by highlighting specific examples to illustrate broader historical

processes. His wider work focused on a range of themes such as Nazi culture, sexuality and nationalism, masculinity and mass movements, and political symbolism.

Given the massive growth in scholarship and research on race and racism in recent years, one may expect *Toward the Final Solution* to feel dated from the perspective of today. Yet every time I look at it I must say I still find something of interest in it, something to explore further, something to think about.

What would you take as your luxury?

I would like two luxuries to take with me. An electronic book-reader with a good collection of novels, poetry, and football books (particularly about West Bromwich Albion). I love to read all the time and the isolation of a desert island will at last give me the chance to devour the books I have always wanted to read but have not quite had the time. It will also allow me to indulge my passion for poetry, from Rumi to Cavafy.

It will also be good to have a device to allow me to play all the music I love and that has been part of my working space throughout my academic career. I often like to work to the sound of reggae, rembetika, fado, Fairuz, Souad Massi and many others. Growing up in south London, I learned a lot about ska and reggae, and I would like a good selection from Studio One onwards. More recently I have discovered the work of rembetika singers from the 1920s onwards and love to listen to them as I work. I guess on a desert island I may at last get the chance to forget about making too much noise and annoying my neighbours!

Professor Solomos' choices:

1. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, by W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) A. C. McClure & Co
2. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, by Hannah Arendt (1951) Schocken Books
3. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb (1972) Alfred A. Knopf
4. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* by Stuart Hall et al (1978) Palgrave Macmillan
5. *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, by George L. Mosse (1978) Howard Fertig

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