

AFRICA IN DU BOIS'S PHILOSOPHY OF RACE

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RESUME: La philosophie systématique du racisme est un concept sous-développé dans la philosophie moderne. Dans cet article je présente une articulation rigoureuse et soutenue d'une philosophie du racisme dans les travaux de Du Bois. En présentant un architectonic du concept racial, comme l'a décrit Du Bois, les travaux de certains lecteurs de Du Bois d'aujourd'hui sont incorporés dans ce text comme Anthony Appiah et Cornel West. Cet article tente de présenter une philosophie du racisme Du Boisienne pour la première fois.

MOTS CLE: Appiah (Anthony), le concept racial, West (Cornel), Du Bois (W.E.B.), philosophie systématique du race

ABSTRACT: A systematic philosophy of race is an undertheorized concept in modern philosophy. In this paper I attempt to present a rigorous and sustained articulation of a philosophy of race in the works of Du Bois. In the process of presenting an architectonic of the race concept, as Du Bois called it, I engage the works of some contemporary readers of Du Bois, such as Anthony Appiah and Cornel West. This paper seeks to present Du Boisian philosophy of Race for the first time.

KEY WORDS: Appiah (Anthony), Du Bois (W.E.B.), race concept, systematic philosophy of race, West (Cornel)

Introduction

Variously described as the greatest African-American thinker of the twentieth century, Du Bois has recently commanded the attention of high profile modern thinkers. Ever since the arrival of Africana philosophy on the philosophical landscape, new readings of Du Bois' vast work are fast appearing. A very recent striking example is that *Philosophia Africana* devoted its fascinating August 2004 issue to Du Bois, with some remarkable new readings – with Edward J. Blum reinterpreting the role of religion as the power which existentially enabled slaves and others to sustain the savagery of racism in America, as forcefully present in *The Souls of Black Folk*; Babacar

M'Baye resituating Africa as backwards and in need of enlightenment in the narratives of W.E. Du Bois; Jonathon S. Kahn giving an inventive interpretation of “a new religious ideal” in *The Souls of Black Folk*; Jason Young arguing that Du Bois’s dream was the cultivation of a new modern man cleansed of the legacies of the past, and finally, Sandra I. Staton –Taiwo examining the effects of Cooper on *The Souls of Black Folk*. Indeed, Du Bois scholarship is rising to new heights again.

Among the luminaries is Lewis Gordon, a leading Du Bois scholar, and the first who excavated an existentialist foregrounding to Du Bois complicated race concept, by arguing that:

“Du Bois did not write about *being* Black but about its *meaning*. He announced a hermeneutical turn that would delight even his most zealous philosophical successors... The black, subject to interpretation, becomes a designation that could be held by different groups at different times and as such is both concrete and metaphorical” (*Existentialia Africana*, New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 63).

Anthony Bogues, a leading Africana Political theorist, sees an originary heretic in Du Bois, who along with C.L.R. James were masters of the Western canon but also saw its radical limitations. As Bogues put it:

“If many radical critiques of modernity focused on questions of exploitation, human alienation, and politics as involving issues of political obligation, sovereign self, and citizenship, the works of black radical theorists like James and Du Bois shift our gaze to questions of domination, oppression, and politics as a practice of freedom. They offer a different optic on the possibilities of human emancipation” (*Black Heretics Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals*, Routledge, 2003).

Similarly, Robert Gooding-Williams, as an admirer of Du Bois has eloquently argued that Du Bois was a critical analyst of Crummell and the latter’s view of the race concept, and that Du Bois had a counter-sublime to that of Crummell. *The Souls of Black Folk* (Ed, Henry Louis Gates, New York: A Norton Critical Edition, 1999, pp. 245-263).

This paper focuses on the idea of Africa in Du Bois’s work, how this idea enabled Du Bois to develop a unique philosophy of Race.

The place of Africa in Du Bois’s philosophy of race has yet to be written, and it is precisely that project that I would like to engage in this article. What I wish to correct is the view that Du Bois is an essentialist, as Appiah in particular has contended. For me Du Bois provided a complicated race

concept ground on the idea that it is the material conditions of blacks and the identity confusions that poverty produces that forces him to look at Africanity as an empowering idea of blackness, and hence black humanity.

Part I: Du Bois on race and the Talented Tenth

Africana philosophers have compellingly introduced new readings of Du Bois's works. Lewis Gordon has provided a highly original phenomenological portrait of Du Bois as an existential thinker of high standing, who engaged the concerns of black people as "a problem people" and provided eloquent social cultural diagnoses of their problems.

The concept of race had been of an endearing to both, both existentially and politically. Existentially because he himself was of a mixed race and politically because he suffered in the hands of White supremacists, and was destined to fight back, to cement a place for himself under the sun. From early on, Du Bois knew that race was a problematical term. In the *Conservation of Races*, he tells us,

"When we thus come to inquire into the essential difference of races we find it hard to come at once to any definite conclusion. Many criteria of race differences have in the past been proposed, as color, hair, cranial measurements and language. And manifestly, in each of these respects, human beings differ widely...The final word of Science, so far, is that we have at least two, perhaps three, great families of human beings --- the whites and Negroes, possibly the yellow race...We find upon the world's stage today eight distinctly differentiated races...the Slavs of Eastern Europe, the Teutons of middle Europe, the English of Great Britain and America, the Romance nations of Southern and Western Europe, the Negroes of Africa and America, the Semitic people of Western Asia and Northern Africa, the Hindoos of Central Asia and the Mongolians of Eastern Asia" (*The Oxford W.E.B Du Bois Reader*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 39-40).

What we sense here is not a definitive commitment to the concept of race, but a judicious way of problematizing the idea of race as well as alerting the reader that we have here is a dangerously ambiguous idea that Science itself has not resolved. The concept of race retains its ambiguity and controversiality. Du Bois himself struggles with the race concept and is certainly not

taken in by a single definition. In a single essay we are told once that there are perhaps three races and in another moment perhaps eight, and may be more. The vacillation itself inconvertibly attests to the shifting nature of race, and its ever-changing configuration.

One thing is certain for Du Bois. Whatever race might mean, the so-called races have definite contributions to make to that amorphous vessel of the race concept. Whereas history had facilitated almost all the seven races to contribute to the global construction of the race idea, blacks had been systematically denied the right to register their contribution through their cultural and existential agency. That awareness leads Du Bois to treat blacks as definitive members of a race --- given the ambiguous nature of the race idea. Yet Du Bois is so eager to let the world know that the members of the black race too are historical people, who among other things gave the American continent their culturally rooted music and deep religious sense. In addition, the so-called laziness and immorality of the blacks deeply sedimented in slavery must be openly acknowledged and corrected by responsible education. These vices are not rooted in biology, but in culture. And they can be corrected by one of the most effective tools of culture, education towards autonomy and responsibility. Central to that mission is the cultivation of a functional and useful group of educated African-Americans to pave the way for the black masses mired in poverty, ignorance, crimes and alienation in alarming numbers. For him what is at issue is the lived fact that he was treated so differently, as if he did not belong to the same human species, that he had to create an autonomous sight of existence where he could be what he naturally is, black and different. It is this imposed sense of difference that led him to think that the difference needs grounding in his blackness, and this blackness in turn needs a further grounding in the idea of race.

Stressing his keen awareness that race is not a lucid concept, he notes, in a passage that would later remind us of Appiah's dismissal of the race concept,

“As to race mixture all the anthropologists said that there were no “pure” races and that modern peoples were all more or less mix” (*The Oxford Reader*, p. 58).

Why then did Du Bois emphasize the value of blackness so much? Here is a remarkable passage that gives us a subtle hint:

“It was in Chicago. John Haynes was talking. He said: I met two children - one as fair as dawn - the other as beautiful as the night. Then he pauses. He had to pause for the audience guffawed in wild merriment. Why? It was a colored audience. Many of them were black. Some black faces were as beautiful as the night. Why did they laugh? Because the world had taught them to be ashamed of their color. Because for 500 years men had hated and despised and abused black folk” (p. 59).

It is such existential situations which imposed the race concept on Du Bois. For he knew what he must do to empower the condemned. He must not only tell them that they exist, but exist as beautifully black, as beautiful as the dark of the night. This is how the sociologist intervenes as the necessary therapist, revitalizing the wings to an abused people by giving them a racial identity, a historical presence, a voice, an agency and an aesthetic all at once by reworking the meaning of blackness, and making it a metaphor of beauty, resilience, historicity and compassion. He reconfigures the seemingly racialized attributes by making them attributes of culturally shattered people - attributes of power, confidence, self-esteem and cultural pride. In this way he makes blackness a beautiful presence, and not a problematical absence. Orchestrated blackness gives way to humbled blackness. Black presence replaces black absence. Visibility in the rainbow of colors becomes a way of being in the world. Being black becomes another way of being human. His philosophy of race is a contour of these folds of humanity.

The race concept is also revisited in the renowned work of 1903, *The Souls of Black Folk*. There the arguments are much different than in the “Conservation of the Race.” The arguments for the race concept are drawn from black everyday life. Data is drawn from the world of the damned blacks. Their churches, homes, work places, and the streets of Harlem and Philadelphia are the sources from which Du Bois draws the facts of black life. Their blackness confines their activities, defines the spaces in which they can move, locates them in neighborhoods where they fester like swarms, to live and die there, without the world ever knowing when and how. Du Bois goes to these places, walks and works there and documents black life both as a participant and a detached observer, the first sociologist who combined the methods of the personal interview and statistical analysis as Paget Henry has observed in a forthcoming article. The race idea is treated with remarkable ease in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois the genealogist does not simply rest with a description of the problematical nature of

black everyday life, but rather goes behind the curtains of the present and the way that the black self is being problematized, and analyzes the root causes of the problem. His meditation on race begins with his own existential situation, the way that the white person would look at him and then either look away or look in intrusively. The black self, argues Du Bois, is not seen directly. It is either not seen at all, or seen too much. The black person is either abstracted or simply generalized as black, but not as this particular black person, but simply as this black like any other black. He is de-individualized. His concreteness disappears in generalities. He is recognized when he does not want to, or not recognized when he ought to.

In either case what does it mean to be a problem?

Du Bois answers,

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (*The Reader*, p. 102).

This striving is propelled by the race concept. Race cannot be erased, nor has it been concretely defined as he argued earlier. But the striving to overcome this two-ness, this fragmentation and alienation is the challenge that is put on the African-American in the American soil, where he is neither African nor American, usually both, and sometimes neither. The striving is a yearning for wholeness, for self-hood, for completion. With an innate musicality and spiritual comportment the black self strives, longs for wholeness, in a racist world that denies it self-hood, manhood and womanhood. This relentless and patient striving, however, swallows the bitter pill of disappointment, of sorrow, of anguish and self-doubt. The racist nation has yet to acknowledge its mistreatment of black bodies and souls since the days of slavery.

The struggle goes on, the striving black marches in slow speed towards the mountain top, propelled by prophecy, comforted by hope, and strengthened by faith, and always sedimented in love. As Du Bois put it,

“In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself, darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself, darkly as through a veil” (*The Reader*, p. 102).

The striving Negro had a deep understanding of the nature of his problem.

His poverty and his ignorance had shackled him to the past, from which he could not extricate himself. He knows too painfully that he had been kept ignorant, bitten and starved to silence, and that he must fight for his freedom, exactly as Frederick Douglas did in his classic fight with Covey, a fight that gave him his manhood, through his own revolutionary agency, as Lewis Gordon eloquently pointed out in *Existential Africana*.

The effect of this ignorance and its indelible race marking had its traces everywhere, as Du Bois painfully learned while he was a schoolteacher in Tennessee. He made it his duty to know the inner lives of his black students by visiting their homes and knowing first hand their everyday lives. That is when he discovered the abject poverty under which some of his students lived. That is when Du Bois discovered the absurdity of black life, the disappointments and deferred dreams. Their absences had painful reasons behind them. Some could not come to school because "Crops" needed them; others had to baby-sit. This was the summer world for Du Bois the teacher. He remembers these days with great fondness in *The Souls of Black Folk*. It is at these self-chosen sights – and this against West – that Du Bois immersed himself in the Black World, not as a hyperactive public intellectual but as a consummate writer, teacher and the sociologist of Harlem, strolling on its streets on a cane, and observing and living black life, and documenting that life in the lyrical passages of *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois lived sociology and did not merely write it, by adding soul and music to its musings.

His life-long dream was to bring Tolstoy and Balzac, Aurelius and Aristotle, Shakespeare and Dumas to the children of slaves, so that they too could swim in the waters of that which humanizes us all - literature and the interior lives of other human beings. The life that this literature promises had grudged the children of Africa. Du Bois strove to make it available, so that without wincing the black masses could also move arm to arm with these great writers of humanity. This is not merely Enlightenment and Victorianism combined. Much more than that. This is the sovereignty of the imagination, to which blacks must have a right to enter, should they want to.

African-Americans had much to give to the world as members of the black race. Du Bois writes,

“The music of Negro religion is that plaintive rhythmic melody, with its touching mi-

nor cadences, which, despite caricature and defilement, still remains the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil. Sprung from the African forests, where its counterpart can still be heard, it was adopted, changed, and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip, it became the one true expression of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope" (p. 199).

This is the contribution of those who have been scarred by the race concept, and whose skin color had been used against them. They can survive only if they say they are black, beautifully black, they need not add, beautifully black but superior to whites. That kind of racism is unnecessary. The duty of blacks is to love their blackness, the foundation of their humanity. It is this foundation that Du Bois' race concept provides.

He writes as well about all those born to greatness, but their dreams left unheeded in the hands of white supremacists. Alexander Crummel was such a man. A portrait of him is one of the best passages in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Consider these lines,

"This is the history of the human heart, the tale of a black boy who many long years ago began to struggle with life that he might know the world and know himself. Three temptations he met on those dark dunes that lay gray and dismal before the wonder-eyes of the child: the temptation of Hate that stood out against the red dawn; the temptation of Despair, that darkened noonday; and the temptation of Doubt, that ever steals along with the twilight. Above all, you must hear of the vales he crossed, the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death" (p. 212).

This then is the material out of which Du Boisian race matters are born. The facts are situational, existential, lived, dreamt, some unrealized, others utopian, but each of them marked by race. To Du Bois, race was a face, a fact, an experience, a situation, a context, an interaction, and sometimes all at once, but always concrete, out there, ready to be faced, to be dealt with for Du Bois. He neither willed it nor theorized it. He lived it concretely. As he told us, the race concept was autobiographical, and not a theoretical construct, like an Aristotelian category, or a Hegelian idea. Du Bois lived its effects, and he willingly becomes its brilliant genealogist. He was you might say the first African-American genealogist who sought to understand the presentness of the race concept, by studying its effects in the lives of the blacks who were lynched, burned, starved, imprisoned, impoverished, and permanently scarred. One of the lingering effects was the problematizing of

blackness, and Du Bois, I will argue in my concluding remarks not only asked the question, "What does it mean to be a problem?," but actually originated a method of solving the question. He gave sociology a method of studying the black question.

He revisited this question in *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, although a deeper and exhaustive treatment of it was given in *The Philadelphia Negro* of 1899. I return to that work now.

Du Bois points out that this question has sparked varied responses. At least two responses come to mind, and both by themselves are inadequate, whereas a blend of both might give us a complex answer, to a complicated question. The first answer is a simple this or that. The second is a hopeless disavowal of an answer. Du Bois' response is that this problem can be solved only by civilization and humanity, and also the participation of both blacks themselves and the whites who enslaved them. It is the duty of both races to solve this crisis of humanity masquerading as the black problem. There are no problem people but there are problems, which complicate any people's lives, blacks notably included, with good reason, because they were enslaved against their wills. Du Bois contends that:

- Blacks are here to stay;
- It is to the advantage of both blacks and whites to solve the problem;
- The Negro in particular must be responsible to address his plight;
- Whites in particular ought to guard their civilization by solving the problems of the blacks that they have created.

The *Philadelphia Negro* is one long sociological meditation that successfully originated a method of studying and proposing solutions to the black problem. He develops detailed responses to the four questions above in this landmark study. Du Bois argues, given what slavery had done to Blacks, they themselves are the first who need to nurse and heal their wounds, by first acknowledging that they have deep problems in their hands, which require their earnest attention. Blacks themselves must remove the increasing crimes in their cities, the debilitating poverty, the mental suffering, the laziness and hopelessness. These structural problems require structural analysis and race sensitive responses by blacks and whites. Blacks in particular need to develop a new work ethic to earn their living by any means

necessary and extricate themselves from the legacies of slavery, and the dependency complex that slavery has sedimented in black lives. Change begins with the proper diagnoses of the problem. It is the duty of blacks to dispassionately diagnose their condition so that they can determine the proper way of articulating their life chances. Denying problems when they glaringly stare at you is worsening your life chances and not improving on them. He proposes that the virtues of honesty, truth and chastity must be the new frames that contain revolutionary black life. These virtues must be included in the cradle, however hard it may be, to propose these virtues to these abused victims of slavery. Furthermore, blacks should see to it that they develop networks of collective self-help and develop industries and other work sites for their sons and daughters. As he put it,

“Proper cooperation among forty or fifty thousand colored people ought to open many chances of employment for their sons and daughters in trades, stores and shops, associations and industrial enterprises” (The *Oxford W.E.B Reader*, p. 350).

Furthermore, he proposes that the institutions of civil society, particularly the churches, should play a pivotal role in the redemption of black bodies and souls. Prayer meetings and amusing centers should be smartly used to help blacks to help themselves. Little girls and boys must be kept out of the dangerous streets during unsafe hours. Residents should be encouraged to buy their own homes and most importantly taught the virtues of savings by controlling their shopping habits. Day-nurseries and sewing schools, mothers’ meetings must be appreciated and developed into new socializing sites of civil society. Moreover,

“The spending of money is a matter to which Negroes need to give special attention. Money is wasted to-day in dress, furniture, elaborate entertainments, costly church edifices, and “insurance” schemes, which ought to go toward buying homes, educating children, giving simple healthful amusement to the young, and accumulating something in the savings bank as against the “insurance” society ought to be started in the Seventh Ward without delay” (p. 351).

The better-situated blacks should look after the negatively circumstanced blacks, since it is they who are at a loss, who have not mastered techniques of survival, tools of existence. Affected blacks must learn ways of survival. Those who know must show those who do not know. The destinies of the

better off blacks are intertwined with the destinies of the worst off. Du Bois forwards this shrewd suggestion in the sparkling pages of *The Philadelphia Negro of 1899*. He advises blacks to be patient with the better of the whites, and enlist them as their allies. As he put it,

“A man may be wrong, and know that he is wrong, and yet some finesse must be used in telling him of it. The white people in Philadelphia are perfectly conscious that their Negro citizens are not used fairly in all respects, but it will not improve matters to call names or impute unworthy motives to all men. Social reforms move slowly and yet when right is reinforced by calm but persistent progress we somehow all feel that in the end it must triumph” (p. 352).

Whites have duties also. They must engage their moral sympathy towards blacks who continue to struggle against prejudice with remarkable tenacity. The whites who know this must fight side by side with the blacks who do so. Such sympathy must be expressed through polished conduct and style of support and cooperation. The best of the blacks do not need pity, but understanding, not handouts, but solidarity, not empty words, but effective public policy. Change can be exacted only by public policy, not half conscious action, but the removal of prejudice and discrimination, not the promises of opportunities but their genuine availability.

It is at this point that Du Bois brings in the role of educated blacks in the form of the Talented Tenth (although he does not call them that), instead he speaks of the need of the best of the blacks to rescue those who are left behind. This imperative is a matter of historical necessity, and not an exacting requirement of the race concept. History and the legacy of slavery have imposed this moral duty on the best of the black race. At the crucial site where policy meets vision, he points out the importance of educating Negroes for social power. He notices that Blacks should internalize responsibility. That is the first step. But responsibility without power is empty, just like policy without vision is blind and deaf. Blacks should make themselves powerful also. It is blacks themselves who should lessen the intensity of poverty. Whites can sympathize with them but cannot and should not be so empowered to lessen black poverty. That is the duty of blacks. Poverty can be lessened only hard work. And work is a skill that can be learned only through training - in the form of a work culture, a work ethic. Economic emancipation requires a work ethic, through training in elementary schools,

through high school and college. The first two should be available to all, the last to the exceptional few. He writes,

“But intelligence and skill alone will not solve the Southern problem of poverty. With these two must go that combination of homely habits and virtues which we may loosely call thrift...more must be taught at home...” (p. 358).

Du Bois writes,

“The Negro Race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from contamination and death of the worst, in their own and other races... If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men. Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools-intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it-this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underline true life. On this foundation we may build bread winning, skill of hand and quickness of brain” (“The Talented Tenth” in *The Future of The Race*, edited by Henry Louis Gates and Cornel West, Alfred A. Knopf New York 1996, p. 133).

He adds that this is no easy task, since it requires some essentially necessary and sufficient conditions for the realization of the ideal. Very much like Plato’s Philosopher-King in *The Republic*, the Talented Tenth are also Philosopher-Kings and Queens in their own right, and that realizing this ideal requires no less a proof than the fact that

- their worthiness of leadership must be demonstrated, that
- the method of educating them must be elaborated and
- that their link to the Black community must be persuasively established.

This masterful essay elaborates on the three conditions.

According to Du Bois, a judicious reading of the past reveals that African Americans had always been great leaders, notwithstanding their invisibility through the racist gaze in America. For Du Bois, a long list of African-Americans had amply demonstrated leadership abilities. In colonial days there was Phyllis Wheatley and Paul Cuffe, who fought the iron bars of

prejudice with unparalleled valor, not to forget great names such as Dr. James Derham, Lemuel Heynes, or the revolutionary leadership of Frederick Douglas, Alexander Crummel, and McCune Smith. These and many able leaders were the exceptional constellation who fought for the future of the race. It is they who faced on the so-called Black problem and strove to provide a lasting solution, argued Du Bois. These leaders writes, Du Bois

“Are they useful men helping to civilize and elevate their less fortunate fellows?”
(*The Future of the race*, p. 141).

The answer is a loud yes. Yes, they were undoubtedly useful then and were destined to serve their race, as part of the exceptional talented tenth. This a destiny imposed on them by the plight of their fellow brothers and sisters. They respond to that socioculturally motivated calling with the willingness to serve and lead. This is the most idealized version of the argument as Du Bois envisioned it in the first version of the masterful essay. He revises the optimism later. In the first unadulterated form that was the vision.

(2) Now that Du Bois has eloquently demonstrated their historical presence, he proceeds to theorize their systematic educability. He chooses the modern university as the indispensable cite of their education. The best and able ones must be sent taught at schools and universities argues Du Bois. There they should acquire the necessary knowledge and be able and willing to transmit it to the future generation on the behalf of the race. Once they are schooled at these places then they must pledge to return to the black masses to in turn educate them as their teachers. They must be taught to teach. They must be schooled to serve. They must sacrifice their individual aspirations for the sake of the race. They must be trained not merely to be technicians but actual men of character who ably and willingly carry the destiny of the race on their burdened shoulders. As he put it,

“It is the trained, living human soul, cultivated and strengthened by long study and thought, that breathes the real breath of life into boys and girls and makes them human, whether they be black or white, Greek, Russian or American” (p. 148).

Once so educated (3) their organic link to the Black community, from which they were extracted must be fostered and maintained. The future of the black community depends on this organic link. This necessary link must be taught at the family, the neighborhood and schools and universities.

There, the notions of commitment, mission and vision must be emphasized as the venues through which the Talented Tenth must travel so as to realize their destiny, which is the leadership of the black community. Du Bois concludes this masterful essay with the revolutionary cry that

“Education and work are the levers to uplift people. Work will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work-it must teach life. The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. No others can do this work and the Negro colleges must train men for it. The Negro race, like all other races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men” (p. 157).

His vision does not end there; he revisits the essay in his memorial address, delivered the Nineteenth Grand Boule Conclave, Sigma Pi Phi, in 1948.

In this address, Du Bois is shocked by the careerist turn that the Talented Tenth has taken. The notion of sacrifice and commitment to the black cause, which he hoped to nurture had vanished, and this distressed Du Bois, who wrote,

“When I came out of college into the world of work, I realized that it was quite possible that my plan of training a talented tenth might put in control and power, a group of selfish, self-indulgent, well-to-do men, whose basic interest in solving the Negro problem was personal; personal freedom and unhampered enjoyment and use to the world, without any real care, or certainly no arousing care, as to what became of the mass of American Negroes, or of the mass of any people. My talented Tenth, I could see, might result in a sort of interracial free-for-all, with the devil taking the hindmost and the foremost taking anything they could lay hands on” (p. 162).

He was even more disappointed when the Talented Tenth begun to shy away from taking on the perennial problems of the race as an agenda, a cause to fight for, once they jumped on the bandwagon of capital and its alluring commodities and comforts. The future of the race is displaced by the future of the Talented Tenth, their personal ambitions displace the needs of the race, and their wealth and power displaces the squalor and desperation of the black masses. Moral responsibility and loyalty to the race is replaced by the particularity and individuality of the ever-changing desires of the Talented Tenth.

What is even more the Talented Tenth begins to deny that there is a Ne-

gro Culture expressed in the Negro Race. Du Bois calls for a new Talented Tenth, with character, uprightness and a clear vision of the race, with a deep understanding of economics, non-capitalist economics capable of framing a new agenda for the black masses, whose plight is increasingly worsening.

Africa in Du Bois' philosophy of Race

The idea of race had haunted Du Bois for years. It is one of the cardinal themes of Du Bois' sociology. He confronts it in all his works. *The Souls of the Black Folk* is one of its central homes. But he also articulates one of the most powerful understandings of race in the revised version of the "*Talented-Tenth*", in which he writes,

"Moreover, biology and sociology were reconstructing my idea of race. This group was not simply a physical entity: a black people or a people descended from black folk. It was, what all races really are, a cultural group. It is too bad that we have to use the word "cultural" for so many meanings. But what it means in modern scientific thought is that 15,000,000 men and women who for three centuries have shared common experiences and common suffering, and have worked all those days and nights together for their own survival and progress; that this complex of habits and manners could not and must not be lost. That this race must be conserved for the benefit of the Negro people themselves and for mankind. I came then to advocate, not pride of biological race, but pride in a cultural group, integrated and expanded by developed ideals, so as to form a method of progress" (*The Future of the Race*, p. 164).

I will argue later that Appiah, one of the most ardent critics of Du Bois, had clearly overlooked the importance of this passage, in which Du Bois has developed a highly original understanding of race, decoupled from any tinge of racism. Race in this passage stands for a habit that grows out of suffering and anguish in the hands of power holders in "bad faith" to borrow a potent concept from Lewis Gordon. In the passage, we sense Du Bois struggling to separate racial essence from culture, contingent practices from static biological essences, behavior from culture. The passage is simply speaking fluid, careful and original. I will return to this crucial passage when I examine Appiah's interpretation of race in Du Bois.

Discussion

Appiah's critique of Du Bois' race concept is based on a misunderstanding. Whereas Appiah argues that the race concept is an inheritance from the 19th century race theories that Du Bois inherited from his Western education, there is no textual base for this view, since Du Bois himself does not directly inform us what he thinks race really is. Infact, Du Bois is at pains, as I have indicated above to share with us his agonies and frustrations with the race concept. He himself does not really know what the concept means, what he knows for sure is that he suffered in the hands of those self-acknowledged experts of the race idea and the ignorant masses of people who think they know what it is, and who discriminated his ancestors, their ancestors, and finally his very self, inspite of his mixed ancestry. What is at issue then whether or not Du Bois himself is a racist, but rather his existential situation, his and his children's life in America where he grew up and lived most of his life.

It is in the USA that he was reminded everyday that he is black, condemned, wretched, inferior and born to suffer. It is that everyday existence that determined what he thought of the race concept. He was told everyday that he did not belong. So in one poignant moment, he tells us,

“In a wee wooden school house, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting cards - ten cents a package - and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card, -refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil” (The *W.E.B Du Bois Reader*, p. 102).

A close reading of this revealing passage is that it is not Du Bois who is choosing race consciousness. It is the racist world that environed his everyday existence that is imposing its brutal force on the young man, and he responds by fending himself against it proudly and heroically. He does not beg to be accepted. Instead, he gets even, by seeing to it that,

“That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot race, or even their stingy heads. Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade; for the worlds I longed for, and for all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine” (Ibid. p. 102).

Again note the careful wording. There is no counter racism here, because he does know the epistemic status of the race concept. That arrogance he leaves to the racists, who portend to know what racism is. His task is not to counter racism with racism. No. He holds his ground by refusing to be defined by the racist as this inferior nigger. He fights the niggerization by beating the racists in their game. He is excellent at everything he does; he fights them leg and leg, task to task, and talent to talent. He is not defensive either. He neither begs nor concedes to otherization. He puts himself on the same par on the human platform of talents, challenges and opportunities. He is super at tasks given him, with self-imposed standards of excellence, an excellence that he demanded of his black brothers and sisters everywhere.

Souls of The Black Folk is filled with this sense of the black self in a racist world. Its pages sparkle with black self-confidence, resonating with the poetic sense that humans in the African world have something special to give to the world. Music, compassion born out of suffering in the cruel hands of time, time as suffering, literature and art, are some of these contributions to a reluctant racist world. Du Bois celebrated these historical contributions coming out of the wings of Africa, and always intended for the humanization of a self-coarsening world contaminated by the negative moments of the race idea. No bitterness or anger accompanies this powerful passage of joy embodied in the human body and soul. Rather, the sociologist illuminates the dark moments of humanity with the potential of the human self to withstand suffering and agony, and maintain an arresting sense of hope, redemption, transformation and illumination of the human spirit.

The poet sings,

“Shout, O’children!
Shout, you are free!
For God has brought you Liberty!

The genealogist of the black experience is not naïve or foolishly optimistic, as West thinks. No. Du Bois is a mature student of time, a theorist of redemption, and a steady harbinger of change. In his hands, time and maturity, ignorance and knowledge, racism and transformation move together, however uneasily. He too moves with these paradoxes of life, the stones of history, and the enemies of human possibilities. He does not despair, nor

does he think that the human dramas can easily be solved by heavy dosages of critical theory. Critical theory is a product of human thought and not a word of God as some of its advocates think.

Where is the grounding then for Appiah's contention that Du Bois, himself is a racist? Where does he say he knows categorically what the race concept is, as precisely as one and one are two, and that he knows too what Blackness, Whiteness, Brownness and Yellowness are in the same way that the does mathematical knowledge.

All that he tells us in a rightly famous passage is that:

“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” (Ibid, p. 107).

That is not a problem that he created. That is a problem that the racist world has created and what all of us will have to deal with, as some of us, the darker types in particular, will have to suffer, and develop strategies of dealing with the hurt, the wound, the trauma, and the perennial insult and badge of insult-as we move with the passage of time, in a racist world, that neither wills change, nor knows how to construct substantial change, beyond the meaningless increments of shallow public policy.

We all know that this color is a living reality, and not simply, as Appiah seems to assume sometimes, a construct of language, or a distortion of rationality that we can will to existence. Sometimes, I wish that I could whisk away racism like a fly. But as Lewis Gordon has brilliantly argued racism is not merely a distortion of rationality but an exercise in bad faith. As Gordon put it,

“Bad Faith is a life to the self, one that involves an effort to hide from one's freedom” (Lewis Gordon, *Existential Africana*, Routledge, 2000, p. 75).

The proponents of the color line gleefully believe in that world of humans separated by the artificiality of color, hair texture, bone structure, language and ethnic tapestry. They like that the world. They benefit from the advantages of being white, as opposed to black. They would like to keep the world that way. Whiteness is an investment with material rewards, and blackness a disinvestment with material loss. That is the world of the color line, that Du Bois inherited, and not a belief in the race concept, as Appiah incorrectly

argues in the pages of *In My Father's House*.

There are powerful power holders who believe in it, who are convinced that race is an actual concept with corresponding types of human beings who belong to its superior and inferior categories, and who never wish it away. Du Bois knows these types and their theories of human nature. It is these individuals with bad faith, who gave us the dystopic Orwellian world of the color line, against whom he warns us, and with whom he combated throughout his long life, brilliantly and patiently.

In the end what we witness is the resilience of the human spirit, the combat of hope against hopelessness, love against hate, redemption against doom, strategy against concession, triumph against defeat, realization against giving up, proof against defensiveness. The tides of time move with paradoxes and Du Bois documents these moves as history through the agencies of a historical people, the blacks of the African World. The pages of the *Souls of Black Folk* are replete with representative black men and women striving to overcome the dark waters of a racist America. There the genealogist treats to the sorrow songs of the children of the African continent fighting for their lives, and slowly but surely succeeding with the flow of time.

As he put in a characteristically poetic tone,

“I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and opportunity” (The *W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, p. 135).

This is Du Bois' black world. Tiny, neatly organized and tightly held by a community of the condemned trying to survive, to live in hope. They are glued together not by the race essence, but as Du Bois informs us the experience of racial suffering at the hands of white supremacists. He documents their lives with unsurpassed precision, combining the sensitivity of the writer, the accuracy of the historian, and the imagination of the sociologist.

The savagery of racism is revisited with a stunning poignancy in *Dark water*, where Du Bois writes,

“O Silent God, Thou whose voice afar in mist and mystery has left our ears an-
hungered in these fearful days-
Hear us Good Lord!

Listen to us, Thy children: our faces dark with doubt are made a mockery in Thy Sanctuary. With uplifted hands we front Thy Haven, O God, crying: We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!

We are not better than our fellows, Lord; we are but weak and human men. When our devils do deviltry, curse thou the doer and the deed, -curse them as we curse them, and do to them and more than ever they have done to innocence and weakness, to womanhood and home” (The *W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, p. 497).

Here we encounter the sociologist drawing from his religious sensibility, an attribute he appended to black people, and ask God to punish the perpetrators of the hatred of blacks. Ultimate agency is not in the hands of black people, but the reflective transcendent. He simultaneously examines The Souls of White Folk, thereby reminding future critics like Appiah that he is not consumed by the hatred of whites. On the contrary, he appeals to the transcendent to cleanse them, to morally civilize, or to use Appiah’s own phrase to distort their rationality. Consider the following passage from that angle,

“Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as a foreigner do I come, for I am native, not foreign, born of their thought and flesh of their language...I see the workings of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know. This knowledge makes them now embarrassed; now furious...my word to them is mere bitterness and my soul, pessimism. And yet as they preach and strut and shout and threaten, crouching as they clutch at rags of facts and fancies to hide their nakedness, they go twisting, flying by my tired eyes and I see them every stripped, -ugly, human” (Ibid, p. 497).

Here we have Du Bois grounding himself with the absurd, with the dark, but also with the human, too human. He knows the ugliness of the human and the embarrassing ugliness of the human in Whiteness. He openly confesses his bitterness, ultimately ground on the absurdity of the human condition. He mocks whites for their embarrassing attempt to hide their ugliness, and blame their weaknesses on blacks whom they maim, rape, kill, and harass with racist laws. It is all there in this remarkable paragraph, condensing it all, telling it hard and fast, intelligently and compassionately, all at once, in a single breadth. Courage mediates this profound thought, this dissection of the interiors of hate, of cruelty, of indifference to the black presence in the American soil, by an insider, “a native” as Du Bois confessed. He warns,

"I am white! Well and good, O Prometheus, divine thief! Is not the world wide enough for two colors, for many little shining of the Sun? Why, then, devour your own vitals if I answer even as proudly, "I am black!" (p. 509).

The Hands of Ethiopia will save us all, he tells us in a melodic language of hope and pride. He writes,

"On its black bosom arose one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of self-protecting civilizations, which grew so mightily that it still furnishes superlatives to thinking and speaking men" (Ibid, p. 511).

Where the racism is that Du Bois is professed to inherit, according to Appiah? In which text and in which paragraph. Since when did the description of a fact become an endorsement? Is listing the number of races or what he beautifully calls "little shining of the sun" became an equivalent of a definitively captured race concept? These are some of the questions that come to mind when I read Appiah's Du Bois. I simply could not recognize in the same texts that Appiah and I have read. I remain unconvinced that Du Bois, himself is a racist. The autobiography of a race concept is no more or less than the narrative of a brilliant and sensitive soul, who discovered who he is as a consequence of being told that he is black, therefore, an other, an inferior and a non-being.

He asks us if white folks allow themselves to describe themselves as white and great, why can not I the child of Ethiopia also say, "I am black and great, I am a being, a person, with a history and a definitive contribution to the world. In what way is this self-conception, an affirmation of blackness, an acknowledgement of difference, in anyway, a surreptitious celebration of racism?" Questions pervade my mind as I read Appiah's Du Bois as carefully as I can.

Dark water ends with a hymn to the people of the world. Du Bois writes,

"Save us, World-Spirit, from our lesser selves!
Grant us that war and hatred cease,
Reveal our souls in every race and hue!
Help us, O Human God, in this Thy Truce,
To make Humanity Divine!" (p. 623).

One of the greatest thinkers of his time, the child of slaves freed himself from hate. He calls for the divination of us all, black and white, victims and

oppressors. To them both he invokes redemption and revolutionary transformation as the answer. Love, profound love based on a penetrating analysis of the architectonic of hate is the Du Boisian solution to the irrationality of bad faith and the distortion of rationality.

All these problematics now lead me to confront West's cavalier attempt to present Du Bois as a mild elitist, who has no patience with and respect for the black masses.

As we recall, Appiah accused Du Bois of internalizing 19th century racial talk by making it intimately his own, and West charges Du Bois of being affected by the excesses of the Enlightenment project and Victorianism. I have addressed the first, and I should move on to tackle the second. What is upsetting about both accusations is that not only are they speculative, but they also reduce this mighty thinker, who stands alone like a lone star in the sky, to the status of a derivative thinker. And that Du Bois will never be. He is much too original to be handled this way. All his cardinal themes, such as the Black Problem, The Talented Tenth, and The Race problem are profoundly original to be derived from Western discourse. To begin with, the problems that he analyzes are black problems, which required black frameworks and concepts. Western tools of analysis could not handle them. He had to originate western frameworks to frame the themes and develop culturally relevant and existentially situated concepts with which to resolve them. This requirement is lost on Appiah and West. They both insist that Du Bois uses western tools of criticality to address the black problems. I disagree with both for insisting on this unnecessary requirement.

West contends that the Talented Tenth are elites who are disconnected from the black masses, and that Du Bois was wrong in proposing them as the rescuers of the race. I think West is gravely mistaken for this view. That Du Bois thought that the black masses were too ignorant to stand on their own. Lucius Outlaw has aptly disagreed with West and wrote,

“Here Corn's articulation of his judgment of Du Bois is problematic, at the very least ambiguous. Du Bois certainly wrote and spoke of what he took to be the prevailing induced ignorance of many black folk—that is, his judgment of their lack of knowledge ‘of life and its wider meaning.’ It is also the case that that Du Bois distinguished ignorance and backwardness, induced conditions he thought suffered by many Black folk at the turn of the century” (Cornel West: *A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, ed. George

Yancy, 2001, p. 267).

Outlaw is right but he does not say enough. Infact, all that Du Bois does in all his writings is introduce us patiently, lovingly and systematically to the subtle and brutal way by which hegemonic ideas insinuate themselves in black life, beginning with slavery and down to early modernity. Blacks are enslaved by backward ideas, lack of the knowledge of economics, consumerism, and uncritical attachment to tradition, crimes and lies. The sociologist advises blacks to save, to buy homes, to shop smartly, to plan for their children, to protect their neighborhoods, in short to empower themselves. *The Philadelphia Negro of 1899*, a text that West avoids, does everything but blame the victim. The text analyzes the process by which the technologies of the black self are constructed. Layers of oppression are laid bare, for the reader to see. Blacks are explained to blacks and whites. The Black problem is systematically addressed on many levels. Consider the following paragraphs from *Souls* diagnosing the human condition among blacks.

“A people thus handicapped ought not to be asked to race with the world, but rather allowed to give all its time and thought to its own social problems. But alas! While sociologists gleefully count his bastards and his prostitutes, the very soul of the toiling, sweating black man is darkened by the shadow of a vast despair. Men call the shadow prejudice, and learnedly explain it as the natural defense of culture against barbarism, leaning against ignorance, purity against crime, the “higher” against the “lower” races” (The *W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, p. 105).

Notice the irony. Whereas West contends that Du Bois played lower blacks against the higher blacks, Du Bois himself is astutely aware of the disparaging and racist use of hierarchies to be trapped by it. He speaks about the conditions that produce backwardness among blacks by the forces of evil. He describes dispassionately how blacks are kept backward and ignorant, conditions that he himself analyzed in the most moving passages in *The Philadelphia Negro* and *The Souls of Black Folk*, followed by penetrating diagnoses and perceptive prognoses, all in one piece. Consider another passage from this perspective,

“To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. He felt the weight of his ignorance, -not simply of letters, but of life, of business, of the humanities...” (Ibid, p. 1050).

It is this passage that licensed West to attack Du Bois, based on a deliberate misunderstanding. West, as a shrewd reader of Gramsci, the philosopher of hegemony, knows for sure how the masses are kept ignorant, particularly how the masses are prevented from moral and cultural organization, and the organization of the self. Only the organized self is capable of self-leadership in the realm of culture. Above Du Bois was addressing himself to the various ways by which the blacks self is denied the inalienable right of self-moral and cultural organization, a problem that the great Du Bois thought could be solved by something like the Talented Tenth as purveyors of leadership as the organic intellectuals of the black community. I am sure this point was not lost to West himself as the historical member of the Talented Tenth, the organic public intellectual of the African-American world in the USA.

Du Bois's vision about the Talented Tenth as West is well aware arises out of historical necessity. It is not an instinctive interiorization of the notion of the great man idea that West argues compelled Du Bois to believe in this modality of prognoses. Du Bois was much of a learned humanist and an organically linked leader of the then prevailing black community to take the notion of the lower and the higher beyond what they are: prejudices. His writings radiate with love, compassion and care for black people everywhere from Tennessee through Ethiopia and Ghana, a place where he chose to be buried for his Pan-African ideals. It is the plight of ordinary blacks, systematically kept ignorant and backward that he championed. It is their historically generated problems that he made the cornerstone of critical sociology and historical genealogy.

Lewis Gordon has persuasively argued that,

“The issues of problematic people are well known among existential and phenomenological theorists...They cease to be people who might face, signify, or be associated with a set of problems: they become those problems. Thus a problematic people do not signify crime, licentiousness, and other social pathologies; they, under such a view, are crime, licentiousness, and other social pathologies...Thus Du Bois focuses on the *social* is already a theoretical advance. For in his time, the tendency was to approach the study of a people in terms of either phylogenic or ontogenic considerations...by focusing on the social, then, Du Bois has, in one sweep, taken the U.S. discourse on blackness onto unfamiliar ground” (*Existentialia Africana*, pp. 68-69).

Exactly. A major advance indeed. Instead of engaging this major ad-

vance in the discourse on the technologies of the black self, and the much needed articulation of how blackness itself is produced through an analysis of social forces, which is what Du Bois did, both Appiah and West take Du Bois on-on that which matters least, the race concept, the black race concept. Du Bois was least concerned with the genealogy of a term and more with the effects of that term on the lives of black people. Gordon has smartly captured that politics, that conceptualization of the black self. It is Du Bois who originated the appropriate concept of the social to analyze black life unsentimentally by exposing the technologies of self-perpetuating conditions of backwardness and ignorance. Whereas, West the public intellectual is shocked by these facts, the genealogist describes phenomenological that which is out there, blocking the black masses from fighting internal and external oppression of values, habits and customs. Du Bois is not shocked by what he observes. He exposes its being there, he unravels its status of being taken for granted, as part of the life world.

The life world is described with arresting honesty, passion and commitment to transform it. Transformation, however, is preceded by description of what is out there, part of black life, the affirming and negating, the positive and negative, the horrid and the fulfilling. He spares no one, and does not refuse to turn the most resistant stone. He goes after reality with zest, coolness and precision. Du Bois' project is as Paget Henry, will argue in a forthcoming article, foundational sociology, a combination of the engaged and the disengaged, the personal and the social, interviews and statistical analysis, all mastered in a single enterprise for the masses and about the masses.

The argument for the Talented Tenth then requires a context, which West deprives it. The pervasive presence of backwardness and ignorance among the black masses, which is not to be equated with an inherent fact that these masses are naturally backward and ignorant, a belief that is far, faraway from Du Bois' world view, requires a desperate measure. That measure is the active developing and training among the black mass, a few individuals, male and female, who can be chosen, trained and socialized to take on leadership positions, on the behalf of their brothers and sisters. It is an ideal argument that may or may not produce the needed results. Du Bois pushes this ideal with remarkable courage and brilliant outline.

Desperate situations require desperate solutions. This is precisely what Du Bois did in that seminal essay and also earlier in *The Philadelphia Negro*

of 1899.

Gates, clearly following West has observed,

“The black middle class has never been in better shape-and it has never felt worse about things. Du Bois had conjured up a Talented Tenth that would be a beacon of hope; it is ninety years later, and they are, instead a stump of gloom. Middle-class messianism has given way to middle-class malaise” (*The Future of The Race*, p. 19).

This is an accurate observation as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. The blame should not be focused on a concept, a desperate idea, meant to address a desperate situation. Nor should it be left on the observation that the middle-class feels terrible. Why does this class feel terrible? How did it delink itself from the black masses that it was supposed to rescue? What other measures of link should be established now between the Talented Tenth, embodied in the Middle Class, and other relevant modalities of linkage.

At this point, I would like to make a few observations following West and going beyond him. First, I wish to suggest that something like the Talented Tenth, Du Bois’ vision and what I wish to call following West a participatory model of democracy embodied in the activities of public intellectuals like West can work in tandem. There is no need to replace Du Bois’ vision and strategies of overcoming with West’s Pragmatism. Both visions could exist complimentarily in the following way. The Talented Tenth remain to be useful sources of filling in the void in the lives of the black masses. There is still much work to be done by those who are able, competent, resourceful, moneyed and well connected for those masses of black people who linger on the interstices of civil society in the Americas and beyond to the territories of the Diaspora. There are connections in the fractured lives of black people globally, which require the attention of something like the Talented Tenth, or their equivalent. The international dimension of blackness, conveniently ignored by West and inadequately attended to by Appiah, was dear to Du Bois. His love of Africa is evident in his Pan-Africanism and in the choice that he made to be buried on African soil. Du Bois loved Africa and African in turn loved him. Some of its leaders treated Du Bois with a reverence rarely accorded to a non-African by birth.

Du Bois was an exception. He was American by birth, but African by choice. While many African-Americans were ashamed of their African heri-

tage, Du Bois made Africa the centerpiece of his life and research. His writings are filled with African matters.

Consider the following hymn to Africa, from a piece called,

A DAY IN AFRICA

I rose to sense the incense of the hills
The royal sun sent crimsoned heralds to the dawn
She glowed beneath her bridal veil of mist-
I felt her heart swell while the King
Paused on the World's rough edge,
And thousand birds did pour their little hearts
To maddened melody.
I leapt and danced, and found
My breakfast poised aloft,
All served in living gold

You see Du Bois' Africa is hopeful, rich and splendid with history. Incense, Gold, Wisdom, Music, dance and birds environ it. It is a deproblematized Africa, a center of civilization, the first home of humankind. Du Bois takes pride in this black world; its rivers, lakes, minerals, purple flowered carpet, and soil flow from his pen as he writes about them. His Africa does not smell. The continent is wreathed in crimson, blue and green, as a stanza in *A Day In Africa* has it. For Du Bois, Africa is also sunshine, vegetation

“bursting life of leaf and limb” (The *W.E. B. Du Bois Reader*, p. 645).

Du Bois writes,

“The spell of Africa is upon me. The ancient witchery of her medicine is burning my drowsy, dreamy blood. This is not a country; it is a world - a universe of itself and for itself, a thing Different, Immense, Menacing, and Alluring. It is a great black bosom where the Spirit longs to die... Three things Africa has given the world, and they form the essence of African culture: Beginnings, the village unit, and art in sculpture and music” (Ibid, pp. 645-646).

Given this enormous respect for African matters, Du Bois could hardly be chided for thinking that blacks are backward and ignorant. How could that be, when passage after passage celebrates the achievements of blacks, our ancestors? In the pages of Du Bois narratives, Africans are presented as historically effective people. The producers of Axum and Lalibela in Ethio-

pia, the Pyramids of Egypt, not to forget the birthplace of Lucy, the miraculous, our oldest female ancestor.

For him, Africa is the homeland of humanity, and the proud place of the black race. As he put it,

“Wherever one sees the first faint steps of human culture, the first successful fight against wild beasts, the striving against weather and disease, there one sees black men” (Ibid, p. 647).

Again, the passages speak for themselves. His blackness is a source of pride, a fountain of his humanity, and Africa is an embodiment of his black body, his black being. Neither inferior nor superior, he defends it, as a foundation of his selfhood, a framework of a moral organization. The Pan-Africanism he so eloquently presented to the world is found on this moral/cultural framework. He knew the absurdity of the human condition deeply, but fought against it with a vision of a transformed humanity found on African possibilities of being; the contingent projects of compassion, care, and a moral framework. He was convinced that these contingent projects were destined to be black people’s contributions to the birth of new men and women that the world had not seen before.

Like Fanon after him, he too wanted to turn a new leaf, out of the incense of African hills, the royal African sun, the soft vegetation, the maddened melody and the purple flowered fields, the lush and the green. One of the duties of the Talented Tenth could easily be mending the broken black self by diffusing these flattering and empowering visions of blackness and Africanity to diasporic blacks. They could do so first by familiarizing themselves with this rich history in Du Bois’ texts and rediscover their African roots. Once they do so, there is much there that could be passed on to their children, their relatives and their friends. Change begins with the self, and then it is shared with other selves. The rising African-American middle class needs to penetrate this history and heal itself. A historical people need historical foundations on which to build a history. That is what Du Bois advocated in his time. That is precisely what we need to awaken now. As educators, corporate heads, business people, preachers and parents, The Talented Tenth must make the exposure of African things a mission, a duty, a program and an effective strategy of change on the behalf of black people everywhere. It is out of this fabrics of existence, with Africa as the background and foreground, that Du Bois managed to create an original

ground and foreground, that Du Bois managed to create an original historical and existential philosophy of race.

Once this is put in place, it can work quiet handily with the revolutionary participatory track that West, the public intellectual of our time, so much desires. The public intellectual as a moral and cultural educator arrives on the scene, to preach to and educate the black masses. Whereas Du Bois's Talented Tenth would quietly impart esoteric and lyrical passages in the classroom and at corporate quarters, the gifted public intellectual could bring this knowledge and popularize it, hopefully, this will be done, and when it must, for little cost, so that those who need it most can be there to be enlightened, so as to act, to march, to fight for their rights.

