

## “Beyond This Narrow Now”

Elaborations of the Example in the Thought of W. E. B.

Du Bois—At the Limit of World

The silently growing assumption of this age is that the probation of races is past, and that the backward races of today are of proven inefficiency and not worth the saving. Such an assumption is the arrogance of peoples irreverent toward Time and ignorant of the deeds of men. A thousand years ago such an assumption, easily possible, would have made it difficult for the Teuton to prove his right to life. Two thousand years ago such dogmatism, readily welcome, would have scouted the idea of blond races ever leading civilization. So woefully unorganized is sociological knowledge that the meaning of progress, the meaning of “swift” and “slow” in human doing and the limits of human perfectibility, are veiled unanswered sphinxes on the shores of science. Why should Aeschylus have sung two thousand years before Shakespeare was born? Why has civilization flourished in Europe, and flickered, flamed, and died in Africa? So long as the world stands meekly dumb before such questions, shall this nation proclaim its ignorance and unhallowed prejudices by denying freedom of opportunity to those who brought the Sorrow Songs to the seats of the mighty?

—W. E. B. DU BOIS, “The Sorrow Songs” (1903k)

What is good and better and best in the measure of human advance? and how shall we compare the present with the past, nation with nation, and group with group, so as to gain real intelligent insight into conditions and needs, and enlightened guidance? Now this is extremely difficult in matters of human development,

because we are so ignorant of the ordinary facts relating to conditions of life, and because, above all, criteria of life and the objects of living are so diverse.  
—W. E. B. DU BOIS, “The Development of a People” (1904)

## INCIPIIT

If one accepts the epistemic imperatives of the example, its status as an always ensemblic apparition of the supposed proper and also, thus, its status as a certain order of name for both the limit and the possibility of thought, it might well be engaged as the announcement of an *atopic* order of existence that nonetheless *is*, if you will, only in its immanent appearance: as a site or a seam, an irruption yielded by way of the concatenation that is a fault line; or as something like the fractual force of waves on the high ocean; or as the terrible heat of a sudden and massive efflorescence, of flame, moving across the desert of the mind’s-eye memory, arising from the sharp and textured frisson of rock against rock; or according to a distribution of force that takes form, if at all, in the general figure of the cantilever, whether as mountain or bridge. The *atopic* in this sense is simply an otherwise-than-proper name of the passage beyond—at the limit of world.<sup>1</sup>

A critical practice—understood otherwise than in simply a modern and now classical sense of that phrase—that would move according to such an order of imperative calls for the development, or operation, of certain techniques that would comprise an inhabitation that sustains itself, if at all, at the limit of habitus—techniques of sounding, of gesture, of reception or hospitality—in the practice of thought. Such modes of attention may remark, in the infra-organization of the instance, or the circumstance, some possible movements, gestures, or steps, perhaps, or some forms of maintenance, of the passive in constitution, in a practice that would accept the responsibility given in a general desedimentation, one that would remain, open, and generous, to its own possible becoming, by which one could traverse the limit of world.<sup>2</sup>

Approached on the path of the bias of this situation of the example, W. E. B. Du Bois’s thought may yet be understood as a certain order of organized epistemic ensemble. As a kind of objectivity, here nameable as a formation of life, it can thus be engaged according to the guidance given by the demands of the topographical in a general sense as the dispensation

of metaphor—of air, of water, of soil or earth, for example. Yet it would remain the case that the example in the Du Boisian modes of thoughtful practice, like habitation or architectural production in general, can be announced only according to the forms of its ensemblic temporalities. There could be no radical disjunction of the topographical and the topological: or, rather, the latter is always already at stake in the former. In this sense, the distinction of the topographical might also be understood to extend itself as a dispensation of metaphor for temporality—of space and spacing as temporization and of the plane and the parallel as duration, for example.

The problematization that we can notice, track, and critically announce as the forms—of historicity, of the itinerary of one W. E. B. Du Bois—then can be understood as the general topographical figuration of a force that is, so to speak, always and already *atopos*. It is always otherwise than the simple or punctual present. Yet such an atopic movement is also the dispensation of paths of traversal for the utopic: it is the announcement—within the forms of existence—of an illegible legibility that appears only in the remark or an impossible possible future that is yet at stake in the present. It is the form of the here and now that is yet “beyond this narrow Now,” as we receive such a thought in the penultimate paragraph of Du Bois’s elegy to his lost son (Du Bois 1903i, 213, chap. 11, para. 13).

Proposed here by way of a tarrying with the thought of Du Bois: the temporal would extend beyond time as duration and configured plane; the *atopic*, as movement or rhythm, would announce the passage to form of the *utopic* and remark its impossible passage beyond possible limit, yielding that which remains as a measure of possibility. Such practice can be rendered available by paleonymy and placed at stake for a contemporary thought—whatever its time—if we think of Du Bois’s thought as a name for both sides of a limit: this is to say that at the limit of limit, there will also always have been the name of possibility.

At the threshold of our own basic practical decision, so to speak, accepting the rhetorical dispositions just given as our guide in traversing a domain beyond that which is accessible simply by way of an analytics, the principal features of Du Bois’s practice in turn may be understood at an epistemic level to exhibit or expose two forms of concatenation, among perhaps other examples: one we might call the autobiographical, and the other we can mark as the historiographical. The interpretive premise that is operative here, in such a formulation, which I began to propose from

the outset of this study, is that before one analytically organizes Du Bois's practice as thought and itinerary into the shape of various given traditions of discourse, disciplines, or political stratagems, one should attempt to accede or attend first to the forms of problematization as they are announced as something that is at stake *for* him as thought—as simultaneously ad-ducing the contours of his profile in thought as such and acquiring a distinct practical organization by way of this production. The concern in the first instance of critical engagement—even if understood as an analytics or a methodology—must be the way in which the major questions took shape as his intellectual formation and inhabitation at the level of his existence and the manner in which the broad historical situations announced their epistemic shape as the sustained solicitation of his critical attention. This is the first order of seam or concatenation. It marks the measure of thought articulated according to possibility in general, we might say. And then, in both instances, the autobiographical and the historiographical, the order of historicity that Du Bois came to call by the name “the problem of the color line” can be understood to inscribe itself in the articulation of every aspect of the problematizations that are announced in his itinerary. It is an instituted form of limitation that would announce itself in both axes of orientation—the spatial and the temporal. And, too, analytically, then, it is a constitutive dimension of both forms of concatenation that I am proposing as the shape of the itinerary of Du Bois—the autobiographical and the historiographical. Yet it takes form if at all not as a thing-in-itself but as a form of relation, its ostensible being at stake as eventuality in each and every instance of its possibility: hence, its announcement on the order of knowledge and understanding is as a problem for thought. It does not preexist objectivity, nor does it issue from a preexistent organization of materiality. It takes its configuration from the force of relation. Thus, it remains that this latter dimension, “the problem of the color line,” a heterogeneous ensemble of productive forms of practiced proscription, can still be usefully rendered distinct—by interpretive elaboration and analysis—from the question of possibility in general, even as the two remain inseparably interwoven. It solicits its own form of elaboration: thus, I consider it directly elsewhere (see part II of this study).

Yet the general question of *istoria*—the historical and the historiographical, of the *historial*—is the very organization of world for Du Bois as a practitioner of critical thought.<sup>3</sup>

Specifically, one is thus led to ask the following question: What, then, is the organization of the “narrow Now” of Du Bois’s contemporaneity as a historical topography? This question tracks, then, a second order of concatenation in an approach to the practice of Du Bois. I propose that what must gain our attention is that in both forms of the itinerary of Du Bois’s practice, the autobiographical and the historiographical, there is no precomprehended limit that can sustain itself as of ultimate pertinence. This may be a practical way to receive or accept a thought as participation in that which opens toward *atopos*. The fundamental question, then, is not only about given circumstance—what shows in the critical discourse as a stubborn commitment to think the African American situation (to reference an on-hand example of the issue at stake) or that of the historically subordinate (for example, the so-called poor) in realms of social power in a general sense (to notate another ready-to-mind exemplar of the question) only under the heading of abjection or pathology—for it is also, and more radically, about historical possibility. It is at such a juncture of epistemological problem that the question of the status of the mark that would announce thought to itself in the form of its own distantiation takes shape in the critical discourse—a discourse that would portend to approach the figure of Du Bois. The turn, the reflex, the *trope*—as metaphor or catachresis—becomes within this difficulty of practice not the finality of thought but the mark of its passage. It is the form of a guide that can only appear as such after the fact. It demands from us—those who might try to think with Du Bois, for example—a certain kind of engagement with the impossible task of remaining open to the impossible possibility within thought. For only within such openness might one gain ground on that which is beyond, or, better, discover configurations of force that may remain susceptible to epistemic desedimentation, a disarticulation of conceptual and theoretical presumption, enabling thereby the capacity to think otherwise than the given. Herein, thus, what follows is an elaboration of *the question of historical possibility* in Du Bois’s thought, along the lines of the autobiographical and the historiographical, as this can be adduced according to the rhetorical, methodological, and theoretical protocols required for an engagement with the order of the example. Our order of attention—however limited our access to such—must be toward the very terms of possibility of the practice of thought.

It is in this irruptive sense that the following takes the form of a sustained excursion on the question of example—by way of the example here—of the thinking of one W. E. B. Du Bois, on two orders of example.

## I. APOLOGIAS

It is Du Bois himself who, in the prefatory “Apology” of *Dusk of Dawn*, places three of his texts in a genealogical relation as “autobiographical” reflections of a distinct kind (Du Bois 1975d, 1–2). They are not simply narratives of his life, or even at a larger level the story simply of the Negro American, but a discourse of exemplification, of a situation, a historical problematization, perhaps as a certain object of thought, and of the struggle to understand or engage this situation as a problematic, perhaps as a subject of thought. These three texts are (and such listing here certainly does not preclude the addition of other texts, especially later ones; indeed, it calls for such interpretive extension) first, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* of 1903, which Du Bois calls in this “Apology” “a cry at midnight thick within the veil, when none rightly knew the coming of day” and whose titular opening and path of elaboration was the question, “how does it feel to be a problem,” or, in other words, the movement of “double-consciousness”; then, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, which Du Bois presented in 1920 just after World War I as a sequel to *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* and which, in the opening paragraph of the prefatory “Postscript,” was proposed as offering to the devastated world a distinct “point of view” “from a veiled corner, where all the outer tragedy and comedy have reproduced themselves in microcosm within” (Du Bois 1920, vii; 1975c, vii); and, finally, for our annotation here, the text at hand in a most signal manner, *Dusk of Dawn*, the subtitle of which, *An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, announces a thought of the autobiographical example as the titular heading for an investigation of what he calls in 1940, at the incipit of World War II, “the central problem of the greatest of the world’s democracies and so the Problem of the future world.” He continues, immediately:

The problem of the future world is the charting, by means of intelligent reason, of a path not simply through the resistances of physical force, but through the vaster and far more intricate jungle of ideas conditioned on unconscious and subconscious reflexes of living things; on blind unreason and often irresistible urges of sensitive matter; of which the concept of race is today one of the most unyielding and threatening. I seem to see a way of elucidating the inner meaning and significance of that race problem by explaining it in terms of the one human life that I know best. (Du Bois 1975d, 2)<sup>4</sup>

In each case, Du Bois sought to understand the limits of the present world from the situation of this example, certainly not in isolation or alone, but

as indeed a guiding example. It is the case, however, in a fundamental way that is not often enough remarked or understood, that Du Bois also proposed a horizon of possibility by way of the question of this example: it yielded a thought of an illimitable movement of possible being that would be at stake here and now even as it was as yet, in the present, impossible. It is thus that just a few passages after the lines quoted in extenso above, in the opening section of *Dusk of Dawn* that he calls “The Plot,” Du Bois presents two layers, in an ontological sense, according to which one might approach the question of possibility *in the world as something yet to come*. For the Negro subject, he writes that they “must live and eat and strive, and still hold unflinching commerce with the stars” (Du Bois 1975d, 7); and for the world in general, as it engages the problem of its future by way of the problem of the color line, while the negative or limit dimension demands that “the scientific task of the twentieth century would be to explore and measure the scope of chance and unreason in human action” (7), the affirmative or imaginal dimension would open toward “conceiving the world not as a permanent structure but as changing growth” and “the study of man as changing and developing physical and social entity” (4).

Let me now take up only one sheaf from among the many pages of this triptych of the autobiographical example in Du Bois’s thought, as it announces itself in the opening paragraphs of the opening chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*:

To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. And yet, being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. (Du Bois 1903d, 2, chap. 1, paras. 1–2)

We have entered the text *en medias res*, across the conjuncture of the first and second paragraphs. (And as these famous lines, and this text in general, are now more and more widely read as well as well as relatively easily accessible, in this part of the present study, I will more often cite this text, rather than offer full quotations or any extensive reference [Du Bois 1903l; see also 1903m]).

**A. BEING AS A PROBLEM.** He has never been anything else, always a “problem.” His, the narrator’s, sense of experience, sense of being, is of always existing as a problem, a social and historical problem, certainly, but also



an existential problem. The matter of existence takes shape as an always previous organization of problem. In “The Conservation of Races,” it is announced on the order of what is often thought as an ontological question (Du Bois 1897b, 2015c). But even though it is the most common and perduring of experiences (that is, consciousness, and above all self-consciousness, of being), the most familiar, this sense, this “feeling,” is “strange,” “peculiar.” This becomes the opening and, thus, the framing formulation of the opening essay. Thereby it is such for the entire text. The inhabitation in question produces a sense of double identification, an American, a Negro, which form, for Du Bois as the narrator, the headings of two ideals: the famous line from the third paragraph reads, “two warring ideals in one dark body.” This in turn yields a moral and ethical question (as this problematic is through and through political) as a matter of position, power, alliance, strategy, and tactic, that is, a matter of policy and program. The question as I would state it is either, “What is the relation between these two identifications (or two figures of a double identification)?” or, “Is it a matter of choosing allegiance to one or the other of these senses of identification?” The question is: Is it possible to be “both a Negro and an American” without proscription?

The response of Du Bois, as author, in the form of the narrator’s declaration, is to affirm both identifications, in a double fashion.

He affirms them together, in reciprocal relation. He affirms each beyond its orientation or referral to this given other. Just how either reference might be *nameable* beyond this other is not so much the issue here, at this passage in the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, but both within this text and elsewhere (as we can see in his discussion of Europe’s formation, or of the formation of Africa), Du Bois speaks of any civilization or culture (I would say mode of inhabitation in general) as produced out of multiple, that is, heterogeneous, sources and references. This is his conception in such texts as “The Spirit of Modern Europe” (which our best supposition dates to 1900) (Du Bois 1985f, 2015j) and *The Negro* (Du Bois 1915b, 1975e), but this conception is already put forth in the speculative narrative that provides the principal thetic transition of “The Conservation of Races,” notably in its tenth paragraph (Du Bois 2015c, 1897b, 1986a). That is to say, there is in Du Bois’s thought, along with a powerful commitment to the sense of the whole and to unity, a certain maintenance of an affirmation of the heterogeneous. Here it can still be maintained in our own time under the metaphorical heading of the double.



This sense of double identification then opens up a space of critique. At the level of the social order, of the subject's inhabitation of a social and historical situation, Du Bois calls it "second sight," in this context, what he calls "this American world." At the level of the social entity or being, of the subject's consciousness of his own way of inhabiting this situation, that is to say the self-consciousness of the subject, Du Bois calls it "double-consciousness."

What must be underscored is that this double sense is set in motion by the violence of a symbolic proscription that is given its force and bearing by acute real social practices of violation, exploitation, and oppression that are distributed beyond the punctual present of the occasion of its promulgation. It is thus that the movement of critique that arises within the formation of this sense, if it acquires legibility, is indeed a turning back, a fold, if you will, operating within the movement of symbolization that is the formation of sense, upon the very conditions that set it in motion. And then, further, it can be shown that at that threshold level of existence, the inhabitation of sense, it both disorients and deters the simple fulfillment of that violence. Let us then follow this more precisely, restricting ourselves principally to these few lines highlighted from the opening paragraphs of this first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*.

For Du Bois, in the phrase that we have already recalled, there are two autobiographical exceptions to that experience, "babyhood" and "Europe."

**B. OF BABYHOOD.** The appearance of the term *babyhood* implies a conception, more or less formal, of stages of a life course, such as infancy (or babyhood), childhood (or boyhood), adolescence, and adulthood (entailing stages of maturation, fullness, and decline). Here, in the passage at hand, Du Bois mentions two stages.

First, babyhood has for its pivotal example in the book *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* the figure of Du Bois's son Burghardt, who died at eighteen months of age in May 1899. This is most poignantly articulated as the eleventh chapter of the text. And it is to Burghardt, along with his sister Yolande, that the book is dedicated. Here it can be said that the figure of the child always clusters around *matters* utopian; this is certainly true for Du Bois. The father writes, "A perfect life was his, all joy and love, with tears to make it brighter,—sweet as a summer's day beside the Housatonic" (Du Bois 1903i, 211, chap. 11, para. 10). And then he remarks this vision a bit later: "Blame me not if I see a world thus darkly through the Veil,—and my soul whispers ever to me, saying, 'Not dead, not dead,

but escaped; not bond, but free.” Du Bois goes on to follow this vision by way of his reception of his son’s passing and marks its nonsimple horizon (if it can still be called such) as “beyond this narrow Now”:

All that day and all that night there sat an awful gladness in my heart,—nay, blame me not if I see the world thus darkly through the Veil,—and my soul whispers ever to me, saying, “Not dead, not dead, but escaped; not bond, but free.” No bitter meanness now shall sicken his baby heart till it die a living death, no taunt shall madden his happy boyhood. Fool that I was to think or wish that this little soul should grow choked and deformed within the Veil! I might have known that yonder deep unworldly look that ever and anon floated past his eyes was peering far beyond this narrow Now. In the poise of his little curl-crowned head did there not sit all that wild pride of being which his father had hardly crushed in his own heart? For what, forsooth, shall a Negro want with pride amid the studied humiliations of fifty million fellows? Well sped, my boy, before the world had dubbed your ambition insolence, had held your ideals unattainable, and taught you to cringe and bow. Better far this nameless void that stops my life than a sea of sorrow for you. (Du Bois 1903i, 213, chap. 11, para. 13)

There is a complex movement of affirmation at work here. By a deft affirmation of the negative, it simultaneously produces a desedimentation, or destabilization, of the status of negativity and forestalls any simple recuperation to the given. The sense of loss that is recorded in the text encodes more than the sign of negativity. The narrator father’s declaration in these lines of a temporality beyond presence can be understood as calling into question the status of the historicity named therein. While the father cannot be certain of some putative other horizon, for he most especially cannot find and does not propose a proper name for it, there is no absolute here, neither in the sense of canonical religion, nor in the terms of philosophy as metaphysics. However, it is certain that, for this father, the passing of the son cannot and will not be apprehended simply as loss. What the text encodes here in the form of rendering a record, a kind of elegy, under the heading of temporality, is a radical disjuncture, a rending, in the heart of being as existence. And, then, in the most decisive move of this essay, it affirms that lability. It affirms it for the passing of the son. And it affirms it for the survivance of this father. The implication is certainly that the father’s sense of self—in the temporality of his life course—was in fact reinaugurated, already, we might say, by way of the force of a delimitation of a putative horizon, which had previously appeared as unlimited, by the

coming to legibility of the mark or “problem” of the color line. Thus, it has taken shape within the horizon of this “Now.” Yet paradoxically, it is this *break*, this *décalage*, this sense of “*time out of joint*” (“The time is out of joint; O cursed spite! / That ever I was born to set it right!”—as Shakespeare’s Hamlet bequeathed the unholy thought to us [Shakespeare 2006, 1,5211–12] that will announce *in existence* the very form of the passage to another horizon (Spillers 2003d, 262; 2006; Derrida 1994, 18–31). It is certainly one in which passage is form, and, perhaps, form is passage. In this movement that is yet a break, the sense of both the instituted break and an unlimited horizon becomes susceptible to remark—that is to say, in another register, acquires nameability—only in retrospect. And yet the process of rendering such legibility is the very means of a passage to and beyond the given limit. It is the disorientation of time as or according to “Now.” As such, its affirmation names without naming the possibility of an illimitable becoming, not in terms of a received idea or canonical horizon. And yet it has bearing and is at stake *here and now*. And here, as we shall be able to confirm again later, in that other register, it is the very passage to narration. The text that *we* are reading is rendered possible by way of the itinerary that we are tracking within its folds.

The figure of childhood, or boyhood, is given as Du Bois himself in the first chapter. “I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England where the dark Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Taghkanic to the sea” (Du Bois 1903d, 2, chap. 1, para. 2). And as this figure is the very subject of the narration that we are following, we will address it momentarily.

Elsewhere in the text, Du Bois describes another stage, a figure of adolescence, we might say a textually doubled figure, for it has two interwoven examples: that of Josie, the dark young woman of the harsh hills of eastern Tennessee, who dies of a loss of hope, in the early chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* called “Of the Meaning of Progress,” and that of John Jones, in the later chapter “Of the Coming of John,” the Negro John in the story (for there is also a White John), from southeastern Georgia, at the mouth of the mighty Altamaha, on the restless shore of the Atlantic, who is lynched for defending his sister against rape (and she does survive unscathed in a physical sense), not yet a prophet perhaps, but one who fulfilled the duty that was bequeathed to him—the form of historical possibility—and whose voice or the voice of those like him, but for this twice-told tale, would be lost in the wind and the sea of history (Du Bois 1903h, 1903f; see also 1903i).

Du Bois, or the narrator, at any rate the boy of the first chapter, as it is given in the second paragraph, encounters a glance, a line of force, we might say, that sends him back on himself:

In a wee wooden schoolhouse, 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. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads. Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade; for the worlds I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine. But they should not keep these prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them. Just how I would do it I could never decide: by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head,—some way. With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly watch the streak of blue above. (Du Bois 1903d, 2–3, chap. 1, para. 2)

While elsewhere I have sought to establish the way in which there is an asymmetrical reciprocity in this movement, one that brings into configuration the limit as given in the social mark, here I will propose the way in which it is productive of possibility, according to which the mark can be remarked such as to exceed that which is already simply given within it (Chandler 2014c, 129–70, 233–46). Thus, we can note that there is a temporality to this figuration; it is one in which the “glance” as a socially productive force (while not simply conclusive) would mark him as different, as “a black boy.” And, indeed, he then sees himself in terms of this difference, this position. However, within this movement, the text records a paradoxical fold or movement otherwise, a properly semiotic configuration, within the formation of the mark. First, he seeks or declares a strict or putatively

pure opposition to the mark. However, with this move, he discovers that he cannot succeed, that it gives him no hold within the system in play. So, second, he undertakes a double move of simultaneous opposition and declaration of commonness across the distinction that the glance would institute. In understanding Du Bois's autobiographical texts, this track or trace that I have outlined is crucial. I consider it the motif of *internal dissociation*, certainly within the self, or supposed ipseity, and in a corollary fashion from, or within, a given context. It opens the space or time of a critical apprehension and reflection, which although announced under this determined heading has no necessary limit. Thus, simultaneously so to speak, by way of an act that might be called a metalepsis, in seeing himself in this way, as the narrator describes the time of experience, he begins to render relative this way of seeing. He names himself as part of a putative group, "black boys." He typologizes the lines or types of negotiation of the position by skin color, some fiercely resistant (him), some resigned (others). Thus, a nascent critique of the distinction and its real concomitant material effects announces itself. To the extent that the narrator by way of a certain movement within the experience of violence has been enabled to see and describe its effects, it is not a simple, or the only, horizon of his sense of the social field or of himself within it. That is to say, the frisson of the movement of violence is rendered only by way of its tracking of a possible movement of distantiation in the field of historicity in play. It thereby leaves the disfigured marks of the path of its own becoming such that there remains a tractable rift in its own apparent repleteness as outcome. This tractability is open to multiple and quite contradictory forms of reinscription. Yet, to the extent that such a gesture is indeed a claim that would, at the symbolic level, as both fact and fiction, portend its own absolute ground or possibility, an act that in its distended temporality takes notice of this process, that of the production of distinction, which thus also takes notice of its own tendential position as well as a distribution of positions within a social field, even among the subordinated, notices such a gesture as an act of force and deployment of power, as a gesture that generates effects on the basis of other already established or operative hierarchies. As the narrator writes, "The worlds I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities were theirs, not mine" (Du Bois 1903d, 2–3, chap. 1, para. 2). Following this rift reflexively, then, in the form of this double gesture, at the level of the character, the young boy "Du Bois," and a redoubled one at the level of the narrator, the young intellectual Du Bois (the one who has been solicited in the form of his writing), make possible the opening of a track for a general

desedimentation of the historicity of the present. As the mature Du Bois, as the world-famous intellectual, will write of the younger Du Bois after some seven decades of living—the young boy, the young man, the young intellectual on the threshold of writing *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, perhaps:

Had it not been for the race problem early thrust upon me and enveloping me, I should have probably been an unquestioning worshiper at the shrine of the social order and economic development into which I was born. But just that part of that order which seemed to most of my fellows nearest perfection, seemed to me most inequitable and wrong; starting from that critique, I gradually as the years went by found other things to question in my environment. At first, however, my criticism was confined to the relation of my people to the world movement. I was not questioning the world movement itself. What the white world was doing, its goals and ideals, I had not doubted were quite right. What was wrong was that I and people like me and thousands of others who might have my ability and aspiration, were refused permission to be part of this world. (Du Bois 1968, 155–56; see also 1975d, 26–27, 13–15, 51–52, 54; 1940, 26–27, 13–15, 51–52, 54)

As I have remarked elsewhere in an elaboration of this text, situated between Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, it is certainly “genealogy” *avant la lettre* in either or both senses of the term given in the discourses carried out under those names, and something more (a tracking on the fold of difference that neither of those figures would avow in their practice). And, then, the practice of a critical reinscription of the world within and by way of this peculiar point of view will not only be maintained and affirmed by Du Bois across his entire itinerary but devolve as one of his most powerful epistemological interventions, and it remains as a still excessive resource for critical thought in our time (Chandler 2014c, 129–70, 233–46).

**c. EUROPE.** The other exception offered in the second paragraph of the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* is Europe. This place is, at least and first of all, a habitation apart from the normal, apart from “this American world.” But the experience of *not* being a problem is, at this juncture, otherwise than normal, the normal of his habitual residence. Even with just this bare reference we see the reflexive existential configuration of Du Bois’s residential experience of Europe as marking for him a limit, a certain kind of inside and a certain kind of outside.

This text of Du Bois's, penned in the late spring or early summer of 1897, is perhaps his earliest *published* retrospective reference to his experience as a student in Europe.<sup>5</sup> And he experienced more than just Germany, where he studied at Berlin. The reference is also to his travels and exploration of historical and sociological examples and entails allusions to architecture and to art. Thus, doubtless, in one reading, Europe, especially Germany, can be shown to be a signal reference for Du Bois in this text. Across this book, completed as a whole in 1903, he cites, among many others, William Shakespeare; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller; Honoré de Balzac; Lord Byron; William Wordsworth; Alfred, Lord Tennyson; Thomas Carlyle; Richard Wagner; and then, too, Alexander Dumas. He describes the African American situation at the historical time of his writing at the end of the nineteenth century as one of "*Sturm und Drang*," with reference to the phrase that came to name the earliest movement within the work of Goethe and Schiller and some others in Europe of their generation during the last third of the eighteenth century. So, too, in three turnkey chapters of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*—the seventh, eighth, and ninth, which together provide entry to the most interior depth explored in the books closing chapters, thereafter—Du Bois makes the interpretive analogy of the historical conditions of African Americans of the southern region of the United States, notably of the region across the American south that he metaphorized as "the Black Belt," as akin to the conditions of the peasantries of France and Italy (England too) during the era of the *ancien régime*, which led to the cataclysm of the French Revolution (Du Bois 1903I, 110–88, esp. 150–53 and 158–59, chap. 8, paras. 26–28, 36).<sup>6</sup> So Europe as a figure of comparison, remark, and reference can be seen to run throughout the entirety of the essays gathered under the heading of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*—to take the main title for the book as a figurative heading, as it were. Yet Du Bois's main preoccupations here are otherwise than with Europe as such. Thus, in another sense, Europe is on the periphery of his principal thematic concerns and situated in the background of the primary declared work of the text. Thus it is also the case that it is in later autobiographical references and texts strewn across his long career that Du Bois elaborates upon the time and experience of this first trip to Europe and to Germany: for example, in *Darkwater*, *Dusk of Dawn*, and the posthumous text published as the *Autobiography*. In this sense, we can append them to this singular notation of Europe from the opening of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*.



Du Bois studied in Germany at Berlin from September 1892 to March 1894, taking courses and writing a thesis for the doctorate (apparently since lost but perhaps still retrievable). Although nominated for the degree by his professors Gustav Schmoller and Adolph Wagner, it was not affirmed, for the brevity of his residency in situ, the duration of his stay, did not meet the university's declared rule. (And the university at Berlin did not formally recognize his study at Harvard.) He traveled widely throughout Germany and other parts of continental Europe, specifically Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, Poland, France, and the Netherlands. Approaching age fifty, Du Bois recalled:

I crossed the ocean in a trance. Always I seemed to be saying "It is not real; I must be dreaming!" I can live it again—the little, Dutch ship—the blue waters—the smell of new-mown hay—Holland and the Rhine. I saw the Wartburg and Berlin; I made the Harzreise and climbed the Brocken; I saw the Hansa towns and the cities and dorfs of South Germany; I saw the Alps at Berne, the Cathedral at Milan, Florence, Rome, Venice, Vienna, and Pesth; I looked on the boundaries of Russia; and I sat in Paris and London. On mountain and valley, in home and school, I met men and women as I had never met them before. Slowly they became, not white folks, but folks. The unity beneath all life clutched me. I was not less fanatically a Negro, but "Negro" meant a greater, broader sense of humanity and world-fellowship. I felt myself standing, not against the world, but simply against American narrowness and color prejudice, with the greater, finer world at my back urging me on. I builded great castles in Spain and lived therein. I dreamed and loved and wandered and sang. (Du Bois 1975c, 16; see also 1920, 16)

At age seventy, he reflected further on this moment:

Europe modified profoundly my outlook on life and my thought and feeling toward it, even though I was there but two short years with my contacts limited and my friends few. But something of the possible beauty and elegance of life permeated my soul; I gained a respect for manners. I had been before, above all in a hurry. I wanted a world, hard, smooth and swift, and had not time for rounded corners and ornament, for unhurried thought and slow contemplation. Now at times I sat still. I came to know Beethoven's symphony and Wagner's *Ring*. I looked on the colors of Rembrandt and Titian. I saw in arch and stone and steeple the history and striving of men and also their taste and expression. Form, color and words took on new combinations and meanings. (Du Bois 1975d, 45; see also 1968, 156)

And in his last years, his nineties, he wrote across this memory again:

In Germany in 1892 I found myself on the outside of the American world looking in. With me were white folk—students, acquaintances, teachers—who viewed the scene with me. They did not always pause to regard me [with a curiosity or as something subhuman]; I was just a man of a somewhat privileged student rank, with whom they were glad to meet and talk over the world; particularly, the part of the world whence I came. I found to my gratification that they with me, did not regard America as the last word in civilization. Indeed, I derived a certain satisfaction in learning that the University of Berlin did not recognize a degree even from Harvard University no more than Harvard did from Fisk. (Du Bois 1968, 157)

Europe, then, opened another horizon. As Du Bois describes it in these autobiographical recollections, he treasured his solitude, the stillness of a rather new inhabitation of thought. Equally, he discovered and held fast to a kind of companionship that knew no simple boundary. In a corollary fashion, he found that he could delimit any given context by way of such reflection. Thus, the American context became a limited and particular one. Moreover, elsewhere, he speaks not only of other “Whites” in Europe but specifically of his reception in eastern Europe, as he was “several times mistaken for a Jew.” “*Unter den Juden?*,” he is asked by “the driver of a rickety cab” in “a town north of Slovenia,” and, accepting the terms of the “mistake,” he “stayed in a little Jewish inn” (Du Bois 1968, 174–75). This solitude and new sense of possible companionship delimited his imagination in such a fashion that he could envision a New Negro vanguard and a renewed (New) Negro “race” participating in a peaceful world revolution of ideals.

An imaginary or fantastic sense of an illimitable collectivity, even if not a simple unity, took shape within this experience. I would propose that we can formalize a sense of this motif under the theoretical heading of *external association*.<sup>7</sup>

It might appear an obvious conclusion to understand Du Bois’s time in Europe, especially in Germany, during this moment as the culmination of a certain humanism and the birth of a certain internationalism thereby in the understanding of himself and of the world in general, as the passage beyond a sedimented parochiality, as the discovery of a path to a true universalism. And while this is certainly so in one sense, and indeed one would wish such in general for anyone, not only for Du Bois, in the discovery of what it means to inhabit a whole other way of existence, perhaps

another world, and to discover a radical sense of the manner that the given can be rendered otherwise, perhaps it remains that there is another sense, even more radical, in which the question must also be understood: simultaneously. What if Du Bois's whole inhabitation of Europe during the early 1890s should be understood as a scene (and not the only one when viewed as part of an early stage of the life course of thought) of the dynamic unfolding of his nascent self-critical understanding of himself as a Negro and a Negro American? What if, for him, a dream of an illimitable concatenation of association among humans took its existential predication and form in a possibility that announced itself by way of his experience of existence as a form of dissociation? Reserved from our first access, it is nonetheless the form of this organization of subjectivation, that might allow for the reflexive naming of two sides of a limit and in so doing thus announce an inhabitation of an originary complication in the constitution of a sense of being, given to us (within our own inquiry) under the heading of the autobiographical, by way of the example of Du Bois. It is this form, or the apparition of such, that must occupy our attention.

It is here, then, that we can properly situate the ambivalence of a fundamental passage in Du Bois's intellectual development. As we retrieve it through an account that he prepared of his somewhat privative celebration of his twenty-fifth birthday in Berlin, the question that arose might be put thus: To what do I belong in my historical present and future?<sup>8</sup> The question is the status of the sense of historical limit within subjectivation.

For a reader of this memorial notation, the answer that Du Bois gives is perhaps first distinguished by its tone: a combination of arch bravado and a somewhat defiant and inaccessible melancholy. This tone in turn directs one thus to the most abiding sense, perhaps, that one gathers upon reading this text: that the narrator is alone. Alone. And that this is not simply in fact but in principle. It is from this unfolding self-reflexive sense of his lived experience, if you will, that the narrator's answer will be given.

The writing of this text precedes the inscription of Europe in the second paragraph of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* that we have been following above and are in the midst of following throughout our discussion of the autobiographical here. It was written in February 1893, seven months into the time of his experience as a student living in Berlin. The first inscription of the textual passage speaking of Europe amidst the discourse of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* dates from the late spring or early summer of 1897. I quote freely here of the passage from the late winter of 1893:

I am striving to make my life all that life may be—and I am limiting that strife only in so far as that strife is incompatible with others of my brothers and sisters making their lives similar. The crucial question now is where that limit comes. I am too often puzzled to know. . . . God knows I am sorely puzzled. I am firmly convinced that my own best development is [not]<sup>9</sup> one and the same with the best development of the world and here I am willing to sacrifice . . . and now comes the question of how. The general proposition of working for the world's good becomes too soon sickly sentimentality. I therefore take the work that the Unknown lay in my hands and work for the rise of the Negro people, taking for granted that their best development means the best development of the world. This night before my life's altar, I reiterate, what my life . . . (Du Bois 1985c)

A note from the editor, Herbert Aptheker, indicates that “pages 8–10 of the original manuscript are missing” (Du Bois 1985c). In the extant pages, when the text resumes, near its end, the narrator is in the midst of an apparently wistful memory. Mentioning his experiences at Fisk and Harvard, and his past loves, he writes, “Then Europe where the heart of my childhood loosed from the hard iron hands of America has beat again in the great inspiring air of world culture” (Du Bois 1985c).

Let us briefly work back across several layers of the rhetorical and semantic strata of this passage. The narrator has already made a decision. He will dedicate his life to “work for the rise of the Negro people.” According to his stated logic, beyond the first blush of a declaration, this is not a simple chauvinism. For it is based on a judgment that is presented as prior: “that their [the Negro people’s] best development means the best development of the world.” What is the status of this generalization? It should certainly not be understood as a simple or naive reduction of the whole of *the* world to that of the Negro. Perhaps it could mean that in order to understand the Negro, one must understand *the* whole world. Perhaps it could also mean that in order to understand the world, it might be essential to understand the *whole problem of the Negro as world*. The Negro as example then cuts through and beyond the “narrow American world” and yet gives the question of *the* whole of the world its tractable historicity. It is thus, perhaps, that we might apprehend the even more previous judgment, given in the form of a refusal of the misleading apparitional neutrality of the universal, when he writes, “The general proposition of working for the world’s good becomes too soon sickly sentimentality.”<sup>10</sup>

Now, proceeding according to the text, perhaps we can remark the traces of some rather disparate imprints or impressions that remain of a

complex movement. In terms of the status, then, of the experience of Europe in the unfolding sense of world for our narrator, the text tells us that the horizon has already been broken. The simplicity of an inherited idea of America, given as if a form of his natality, has already been complicated. Yet there is a maintenance here, so the narrator declares, of something that appears as almost primordial and indestructible, “the heart” of his “childhood.” But is that which is recorded here only (if at all) a primordial root or stem that has survived into the present of his writing? Perhaps. But even if so, what is also registered here are the remains of a cut, division, or restriction, an instituted limitation, whose bearing or effects can only announce themselves within the subject in formation as figures of ambivalence.<sup>11</sup> But they can yet assist in making possible a delimitation. (One says something like, “So, if that is your idea of the game, then I am really not sure that I wish to be a part of it at all”; the child declares threateningly, “I’ll take my marbles and go home!”) Such figurative moments of hesitation are susceptible to a metaleptic retrieval, and such retrieval would not always be benign or containable within a sanguine disposition. Perhaps it is this operation that we see moving through the semantic instability of the declarations of this text. Du Bois’s discourse of full-throated youthful bravado then would yield not only a putative continuity from the “heart” but from this metaleptic inhabitation of his present. Such inhabitation here proceeds by way of a kind of breaking up of the compressed sedimentation or fault lines of an instituted limitation. As a response to a solicitation, it retraces or tracks the disfigured remains of the line of force by which that mark was instituted. Such a response is a folding that displaces the apparitional punctuality of the mark, concatenating its supposed primordial originarity with other lines of force. This concatenation might be understood to produce an *atopic* dispersal or dissemination of such a line—even if configured as a scene of emergence. On occasion, at the level of the formation of sense for the subject, the effects of such relations of force might be available for metaphorization on the order of the rumblings of a small volcano or the tremors of a barely tenable earthquake. Yet while we cannot ourselves declare some pure or primordial ground for what is yielded by way of such desedimentation, we can affirm that this declaration by our narrator is effective for him at the level of its enunciation: it relativizes the American scene—one that would have relativized and restricted him, rendered him parochial in every sense—and delimits another horizon, even a beyond of any given horizon, as the orientation of hope, desire, and becoming.

For us, at the level of a retrospective analysis, if not for Du Bois the subject or narrator, this whole movement has the form of a nonsynchronous simultaneity. In this sense, then, as descriptor and cautionary protocol for our own approach to this moment in Du Bois's thought, it might be reasonable to say that before his arrival in Europe, Du Bois had certainly already begun to insist that no matter the presumptive limits of the mark of the color line, *for him*, his future was *not yet decided*. For it can be understood that it was such a perspective, that of possibility in his own life, that led him to pursue study in Europe.<sup>12</sup> It was a sense of possibility that remained, during those years of the early 1890s, open in his thinking—receptive for whatever it could *come to mean for him*. Thus, the European experience should certainly not be misunderstood as determinate of his entire sense of the African American situation or as the only basis for his thought of an illimitable sense of human existence. As I noted above, Du Bois himself described the experience in Europe, saying that it “modified profoundly my outlook on life and my thought and feeling toward it.” Neither the profundity of this modification of his sense of the parochialism of the American division along the color line nor that it come to that function by working over an ongoing inhabitation of his sense of the African American as a name for a possibility yet to come should be left aside.

What we must countenance, in the terms of the formulations that I have proposed here, is the thought that Du Bois's dream of an illimitable concatenation of *external association* took its *historical* predication and form from the possibility opened by way of his supple inhabitation, simultaneously negative and affirmative, thereby radical in a critical sense, of an ongoing reflexive practice of judgment and decision, of a movement of *internal dissociation*. Thus, we might say in the biographical or autobiographical register that Du Bois inhabits European historicity, including European discourses of critique, say a certain philosophy or a nascent science of the human, by way of a historicity that we can properly name as African American without any presumption of pure essence. In this specific sense, it is his own, his peculiar, historicity. This is certainly to say the obvious: that he inhabits Europe on the basis of his previous history and social experience. Yet it means something more fundamental. The autobiographical reflection and account of the experience of Europe is formulated by way of a certain inhabitation of his specific or peculiar historicity. An affirmation of the spacing of this dissociation, its formation as the articulation of the heterogeneous is then, paradoxically, an announcement of a peculiar and originary inhabitation of the historical.

This is thus to say that the passage of a movement of dissociation is the name of the structure of a retrospective metaleptic inhabitation of the sense of Europe that we can without any presumption of simple essence or primordial obligation name in the historical sense as Negro or African American. The status of Europe in the unfolding of Du Bois's sense of self is given in an autobiographical account whose epistemological possibility and form are themselves, in part, but in a fundamental way, the manifestation of a certain inhabitation of his most specific and peculiar historical possibility. Thus, it can be seen that the Europe that Du Bois announces here, at the opening of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, as the opening to the imagined sense of an illimitable possible association, in the first instance has its configured implication as example, for him and for us, by way of its taking epistemic shape in the movement of a kind of double inhabitation or inhabitation of the double—a certain form of internal dissociation that is otherwise than simply passive—that is the narrator's critical inhabitation of his peculiar historicity.

Yet we would reconstitute in our own discourse the apparition of the oppositional logic of this form of proscription if that were all we could adduce in Du Bois's practice. The critical inhabitation of the economy of thought and practice that we are tracing here in Du Bois's discourse can only become commensurate with the question at stake for it in his thought if it practices *along with his discourse* a certain exorbitance in relation to the logic of opposition. It is here that we can affirm that it is *also* the case that the figure of Europe, this example, in this opening passage of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, marks a possibility beyond the limits given by this problem of the color line. It is here that we can see that at the end of the nineteenth century, for Du Bois, the experience of "Europe"—perhaps allegorically tractable in the form of the travels of the young twenty-something Du Bois—made possible the tracing of a legible frame or horizon that could nonetheless relativize all previous experience. As such, the experience of Europe would affirm, in this young figure, the powerfully political aspect of his ambivalence in the engagement with the oppositional or categorical premise of the color line. As such, it should be understood as an example that could refract the logic operative at the root of this historicity in such a fashion that it could disrupt the ultimate pertinence of the line. And, for him, this devolution took such fractal patterns of dispersal (perhaps always otherwise than fractal), most precisely even as there was no absolute necessity in the realization of this possibility. And then, further, if such a refraction were attached to the kinetic force of



the violence that would install this line, by way of the double movement of identification named in this autobiographical account, the form of this line could paradoxically begin to twist, to defract and to refract, such that the possibility of passage to an illimitable inhabitation of being, the atopic passage that maintains both sides of a limit, perhaps metaphorizable here according to the apparition of a virtual geometric figure that articulates as a kind of *éllipsis* or the apparition of an open circle, or a broken line, or, better, a movement by which such could be announced at all, the possibility of inhabitation of existence beyond even that which can be given in outline, beyond the simple plane or parallel, such is rendered—perhaps, in the form of question. At best, it is a movement that yields doubled parallaxes. As such, the dynamic operative here is a movement of the imagination—as freedom or chance—such that an inhabitation beyond any boundary given as a form of proscriptive limitation is proposed as of existence. In this manner, the discursive recollection of the sense of the double, the inscription of a sense of internal dissociation in the temporality of thought, is rendered in a fashion that is inextricably interwoven with the recollection of the hypothetical sense of external association, the existential space of which is named for thought in a narrative of the coming of age of a Negro American—one William Edward Burghardt Du Bois—as such an experience opened as a scene of the habitation of critical thought in the horizons of Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. It is for this reason that it must also be affirmed as autobiographically unfungible that the sense of dissociation announced therein, with all of the productivity that we have sought to notice above, acquires a certain legibility for thought in this passage beyond the existing or given limits of the American scene that is the retrospective experience of Europe for the young Du Bois.

In this way, then, the sense of dissociation and the sense of association, each and each in relation, are announced and elaborated in thought according to the discourse of Du Bois's autobiographical accounts in a fundamentally elliptical reciprocity. That is to say, understood together, their form as constitutive movements in the historical production of a subject is that of a dynamic dissymmetric relation or difference. Each is announced in its own irruption. And, thus, they are not subsumable within the other in any sense. Yet neither could be announced except by way of a metaleptic retrieval carried out in the atopic inhabitation of the scene or horizon that is opened by way of the other. The recollection of the experience of dissociation is named in a retrospective account of the experience of association that acquires its nodal organization across the layers of the sedimented

epistemic subsoil of the historicity that would render a critical sense of such dissociation as the form of a possible lived experience. The temporality operative here is such that it distends any presumption of the priority of time as a given present. The geographic distension of this movement is the name of a duration that is thus the very form of existential possibility. The event of experience, if there is such, occurs in both the before and in the after of its incipit and then, too, remains in that which is yet to come, both here and there. It is a complicated *atopic* movement of temporalities.

It can now be said that in this discussion of the sense of the autobiographical example in the practice of Du Bois we have outlined a movement of reflexivity or sense that marks out the path by which the subject of critical thought—a thinker, a practitioner of thought, an intellectual, a writer—came into relief, or into itself, rendered as a form of problem. But, equally, we have remarked the process of bringing into relief the terms of a critical inhabitation of world, of history, of a historical present, for such a putative subject. The subjectivity in question is rendered according to the terms of another horizon whose sense is announced as illimitable by way of an experience of dissociation that takes the form of a nonsynchronous simultaneity as the becoming of the self in the practice of thought. At each step or level of the elucidation, what has been remarked is the extent to which such practice in the itinerary of Du Bois acquired its form through, or as, a maintenance of an affirmation of a chance or freedom in the organization of experience. We might say, then, that the figure of the double is simply a concept metaphor for this possibility and this complex process.

Such would be the announcement of historicity, as existential, as such might be specifiable or tractable in terms of a putative individuation of person or subject announced in the order of the autobiographical.

## II. HISTORIOGRAPHIES

What is now at issue is the status of the historiographical as an order of example of possibility and not so much as a supposed simple and direct thought of the whole in general, whatever is such. The dimension of problem to which we now turn cannot be named by way of the analogy of a simple linearity or discrete contiguity.

In its eventuality, it might yield the problem of a difficult thought of horizon as otherwise than the given or that which could be—even in the staid sense of the term—as thought or concept. Orchestration of thought

and practice in this dimension would always be of at least more than one continent (for the matter is *of* relation); this would mean a sense of space and spacing that would always be in its very immanence beyond or otherwise than the simple form of a here and now.

This matter of the-way-in-which, or the question of possibility in its actuality, this is the matter that should remain our guide. Thus, at this juncture in my own discourse, a kind of fold, another fold, if you will, I propose an affirmation of this thought-metaphor of spacing, the movement that forms space, which I began to annotate at the outset of part I as a way to track Du Bois's concern with the figurations of historicity.

Thus, if I present my discourse henceforth as if an unfolding of sheaves upon which we might discern inscription, the matter of the binding of such sheaves would be that they must remain loose and undrawn, if not undrawable. For indeed the matter of the form of discourse must accord, even if as an agonism, with the status of the topographical as itself *of* the topological, in general—even if ultimately, in a new sense, the matter remains *atopos*, otherwise than simply given according to *topos*.

This is also to say that at this juncture of contemporaneity, in our time, along with Du Bois and his time, we must take reference to the dominant orders of thought, even as we might question them. Hence, I propose that we recognize that the general question of historicity in the thinking and political practice of W. E. B. Du Bois was situated at the level of existence that might have once been understood as ontological in the terms of the inheritance of Greek thought as conceptuality as it has issued forth in the modern epoch. This is not at all to declare that Du Bois's thought should be understood or construed as itself an ontology. Thus, it can be said that it concerned for him the sense of being or the way in which something is announced in or as a form of existence. Thus, the question of historicity for him was not only, or first of all, a problem for thought, one concerned with the gathering and establishment of references that would confirm a claim about the material aspects of a form, or forms, of existence—even though it was also such a project. In the epistemic sense of practice as thought, it was simultaneously a question of the possibility of rendering an account of the status, the ground, as genesis or revelation, of a form, or forms, of existence. As an inquiry the question might be summarized by three interlaced interrogatives and a coda: (1) What kind or form of entity is or can be understood as a bearer of historical devolution? (2) Whence comes such a form of existence; that is, from what, or how, does it emerge or arise? (3) What is its end or *telos*, or is such a formulation even the proper one to ask about the character of

its becoming, its past, its present, its future? And then the coda, the motif of which actually runs through each previous question: What are the means by which such questions can be considered, engaged, perhaps answered—if the given, supposed being in its possibility, is itself (if there is such) only as a question? What if the sense of being is always only as a form of question?

Within our own discourse and yet beyond the horizon of our own historicity, the matter of status and sense as question ought not be understood here according to the premise of a putative presumption of the anterior or ultimate determination of the present.

Beyond such reference to the epoch of that which has been understood as ancient Greek conceptuality, the question is about a certain impossible possibility, the opening toward a domain that cannot be thought, as such, but can be announced, if at all, in a movement that cannot be given to a proper name. As I have begun to annotate within Du Bois's discourse, such immanence is about the status we may give to the thought of relation in all senses, in its radical sense, the very possibility of relation, relation as possibility, even as the differences of force that may organize the formation of form, that is to say, also, power.

If I characterize his thought in general on this question, that of historicity, or, better, the historial, I have sought to cultivate a sense of Du Bois's own approach or practice as best understood as from or of a history of the problems of existence. An account of such, his or our own, for example, is neither the chronicle of the greatness of the sovereign (whether as person or people) as conqueror, nor simply the narrative of the realization of a given truth in the form of the idea or the supposed absolute. Historicity, or the apparition of existence as problem, as I understand Du Bois to proffer it across his discourse, is announced in the promulgation of an engagement with problems, with the dynamic constitution of a difficulty as existence itself, its coming into being, in the forms of existence. To place this as a pragmatic matter, historicity emerges in the forms by which an engagement with the difficulties posed as existence configures a group for a time, perhaps, including *both* its possibility, its survival, *or* its becoming something else altogether. This maintains within it the movement of that which will always have been—in a certain sense—inhuman. Historicity, or the historial, is then beyond the question of the status of any particular group; rather, it is about possibility in general: the relation of chance and necessity, that is to say, the configured character of possibility as relation.

In such a light, I can now propose that the question of the subject, or example, of historicity—the historial example—takes on a profound

status in the work of Du Bois. By way of the relation of the question of ontological ground to the question of who can be a subject of history, what exemplifies historicity, this supposed ontological level of the question of historicity (no matter that it may or must be given to desedimentation) is for Du Bois profoundly political—concerned with the organization and bearing of the force of power. The determination of the question of ground is decisive in the practical theoretical judgment of who or what is the bearer of historicity, whether or not such is understood as a proper, the proprietary, or a property. It is thus the crux on which all of Du Bois's major judgments about the political are situated, and, too, it is the question of who is responsible and for what in the making of the future world(s).

In this sense, Du Bois's ideas about the historical might be construed along two dimensions: one, a concern with the possibility of the originary emergence (not only as past but also, and especially, as future) and profile of social groups of one kind or another; the other, a concern to characterize the structure of limit in a historical domain. The necessity of an engagement with both of these questions was given to Du Bois by his situation, by the terms that solicited his reflexive and critical inhabitation.

The first of these two dimensions, the question of originary possibility—that is, the question of the possibility, in all senses, of the realization of forms of existence according to judgment, perhaps as value, perhaps as ideals—is the guiding order of this problematization.

The second dimension of Du Bois's critical engagement of the historical, the form of historical limit, is a constitutive form of the organization of the first dimension within his thought. This latter dimension as part of a project of science in the broad philosophical sense would pose the question of elucidating the general process of historicity, certainly of a domain of history in general, such as the modern epoch, if not of the absolute of history as a system. Yet the paradox of Du Bois's approach to the general or the whole is that it is only and always by way of the nodal irruption of historicity as example or problematization. That is to say, it accedes to the general form of limit by way of the tractable example.

As I indicated at the opening of part I, I will reserve this second dimension for an initial consideration and elaboration on its own terms; see part II of this study. Here, as the first dimension will appear as the titular motive in the discussion at hand, it might be salutary to at least state, in a word as it were, that the production and operation of the concept-metaphor of “the problem of the color line” in Du Bois's thought across more than sixty years offers an account in this domain—of historical

forms of limit—that cannot be set aside without epistemological consequences for even the most contemporary of theoretical discussions of modern forms of historicity.

For his thought here, in its elaboration, is one that attends to systems of material forms of hierarchy and subordination as domination, exploitation, and oppression, just as much as it names so-called ideational systems. It is most certainly about the operations of power. And, for Du Bois, the mode of historical appearance of the “*problem of the color line*” (my emphasis) would always be material even if the forces in play cannot always be represented.

In the epistemic sense, these two dimensions—possibility and limit—are aspects of one general problematic. They are simply respective ways of conceptualizing the same objectivity: the character and implication of collective forms of historical existence. They are conjoined and tractable only in the irruptive emergence and devolution of the example.

The example, at once autobiographical and historiographical in general within discourse, becomes the site of epistemological conjuncture in Du Bois’s thought. It articulates the given as a situation to existence as a committed practice. On the one side, it is the situation of an individual, as singular or collective, as group, as revelatory of historical circumstance. On the other side, it is the activity of an order of individual, notably as a form of group, as an exemplification of both limit and possibility. Du Bois was committed, it must be emphasized, we might even say ultimately, to the question of historical possibility: to the movement of that which is illimitable within the possible as existing limit.

It may be confirmed beyond even the present context of our discussion (which is a certain form of an overture to some essential dimensions of Du Bois’s thought by way of some of his earliest writings) that—as I have proposed elsewhere—all of the forms of historical example that one may find decisive across the whole of Du Bois’s later itinerary were already adduced as signal examples on both an epistemological and a theoretical level in the earliest moments of his intellectual maturation (Chandler 2021).

#### A. OF HORIZON I: “THE AFRO-AMERICAN” (CIRCA 1894)

Now I propose to render a turn in the organization of our passage through the discourse announced under the heading of Du Bois. Further, I will proceed by folding over or under, across, and through the plane of the previous autobiographical exploration another level of passage, the historiographical.

Yet, in this study, the value of this turn from the autobiographical to the historiographical is acquired according to the virtual and rigorous responsibility of a contemporary sense of an *origami*, a fold on the bias, for these so-called parts of our discourse here are not at all equivalent: that is to say that this fold is the configuration of a radical asymmetry in which it is the case that while the autobiographical is here the form that allows us passage in thought and discourse to the historiographical, the latter domain is yet in all propriety the general terms of possibility of the former. For therefrom, or in the form of a kind of swiveling movement, I propose to unfold, as a sheaf, a different possible articulation of sensible forms of topography, of historical specificity or example, now thought in terms of another order of generality, the historiographical, not only of limit or necessity but also of imagination and possibility. In this consideration, I propose that Du Bois operates in terms of a concept of the collective as the level of individuation or discursive nominalization. Yet, layered within the imprint of each sheaf of writing, if you will, is the ineluctably intermingled passage of the autobiographical—that is, as both individual and collective and, too, of the given and the as yet impossible possibility.

Thus, while a rendering of this thought of the example by way of a passage through the texts of Du Bois is indeed and in all truth the concern of the whole of this study, at stake in the instance of each one, here I wish to remark, is the incipit of its enunciation in his discourse. And this remarking may have the additional value of allowing us to notice the form of the turning within Du Bois's practical-theoretical reflection, one that in all truth never stops but remains as a recurrent and renewed oscillating gesture and movement, from an existential preoccupation on the order of the autobiographical to one that extends itself to the limits of the historical understood on a planetary scale and on an epochal horizon of temporality.

The first locution of the statement in question is given in the form of an essay that is provocatively titled “The Afro-American,” the composition of which most likely dates from sometime over the course of the late autumn of 1894 to the late spring of 1895—during the half a dozen months or so after his return to the United States by steerage from Germany (where he had studied from midsummer of 1892 to the early spring of 1894), via France and England.

While the original twenty-page typescript can be found among the papers of Du Bois housed in the special collections of the library named after him at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, it was recently published for the first time.<sup>13</sup> We can reasonably adduce the approximate time—within



a given eight-month period—of the composition of this text by Du Bois on the basis of the hand-script signature and title that are given on the last page of the original typescript. It is signed “W. E. Burghardt Du Bois (A. M., Professor of Ancient Classics in Wilberforce University).” We know several facts—that Du Bois was in possession of a master’s degree that had been awarded by Harvard in 1891, that he assumed his duties as a faculty member of Wilberforce at the very end of August 1894, and that he submitted his doctoral thesis to Professor Albert Bushnell Hart at Harvard University in midspring in 1895, which the latter signed in official approval on June 1 of that year (Du Bois 1973e; Aptheker 1989b, 9–10; 1989b, 2; Lewis 1993, 155). Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that the text of “The Afro-American” may have been written (or at least completed) sometime after the assumption of his professorial duties and before his official designation as holder of a doctor of philosophy degree. More specifically, two different time frames seem most plausible for the text’s composition: early to late autumn in 1894 and late spring in 1895. On the one hand, the reference by Du Bois to his train travel on the “continent” in the opening line of the essay suggests an ongoing reflection, implying that Du Bois may have written this text with the memory of a last sojourn (alone) across Germany during the last weeks of March 1894 very much present to mind (Du Bois 1968, 175–76; 1894b). On the other hand, given that we know that Du Bois had been hard at work redrafting the text of the thesis throughout the early months of 1895 (the initial research for which dated back to 1889–91) and that he delivered an address on the occasion of the death of Frederick Douglass for a memorial service held on March 9, 1895, at Wilberforce (some themes of which overlap with “The Afro-American”), it also seems quite plausible that Du Bois could have been led to engage the question of the direction and leadership of African Americans as a group and prepared the essay “The Afro-American” sometime after posting the final pages of his doctoral thesis to Professor Hart at Harvard (Du Bois 1985d, 23–25, 1973f; Aptheker 1989a, 1–3; 1982e).

We can notate here, as well, that if the latter time frame is adduced, we can retrospectively remark the temporality of its construal in the development of Du Bois’s thought about leadership as reciprocally punctuated by the appearance of Alexander Crummell as a commencement speaker at Wilberforce University in the spring of 1895 (a man, as Du Bois would later write in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, to whom he “instinctively bowed” upon their meeting) (Du Bois 1903l, 216, chap. 12, para. 2;

and see whole essay 1903b), on the one hand, and Booker T. Washington's famous Atlanta Exposition speech in the early autumn of that year (to which Du Bois responded on the occasion as "a word fitly spoken"), on the other (Du Bois 1973a, 39).

For our concerns at this juncture in our inquiry about Du Bois, this essay, "The Afro-American," renders traces of the form, the legible relief, of a certain historical passage in thought of an African American intelligentsia.

This essay can rightly be taken as a decisive step in Du Bois's attempt to formulate for himself the theoretical and political terms and project of a putative vocation that could become his own. The title of the essay, then, should in all propriety be taken as Du Bois's first attempt at announcing his own reflexively chosen nominalization of a sense of self in terms of a supposed group or horizon of historical situation. It stands at the inception of a crucial phase in Du Bois's development, at the beginning of a period of three years in which he struggled to clarify for himself his sense of intellectual problematization and a way of engaging it—the sense of a vocation. In the chapter titled "Science and Empire" in the remarkable text *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* of 1940, which might be understood in relation to "The Afro-American" as simply a late extended reprise of the fundamental thought of the original composition with the addition of an elaborated up-to-date coda, Du Bois gives us the pivotal formulation in the form of a recollection: "I tried to isolate myself in the ivory tower of race. I wanted to explain the difficulties of race and the ways in which these difficulties caused political and economic troubles. It was this concentration of thought and action and effort that really, in the end, saved my scientific accuracy and search for truth. But first came a period of three years when I was casting about to find a way of applying science to the race problem" (Du Bois 1975d, 54–55; see also 1968, 208). We can reasonably understand the denouement of this period of vocational and theoretical searching as given a nodal articulation in the pivotal programmatic statement calling for a "scientific" study of the situation of the Negro in the United States that Du Bois presented to the American Academy of Political and Social Science in November 1897, which was subsequently published in early 1898 in the *Annals* of the academy (as the opening text for the January issue of their periodical) and then (a month later) also as a freestanding pamphlet in its special publication series, both under the title "The Study of the Negro Problems" (Du Bois 1898c, 2015b, 1898b, 2015l). I consider this the founding programmatic

statement calling for the systematic practice of an African American studies. If this is so, following Du Bois's own periodization as a thumbnail guide, we can propose, then, that the essay at hand, "The Afro-American," stands at the inception of Du Bois's effort to announce to himself the terms of his possible intellectual projection. It thus offers a legible passage of reflexive discourse that can be remarked as outlining the conjunctive terms by which the so-called Negro problem acquired its incipient organization within his practice as thought. And in this organization, the autobiographical and the historiographical are explicitly conjoined, and the local and the global appear as figures always announced in relation to each other. This so-called Negro problem—in America—is anything but parochial in the terms of Du Bois's discourse, as we may be able to recognize already in this very early essay of his first maturation as a thinker. Yet it must be noted for the scholastic record that the epistemic and theoretical sense that we are adducing here for Du Bois's late autobiographical recollection of the passage of time that we hereby demarcate, from late 1894 to late 1897, has remained essentially unremarked in the critical discussion of his thought, biographical or otherwise.

First, it may be useful to briefly extend here a critical sense that I formulated and began to outline above concerning the autobiographical with regard to how we may understand Du Bois's relation to Europe in general and Germany in particular. Here I note that the scholarship concerned with Du Bois's itinerary during the 1890s on the whole has been primarily oriented toward adducing what we today might wish to claim Du Bois received from Germany and Europe (Barkin 2005, 2000; Schäfer 2001). On the whole, not much scholarship has been situated theoretically to think of his relation to the historical figure of a supposed Europe as a whole as a kind of engagement, critical and variegated, a realized perspective, assiduously and distinctly cultivated. This latter approach would recognize in this engagement an affirmative critical inhabitation of disposition and thought as the leading edge of Du Bois's relation to Europe, and it could account for such a practice by Du Bois as one in which the history, the political situation (in specific but also in terms of a global horizon), and its intellectual discourses of science and philosophy are all at stake and not simply assumed; moreover, it would recognize the dynamic, yet principled, unfolding of his relation to Europe in general across the first six decades of the tumultuous twentieth century. Despite the apparent consolidation over the past two decades of the postwar discussion of Du Bois's relation to Europe, within

that relatively recent discourse, some efforts have gestured in the direction of remarking his relation as a whole engagement (Rothberg 2001; Sollors 1999; Beck 1998). The text at hand by Du Bois, especially its opening dialogue (among others across his discourse), might well be taken as a legible indication of the possibility of a more balanced and supple understanding of this relation. Two other texts by Du Bois from the 1890s, both of which remained unpublished during his lifetime and were brought to publication at the turn of the twenty-first century by Kenneth Barkin—“The Present Condition of German Politics” (1998a) and “The Socialism of German Socialists” (1998b)—give further indication of the depth of Du Bois’s critical inhabitation of Europe at that time. They provide a poignant engagement with the whole crisis of liberalism and the social question (especially the problem of a certain “socialism” in the general sense) afoot in Germany and Europe at the time.<sup>14</sup> These two texts stand then—along with the essay “The Afro-American” (circa 1894–95), the memorial speech “Douglass as Statesman” (circa 1895, published for the first time in 1964 by Herbert Aptheker), and the public lecture “The Art and Art Galleries of Modern Europe” (circa 1896, also published for the first time by Aptheker in 1985)—as a quite rich set of intertextually related documents marking the young Du Bois’s far-ranging and yet deeply probing critical thought on the historical (both political and economic) and supposed historical situation (that is, on the terms of the whole question of historical possibility) of African Americans, the project of America, and modern Europe (Du Bois 2015a, 1964, 1985a; note also 2010 and 1982e). On one fundamental level, they form an intertextual discourse in which the problem of leadership (its moral and intellectual projection of duty to uplift society) is the foremost theoretical guide. Europe, then, is both part of this problematic as an example and a source of thought and ideas for its address. Yet, as I suggest later in this commentary, so is “the Afro-American” and a certain “America,” of which (with regard to both) Douglass is—for Du Bois in the 1890s—the stellar example. Thus, here too, one must index the gathering of this understanding specifically with regard to Du Bois’s solicitation of a new African American leadership under the heading of the “talented tenth” in mid-1903 (Du Bois 1903n, 2015m).

Now, second, with regard to “The Afro-American,” we can annotate our reception at the outset to the effect that this essay is the theoretical form of Du Bois’s return from Europe to the United States of America.

Organized as an ambulatory discourse of four paragraphs and a main discourse of four sections, the essay is oriented toward one concern: to

articulate a sense of the situation of the “Afro-American” from the point of view of this putative historical and social subject itself.

The turning that we have begun to remark is made across the crucible of the problem of representation. That is to say that the stage-setting problem of the essay as a whole is that of the question of understanding or knowledge and the concomitant question of the representation of the situation of the Negro in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The question can be further unfolded as the problem of the representation of the so-called Negro problem both by others and by the putative “Negro himself.” And, in an apparently small but ultimately decisive formulation, Du Bois will come to proclaim that in America, “Americans” in general (other than the Negro) “veil” the situation of the American Negro from themselves. In the thought of the young Du Bois of the middle of the 1890s, the problem at its root is one of “understanding.” The project, then, is to engage the prevailing discourse on “the Negro question” and to intervene in its terms by way of announcing the Negro’s own representation of their own sense of themselves as a form of problem—and this sense will mean in part, in its eventuality, a form of solution.

The essay opens and closes with an autobiographical reference, the first situated on the level of the individual and the latter on the level of a collective. In its middle stages, it formulates a sense of problem, the so-called Negro problem, and outlines a series of approaches to it, three different ones proposed by others and a nascent perspective that would be proffered by a putatively new “Afro-American” intelligentsia at the end of the nineteenth century. Across the discourse of this incipient essay, all of the most poignant and famous themes and concept-metaphors of Du Bois’s thought of the turn of the century are already announced—in thoughtful gesture and reflexive distinction, if not in the fullness of their lexical and theoretical nominalization. In a sense that could be sustained at all levels of its discourse—lexical, rhetorical (conceptual and metaphorical), and theoretical—it could be demonstrated that the pivotal essay “Strivings of the Negro People” from mid-1897, which was subsequently positioned as the opening chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, is in every sense a performative and transformative reinscription of the essay “The Afro-American.” The fullness of Du Bois’s attempt to think the whole of the historically given present situation of the Negro in the United States at the time of this inscription gives the latter essay its most distinctive character. It is thus the political-theoretical form in which Du

Bois first attempts to announce himself as an independent intellectual persona within the American scene.

**1. A PASSAGE.** The discourse of the essay opens with the flush of a searching gesture of self-reflexivity, which, paradoxically perhaps, is formulated by reference to his sense of the apperception of his persona by others. Across the cusp of this perambulatory statement and fictional dialogue in its conjunction with the opening of the first section of the essay proper, the first formulation of a certain structure of critical self-reflexivity begins to take shape. It is a movement of self-reflexivity that would justly become the definitive epistemic passage in opening the most radical order of Du Bois's own gestures in thought. In these opening paragraphs of "The Afro-American," we see the first discursive appearance of a practical theoretical problematization on the order of *thought*, a certain critical reflexivity, of the sense of inhabitation of the historically rendered forms of identification that would define one W. E. B. Du Bois or the putative forms of collectivity to which he might be understood and understand himself to belong. In this specific sense, we can say only retrospectively that it is the first rhetorical form within Du Bois's discourse of the problem that he will in its eventuality construe under the heading of "double-consciousness." As this essay has remained essentially unremarked or unknown in the critical literature, I will quote its ambulatory paragraphs and embedded dialogue in full here:

In a third class continental railway carriage, my neighbors at first stare at me—sometimes a bit impudently, sometimes with an inquisitive smile. I have grown so used to this that I can sit quietly for an hour or so with from three to six pairs of eyes focused on my brown face, my closely curled hair, my hat, my clothes, my hands and the visible part of my soul, without betraying any considerable impatience. After satisfying their eyes and becoming more or less assured that I am neither wild nor a member of a passing circus, one of the bolder ones usually seeks to open a conversation, through the weather, the speed of the train, the window, or some such railway topic. It depends of course on my mood as to whether the conversation is particularly successful. Sometimes when there are [not many] with us, and my neighbor is pleasant and gentlemanly, I let the talk run on, well knowing whither it will eventually drift. I agree that the weather is pleasant, that the open window is to my taste, *et cetera*.

My friend then generally sees fit to compliment my accent and says:  
"Your native tongue is—?"

“English.”

Here comes always the first look of surprise. Oh! he thought I spoke French, or Spanish, or Arabian.

“You are then from English India?”

“No, I am an American.”

“Ah, yes—South American of course; I’ve a cousin—”

“No, I’m from the United States, North America.”

“Indeed, but I thought—were you born there, may I ask?”

“Yes, and my father, my grand father and my great grand father.”

“Is that so! Excuse me, I had thought from your color—”

“I am of Negro descent.”

In this manner it gradually dawns upon my inquisitive friend that he is face to face with a modern “problem.” He recollects the emancipation of several millions of slaves in the United States some years ago, and he has since heard more or less of the trouble which naturally followed with this horde of partially civilized freedmen. In common, however, with the rest of the European world he had always thought of these people in the third person, and had no more imagined himself discussing this race problem with one of them, than he had planned talking Egyptology with a pyramid. The curiosity of my neighbor, therefore increases. He hesitates at openly prying into my private affairs or into such public ones as may be painful to me. Yet he is interested, for here, says he is a young man whose very existence is a kind of social paradox: removed but a couple of generations from barbarism, he is yet no barbarian; and again though to all appearances the civilized member of a civilized state, he represents the 19th century problem of barbarism.

I am not always unwilling to satisfy my friend’s curiosity. Yes, I tell him, I am one of those nine million human beings in the United States, who constitute the so-called “Negro Problem.” The majority of us are not of pure Negro blood, and therefore, as a people, cannot be described as Negroes; neither we nor our ancestors for generations were born in Africa and thus we are not African. We describe ourselves by the perhaps awkward, but certainly more accurate term of Afro-American. If, now, the interest of my neighbor still continues, I proceed to enlarge on a subject which naturally lies near my heart. (AA paras. 1–4)

In these opening paragraphs of “The Afro-American,” Du Bois begins by hypothesizing a description of himself through “the eyes of others.” And this formulation of a narratological or epistemological point of view will certainly come to stand as exemplary across his entire itinerary of discourse.



It is related to all of his subsequent major statements of the problematization that defined his thought. Its richness is such that it can and must sustain multiple approaches to its discourse. Here we will mark out only a certain track of reflection in the context of our discussion at hand—the question of example.

The scene, as it opens, is of the Negro abroad, beyond the borders of his natal habitation in a local, regional, or national sense. Perhaps it should occasion no surprise that the very incipit of the discourse of the young Du Bois in maturation is a discourse of transnational “travel.”<sup>15</sup> The autobiographical narrator is on a completely different “continent” from his natal one, and the world is named, if at all, from a different shore or heading than one that might presumptively be considered his own. And it is precisely the question of heading, under the question of nominalization, that is at issue. He is in Europe in the general sense and on the continent itself. Yet he is in transit. The question remains, From where to where? In all senses, this is a conversation “of between,” that is, both from and about a movement that is otherwise than a coordination of a punctual present of a determinate space and a given time (Chandler 2014a).

The theme is his sense of the perception of him by others around him. This is self-reflexivity of the second degree, at least and never only. On the implicit level, the entire background of the discourse is that they perceive him as “different from the others,” from themselves and the others, those other than him. He formulates their implicit questions as to whether in some sense he is monstrous—whether he renders the space unsafe for them, as in “wild,” or whether he is abnormal in some definitive manner, as in a member of a “passing circus.” Here, before the incipit of a stated dialogue proper according to Du Bois’s text, he represents their perception of him as a certain order of phenomenal problem. His appearance for them is outside of the norm: thus the question “What is . . . ?” But their eventual judgment is that he is within the compass of their anticipation of the possible forms of human. He is comprehensible by way of their notions of civility. In a moment, this form of precomprehension will be shattered, at least for one hypothetical member of this circumstantial and fictional group.

Du Bois, the “Afro-American” narrator, then outlines a typical course of conversation. It proceeds by way of indirection. It is in all senses a discourse of “between.” Expressions of curiosity mount, about the weather, the speed of the train, the aperture of the window, and so forth. His response is to meet such indirection with the same: “I agree that the weather

is pleasant, that the open window is to my taste, *et cetera*.” And, so far, he describes his supposed interlocutor as “gentlemanly” or, with a gesture of politesse, as “my friend.” In its eventuality, the course of the conversation picks up an orientation toward a question of his origins or his identification. It unfolds as a series of questions and responses that are punctuated by statements of repeated surprise, which acquire their rhetorical implication by their appearance against the foil of an indirectly spoken but nonetheless relentlessly declared statement of always already achieved knowledge on the part of the autobiographical narrator. This narrator is a worldly one.

The explicit register of the first question is the narrator’s language. Perhaps the language of the conversation is German, for it takes place in “continental” Europe, and French, Spanish, and English, along with Arabic (Du Bois writes “Arabian”), are queried in the dialogue. Here we simply note the biographical facts as we have them at present, that after some initial study of German as well as Latin some years earlier at Fisk, Du Bois really began to speak the language during his first months in Germany during the summer of 1892 (Du Bois 1985d, 6; 1975d, 45–46; 1968, 160–61). He makes no mention anywhere in his autobiographical recollections of learning Italian, perhaps the only other language that would likely function in a synonymic manner in this example. Yet the specific and presumptively literal truth of reference is not decisive. At issue is the narrator’s relation to the language of the interlocution. Is it natal or not? Or, better, does its availability *belong to him*? His accent in that language, although perhaps worthy of compliment, is perceived as otherwise than native: “Your native *tongue* is—?” (emphasis mine). And what goes unasked is the real question, perhaps given as two implicit interrogatives: initially, “Where are you from?” which in all truth means “Who or *what* are you?” When the narrator answers “English,” it only causes greater confusion. It occasions the first “*look*” of surprise (emphasis mine). But this is really the second (or even a third) form of surprise after a hidden or implicit one that stands before and behind the entire opening of spoken interlocution. The first one noted in this recollection was the surprise of his appearance in general. But another unspoken surprise has perhaps also already occurred, the one that yielded a perhaps overly polite judgment that he has already been better spoken than they would have anticipated: “My friend then generally sees fit to compliment my accent.” They both bespeak the character of a hidden—unspoken, perhaps unspeakable—order of presumption in this context.

Yet another turn of question can be noted here in that this open register of the stated form of interlocution, as just noted, carries an implicit one. It is a query about his natal place, the place of his natal origination. Here the stress is on the first term of this nominalization: “Your *native* tongue is—?” (emphasis mine). And here, it can be recognized, the whole implicit order of presumption moves ever so obliquely onto the threshold of the realm of the speakable. The question here is “To what do you belong?” In a general sense, place, as in place of origination, is here presumed by the interlocutor almost as a form of given ontological determination. Language then would be its sign. Thus, “English India,” in the interlocutor’s aggressively inquisitive reply, carries the paradoxical mark of civility at this juncture of the discourse, of which the implication here—without any paradox according to the horizons of colonial discourse and its offshoots—is that it issues from a form of colonial philanthropy. The term “English,” the one shared term of these two respective locutions, in all of the instability and polysemic capacity of its putative reference, is the modifier that bespeaks the presumption. Otherwise, the figure and term of “India” might be enough. Yet even the statement of this latter figure would leave intact the idea that language and place, as in origination, bear a fixed relation. The narrator’s answer disturbs all of the layers of such presumption within the terms of this interlocution: “No, I am an American.” The force of this statement comes from its deepest paradox. While it appears in the form of a statement of essence, an answer to the question “What is . . . ?” or “Who are . . . ?” in all truth it resolutely announces a heterogeneous genealogy all the way down, so to speak, and in all of the orders of reference at issue in the interlocution. The sense of possible reference of the term “English” is simultaneously distended from any fixed origin—the term is “American” and not “English American”—and multiplied in the implication of the horizons of world that it might assist in naming.

Yet the figure of whatever it is that is “American,” as that has been named, is also not simple. This is the third turn of question. It appears, however, not in the explicit form of the interrogative but as a reassertion in even stronger terms of the implicit presumption. It is almost a declarative statement. The interlocutor raises the profile of a certain “South America” in which he would recognize “a cousin.” It is given as the “of course” of a statement of precomprehension in which this “other America” would be apprehended as an extension of the “gentlemanly” interlocutor’s supposed world, not to say family, that is to say, *of* a certain “Europe.” The “South American” would be the derivative cousin of the European in the latter’s

imaginal horizon. We note, however, that at least the question of another “America” (whatever is such) appears on the edge of this dialogic scene. The strongest disruption of any thought of a simple essence attached to an appearance—that of the practice of language, here as speech—comes in the flat insistence by the narrator that his natal origin is “the United States, North America.” In so doing, he proposes against his interlocutor’s repeated presumption of a predetermined recognizability a different truth: that this America, of the north, has anything but a simple form of identity or identifiable sense of essence. Just what is “American” is being problematized for his interlocutor, or at least any precomprehension of what might be such.

It is at this juncture that the interlocution reaches a decisive turning point, in the sense of the dynamic play of perlocutionary force that would determine for this interlocution the order of name attached by both parties to the narrator. It is the most complicated moment of the discourse. The interlocutor’s presumption appears in an implicitly self-reflexive statement as an explicit admission: “Indeed, but *I* thought—” (emphasis mine). And then, finally, interrupting the ever so briefly exposed hint of self-reflection, the question about natality appears explicitly and is posed in starkly direct terms: “Were you born there, may I ask?” This is the presumptive and precomprehended query of the whole dialogue for the interlocutor. It arises from a complication at the root: phenomenal appearance has not yielded the base for a determinate judgment of essence, supposed here as a certain necessary conjunction of natality and language. Likewise, we can remark then that the narrator has continually exacerbated that indetermination rather than relieved it.

Let us turn, then, and follow this exacerbation to its conclusion. The narrator proposes that this complication of the American scene goes, so to speak, all the way down. “Yes,” he was born in “the United States, North America.” But, more important, much more important in the terms of this interlocution, he continues in a manner that has the status of an emphatic gesture, almost an aggressive one, “And my father, my grand father and my great grand father.” With this statement, the questions cease. The next locution, which could well have been expected to take the form of an interrogative, is not such at all. And Du Bois’s punctuation here guides us. It takes the form of a mark of exclamation and not of interrogation: “Is that so!” This locution is simply the beginning of a two-part statement from the interlocutor. In all truth, it is a statement of agreement. Yet, in the rhetorical sense, it is one that is given under the aegis of a certain

perlocutionary force that might be said to arise by way of the narrator's complicated ironic operation, as we have followed it, of the very premises by which the interlocutor had instituted the conversation. It yields also an apology and the admission, again in the ever-so-brief flash of an explicit register of self-reflexivity, of a mistake and a form of prejudgment on the part of the interlocutor: "Excuse me, *I* had thought *from your color* that—" (emphasis mine). Having already fundamentally questioned the premise and the whole logic of this presumptive admission, the narrator can then give a final statement in a manner that is peremptory and appears in the context of this interlocution almost as a triumph: "*I am* of Negro descent" (again, emphasis mine). And yet all of the ambiguities of this statement of apparent being (given in the unavoidable use of the copula) and descent that has been set afoot over the course of this interlocution remain.

We can say, then, that a certain presumption is adduced both rhetorically and thematically as subtending the whole conversation of the narrator and his interlocutor. A certain engagement with that presumption is the concern of this opening stage of the essay "The Afro-American."

We have so far been able to track the rhetorical level of this problematic within the dialogic rhythm of this interlocution. The matter pertains to the syntax of the respective locutions: a contrapuntal movement in which, respectively, a presumption, unstated or not, is given in the discourse of the interlocutor, which is then met by a certain counter, in the form of a confounding contradiction of that presumption and the eventual revelation of a different truth, so to speak, on the part of the narrator.

**2. THE CONCEPTION—OF WORLD.** The thematic level of this problematic is given in the two closing paragraphs of this ambulatory discourse. We can sketch it as the relation of two forms of question or two forms of representation of question. The first is that of the Negro American in the United States as perceived in "the European world" as a "modern 'problem,'" that is, a form of being "whose very existence is a kind of social paradox." As the narrator describes it, he is perceived in the eyes of his interlocutor in this railway carriage as of apparently "barbaric" origins but is yet "to all appearances the civilized member of a civilized state." Du Bois here calls it "the 19th century problem of barbarism," which might well be understood as a nascent formulation of the problem that he would later call "the problem of the color line." If, in the opening scene of the interlocution, just before its incipit in the form of an actual statement, the problem was understood by the narrator's putative interlocutors as one of a certain comprehensible monstrosity,

a borderline “wild” man or a “member of a passing circus,” now we can recognize that for the “gentlemanly” interlocutor proper, a far more profound sense of problem is also operating within his discourse, on its lower registers or among the resonances of its cavernous subterrain. The figure of the narrator, under the heading of the Negro, appears as the name of a great modern social problem. And it takes the reverse form of the one we noticed at the outset. It can now be said that, according to the view of his interlocutor, the Negro has seemed on the terms of his initial appearance—decisively marked here by his linguistic capacity, perhaps his ability to speak in German, a so-called European tongue—within the norm of civility, but, according to the eventuality of the conversation, it has been revealed that he *is*, in actuality, according to this view, descended from “barbaric” and uncivilized origins. Yet interlaced within the whole of this apparently given form of social problem in general is a specifically discursive one. In this view of the question, the so-called Negro is an object of discourse but not at all a possible, let alone probable, subject of such discourse or of a critical reflection. As the narrator poignantly puts it, “In common, however, with the rest of the European world he had always thought of these people in the third person, and had no more imagined himself discussing this race problem with one of them, than he had planned talking Egyptology with a pyramid.” In a sense, the whole discourse of this essay is an intervention and interruption of this form of objectification and its underlying premise of the absence of a critical and reflexive form—in this form—for the announcement of a putative subject. Not only has the table begun to walk, but the walls have also begun to talk. Thus, the second form of question is the one given by the putative object/subject of the conversation—the “Afro-American” himself. And the key is given in that he proposes to self-reflexively name himself in a certain manner: “I am one of those” whom you think “constitute the so-called ‘Negro Problem.’” That is to say, in the initial breath, he names himself to his interlocutor in the terms that would be given by others. However, almost immediately, in the decisive gesture of the interlocution, he proceeds to rename, to reinscribe the name, of the so-called Negro in America according to premises that would define such a figure otherwise than those already given. In logically negative terms, he specifies in two terms or two forms of reference what the Negro in America is not: not of “pure . . . blood,” not of “pure Negro blood, and therefore, of the Negro in America as a people, one ought not describe them as “Negroes” (thus, in part, the complication posed for his interlocutor by the narrator’s “color” or appearance); and not of a simple or single natal origin in a genealogical sense; that is, “neither

we nor our ancestors for generations were born in Africa and thus we are not African” (even as the question of “What is American?” is opened and held in abeyance, as any closure that would exclude the figure in question is forestalled or put at issue). Thus, the narrator concludes, “We describe ourselves by the perhaps awkward, but certainly more accurate term of Afro-American.” This figure, in the voice of the narrator, proposes to intervene here directly and in its own name on the terms by which it would be represented—to the whole of the possible world, we might say.

And then we must recall that this ambulatory discourse is just an overture to a discourse that would attempt to name and rename the terms by which this figure of the “Afro-American” might be announced within the lineaments of Du Bois’s historical present of the end of the nineteenth century. Over the course of the next decade, he will definitively elaborate this thought problem at the level of a self-reflexive discourse as the historical terms of a specific organization of subjectivity—of subjectivation and the pronouncement of a putative subjecthood—here called “Afro-American.” Yet the gradual or eventual character of the processes of this emergent theorization must be adduced. All does not appear in one moment or gesture. Nor does it eventuate in a fully accomplished statement on the level of a generalized theoretical proposition. We will maintain here in our own reinscription this sense of a thought in movement, in process, yet to be finished, or, better, yet to come. The implication of its epistemic irruption remains, even in the form of this emergent enunciation, nonetheless.<sup>16</sup>

In the first step into the main discourse of the essay, across the conjunction of the ambulatory discourse and a first statement of problem, a formulation of an understanding the problematization at stake, Du Bois maintains the self-reflexive register of his discourse even if the specific autobiographical motif has moved somewhat into the recesses or interstices of the explicit statement:<sup>17</sup>

The European child is born into one of several superimposed worlds; he sees in the various social grades and walks of life, so many different and more or less completely separated spheres to only one of which he belongs, and from which he views the others as so many strange and unknown planets. With the white American child, the case is not so different as many democrats would have men believe. With the Afro-American the case is quite different; he is born into a universe which in addition to all horizontal boundaries is separated by a straight perpendicular fissure into a white and black hemisphere. These two halves both have their horizontal differences of educated and ignorant, rich



and poor, law abiding and criminal. On the black side these grades are not, to be sure, so highly differentiated, and the average of culture is far below that of the white side, still they are adjacent and not superimposed spheres.

This fissure between white and black is not everywhere of the same width. Naturally it is the widest in the former slave states and narrowest in the older and more cultivated East. It seldom, however, wholly closes up in New England, while its threatening width in the south is the “Negro Problem.” (AA paras. 5–6)

The question that Du Bois adduces here—following the figure of the child—is that of a peculiar sense of world. Du Bois, it may be understood, is on the track of outlining a complicated sense of world. The world in question is always one of worlds. It is a world that is itself, as such, an infrastructural organization of discontinuities. In this sense, the world has, perhaps always, already been “broken.” It will always have been a “wounded world.”<sup>18</sup> At its limit, it may be that, paradoxically, it will always have been this break or “wound” that will also always have already made possible a complicated epistemic passage of standpoint from which the sense of world in question might be remarked.

Du Bois outlines two contrasting experiences of the sense of world. The “European child” and the “white American child” exist within a world of separate worlds marked by a series of horizontal distinctions, layers, or gradations, configured as distinct “social grades and walks of life.” It is a stratified social order. But, in the telling as given here, however, “world” is yet more or less experienced as if a whole, indeed as a “sphere” (even as we can note that at its root, in its genealogy, the distinction of supposed social class could purport from a certain position of hegemony to function as a categorical mark). The existence of the “Afro-American” child also takes place within separate horizontal worlds but, according to the text at hand, with a radical difference. A vertical or “perpendicular” line of distinction, which Du Bois describes as “a fissure,” divides the horizontal layers into two different “hemispheres,” one “white” and the other “black.” Thus, “world” here, while experienced in a certain way as if a whole, is yet also always already re-marked within that form of experience, that is to say, explicitly marked, as a categorically or oppositionally divided whole. The sense of whole here is always already that of the originarily nonsimple. And even if only in the form of the remark as an infrastructural organization of its possibility, the nonsimple would always remain precisely *as the sense* of “world”—in the apparent here and now of this situation. The sense of world will always have been already phenomenological.

In describing the situation of the Negro in America from a putative third-person point of view, which would yet simultaneously be a partial one, that is, one announced on the bias of a concern to adduce the terms of an “Afro-American” situation, Du Bois accedes to an account of the general structure organizing the social and historical field in question. Just how such an accession unfolds at the epistemological level we will not try to completely address or determine here. The eventuality of its announcement must retain its theoretical opacity for us. Yet the moment of this essay “The Afro-American” is a pivotal stage of theoretical projection, and it is one from which Du Bois in all propriety will never retreat. According to this statement, the problematization that sets afoot the conditions in which something like a Negro or “Afro-American” is announced takes shape as a peculiar organization of relation, one that is yet distributed across the entire social field in general. This is a specific historically produced organization of social field and horizon.

Across four subsequent paragraphs that form the remainder of this opening section of the main body of the essay, Du Bois produces the perhaps apocryphal, yet truthful, figure of a young “black boy” as a coded mark to guide his representation of this heterogeneous sense of historicity (AA paras. 6–9). Making reference to John Greenleaf Whittier’s figuration of the same in the sixth stanza of his poem “Howard at Atlanta,” which was composed in the aftermath of the Civil War and in the advent of Reconstruction, in a gesture that he would reprise in one of the two epigraphs that stand at the head of the fifth chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, titled “Of the Wings of Atalanta,” Du Bois proposes to describe the “peculiar world in which he [the young black boy of the poem] had to ‘rise.’”

This reference is a nodal mark of a deep ore line within Du Bois’s discourse, marking the connections of the reflexivity of his practice to a certain distribution of the historical sedimentation within his thought. On the one hand, it gives legible passage to the historical nexus that gathered upon the formal ending of the Civil War (the deep and vexed historicity encoded therein) and to an epistemological index of the inception of the project of Reconstruction (and its complicated relation to the future of the project of America as a whole, both at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond). On the other hand, this line also indexes Du Bois’s own life course. Born in 1868, Du Bois is fully writing *of*—both from and about—the historicity of which he is an issue. And near the end of this opening section of “The Afro-American,” he will make this explicit, declaring in the

ninth paragraph that the conditions of which he writes pertain to “even the boy born, as I was, in Puritan New England.”

We can recognize the depth of the reference here by two forms of annotation. In the instance, John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem “Howard at Atlanta,” referring in its titular frame to General Oliver Otis Howard, a Union military commander during the Civil War, who was with General William Tecumseh Sherman at Atlanta in September 1864, was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in March 1869 (Whittier 1869). It may thus be understood to index on supposed literary terms directly and broadly one form of potential audience for Du Bois’s essay, even as the latter remained unpublished. Du Bois refers to the fifth and sixth stanzas:

*And he said: “Who hears can never  
Fear for or doubt you:  
What shall I tell the children  
Up North about you?”  
Then ran round a whisper, a murmur,  
Some answer devising;  
And a little boy stood up: “Massa,  
Tell ’em, we’re rising!”*

*O black boy of Atlanta!  
But half was spoken:  
The slave’s chain and the master’s  
Alike are broken.  
The once curse of the races  
Held both in tether:  
They are rising,—all are rising,  
The black and white together!*

Also, however, the specific reference to this poem, in addition to this essay in general, is more than a literary citation; for it is also in all truth a kind of trace or residual mark of the emergent *historial* articulation of what would later become a signal reference in Du Bois’s early thought—the status in the aftermath of war and reconstruction of the immediate generations of those talented among African Americans who somehow found the opportunity to realize some substantial aspect of their capacities.

The “black boy of Atlanta” of the sixth stanza thus refers to an event in 1868, during which a young Richard Robert Wright, a student in a

“new” school for Negro children at Atlanta, in response to a query from a commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau on behalf of General Howard, replied, “We are rising.” The event and the poem are each something other than apocryphal.

For Wright eventually graduated from Atlanta University in 1876 as the valedictorian of his class, going on to become a pioneer in education, a prominent political activist, a major in the U.S. Army, and a banker in Philadelphia (after study at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania), as well as a founding member of the American Negro Academy in 1897, along with Du Bois, among others. At the time that Du Bois wrote this essay—perhaps sometime from late 1894 to early 1895—Wright was head of the State College of Industry for Colored Youth in Savannah, Georgia. William Sanders Scarborough, a native of Georgia and the first graduate of Atlanta University, also a founding member of the American Negro Academy, wrote in his autobiography of being a participant in the events on the occasion and noted that Wright’s phrase had been written in “good King’s English” but that “the newspapers insisted on putting it into a dialect form” (Scarborough 2005, 43–45). As well, during this same time frame, having just returned from doctoral study in Germany and upon being offered a position at Wilberforce University, Du Bois had thought covetously that he would become an assistant professor to Scarborough, a brilliant scholar of classical languages, but the latter had been unceremoniously displaced from his position of fourteen years at Wilberforce and shuttled into its new offshoot, the Payne Seminary, with no regular salary provided. Yet the older scholar would later return and serve for twenty-three years as a distinguished president of that university.

This reference thus indexes the historicity configuring the course of three of the most distinguished men (for one notes the masculine implication of the literary and historical archive’s reference and the essay’s citation to the “black *boy*,” even if not simply expressing a declared self-reflexive intent by this author, that is indexed therein) of the African American intelligentsia of this pivotal moment. Du Bois, it ought to be noted, has thus already remarked (inscribing himself therein)—in 1894—a possible historical intellectual and political formation that he would come to conceptualize nearly a decade later as a “talented tenth” among African Americans in the United States (Du Bois 1903n, 2015m). Within this same purview, we might well recognize the difficult and real ambivalence—of unsentimental sorrow and ambiguous, yet still resolute hope—encoded as a remark across the representation of this same historicity within the

narrative arc of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* during the same time as the essay on the “talented tenth.” For the historical figure of Josie (the young woman of thirty who dies of loss and exhaustion in the backwoods and hills of eastern Tennessee) who appears in the fourth chapter of the classic text as the signal example of the generations left aside from the grand hopes and dreams of the Reconstruction era and now caught and ground within the gears of the resurgent old in the form of sharecropping and peonage and the insurgent new of an industrial reorganization of the proclaimed New South (Du Bois 1903h), along with the fictional Jennie of the penultimate chapter of that same text (the young woman who is protected by her brother—the willful protagonist and ostensible hero of the story—from an ensuing rape), who survives, so it seems, within the apparent truth of the fiction to *potentially* find a way forward into a new horizon (Du Bois 1903f), neither of these figures can appear in a fulsome manner and on their own historical terms within that archive and that the idiomatic resources of the forms of telling such stories at that time—the last decades of the nineteenth century—within Du Bois’s path of thinking.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, in a thetic sense, the leitmotif carried within the reference to the “black boy” of Atlanta, so to speak, in Du Bois’s telling, in which the matter of “education” is the most decisive passage of the life course, is that of “Afro-American” capacity—to “secure a common school education,” to struggle to rise above “the old menial positions” that he had been perennially encouraged to accept, and to move beyond the segregation and prejudice that had both historically and in the present of the fin de siècle “strictly hedged in” his mature social and political life (in homeownership and in participation in civic life, such as the use of “public libraries, theatres . . . , lecture courses, white churches, etc., and . . . hotels, cafés, restaurants, and the like,” but also in the negotiation of the relative absence or limitation of protection by public law for the freedom of movement, e.g., railway transport, freedom from insult or injury, and the right of the franchise) (AA paras. 7–9).

In terms of the whole sweep of the early discourse of Du Bois, he will adduce two orders of concept-metaphor to name the operations of social and historical distinction or forms of relation that concern him here.

On the one hand, he adduces a metaphor to name the distinction as a structure of social relation in general that appears almost as a given form of objectivity. Here Du Bois is trying to represent what he thinks of as a certain reality—a real situation rendered by an account that would be

concerned to present the truth of and about that situation. In the text at hand, such distinction is named by way of a geologic term, *fissure*. Elsewhere, and most often, he renders it by various syntactic deployments and semantic shadings of a geometric or geographic term, *line*. This was a term that had become a constituent lexical and semantic element in the general colloquial formulation of the matter of the turn of the twentieth century, as in the phrase “the color line.” However, it is given a distinctive theoretical weighting in Du Bois’s reinscription of it in the phrase and thought of “the *problem of the color line*” (emphasis mine). Du Bois will adduce this name to characterize the general form of the problem that he wishes to remark, which he will construe as pertaining to all of modern history on a global scale. And he will attempt to exhaustively report and characterize its functioning in the American scene, even its distinctiveness within a comparative horizon, across these early years of his projection of scientific study from the middle of the 1890s through to the World War I. The characterization of this “fissure” as a social condition, then, is the concern of the entire first section of the main body of the essay “The Afro-American,” the first paragraph or so of which I have noted above.

Here I must index Du Bois’s essay of the turn of the century, “The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind,” even though in part II of this study, by way of a close attention to this essay, I attempt to track some aspects of the first declarative statements of Du Bois proposing the theoretical question of “the problem of the color line.”

Likewise, we may note here that fifteen years after preparing “The Afro-American,” in a closing chapter titled “The Legacy of John Brown” within his biographical study of that figure, Du Bois will thematize this relation of hierarchical “horizontal” distinction by “class” with a kind of “vertical” form of hierarchical distinction by socially ascribed “race”—on a global scale of comparison. He writes in paragraphs 38 and 39 of that closing chapter of the original edition of the book *John Brown*:

We are, in fact, to-day repeating in our intercourse between races all the former evils of class distinction within the nation: personal hatred and abuse, mutual injustice, unequal taxation and rigid caste. Individual nations outgrew these fatal things by breaking down the horizontal barriers between classes. We are bringing them back by seeking to erect vertical barriers between races. Men were told that abolition of compulsory class distinction meant the leveling down, degradation, disappearance of culture and genius and the triumph of the mob. As a matter of fact it has been the salvation of European civilization. . . .

The same is true in racial contact. Vertical race distinctions are even more emphatic hindrances to human evolution than horizontal class distinctions, and their tearing away involves fewer chances of degradation and greater opportunities of human betterment than in the case of class lines. On the other hand, persistence in racial distinction spells disaster sooner or later. The earth is growing smaller and more accessible. Race contact will become in the future increasingly inevitable, not only in America, Asia and Africa, but even in Europe. The color line will mean not simply a return to the absurdities of class as exhibited in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but even to the caste of ancient days. This, however, the Japanese, the Chinese, the East Indians and the Negroes are going to resent in just such proportion as they gain power: and they are gaining the power, and they cannot be kept from gaining more power. The price of repression will then be hypocrisy and slavery and blood.

This is the situation to-day. Has John Brown no message—no legacy, then, to the twentieth century? He has and it is this great word: the cost of liberty is less than the price of repression. (Du Bois 1973d, 286–87; but see also 274–301)

Hence, we may reasonably recognize the profundity of the question—at least for Du Bois and within the cadence of his thought—announced in its nascent articulation within the “The Afro-American” of 1894. This world-historical reference was already at issue in his first efforts at the enunciation on this order of problematic, say in 1894; it is thus no surprise to recognize its stakes in the a most emergent moment of his intellectual maturation, say in 1909, approximately a decade and a half later, from the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Du Bois’s distinctive critical conception of modern historicity as a whole came into resolute focus, across the turn from this latter decade to the beginning of the next one, which then was punctuated by the advent of the first war on a planet wide scale of reference.

Yet, on the other hand, as he turns to address at least a putative part of the audience for his representation of the situation of the African American in the United States, the matter of representation itself begins to acquire the character of an explicit part of the problematization. In order to address it, Du Bois will eventually be led to coin one of his most poignant concept-metaphors, “the veil,” as the name for the *problem of representation*—both to the self and to the other, constituting thus an entire social field of articulation, of values and norms—of the dynamic social infrastructures in question, of the elusive play of social distinction



according to a *practical* idea or concept of race. The term *veil* appears as a descriptive verb, rather than as a theoretical nominalization, three-quarters of the way through the essay at hand, “The Afro-American.” In what is apparently the first lexical appearance of the term *veil*—here as the description of an action, *to veil* and not *the veil*—in Du Bois’s discourse in a manner that is yet epistemologically proximate to the implication that we have come to recognize in it in our time, it appears as the name for the act of avoidance that defines the “American people[’s]” engagement with “the kernel of the Negro problem.” That “kernel” is the question of the status (supposed ontology, understood and enacted as moral, political, and legal judgment, almost always with economic consequence, although Du Bois does not make the latter a privileged theme in this essay) according to which the Negro will be recognized in America. The question is whether this figure will be proscribed within the horizon of the American republic “solely because he has Negro blood?” This, we might suggest, following the manner of his statement, could well be simply called the *American* problem with the Negro (my emphasis). At this juncture, Du Bois deploys the word *veil* in its verbal form as the name for the specifically American way of grappling with “the problem of the color line,” a certain denegation, which is the act of “*veiling*,” hiding or disguising, the basic question. And that question is about the presumptive practice that is carried out in the blind of a peremptory judgment (in all truth, a prejudgment) about the status of, the Negro as a form of being. He writes, “This is the kernel of the Negro problem, and the question which the American people have never boldly faced, but have persisted in *veiling* behind other and dependent problems” (AA para. 23; emphasis mine). The order of problem here is, precisely, that of the *representation* of the so-called Negro problems.

We can begin to confirm this sense of the emergence of the term *veil*—*to veil* and *a veil* or *the veil*—as a lexical mark and its eventual acquisition of the status of a theoretical nomination within Du Bois’s interpretive disposition toward the so-called Negro problem by noticing its announcement within what appears to be its next deployment, which in all truth is the epistemologically decisive one, within his discourse. It appears in the famous second paragraph of the essay “Strivings of the Negro People,” which Du Bois completed sometime between the middle and the end of June 1897, while he was still in Philadelphia and just before he left to undertake summer fieldwork in the small southern town of Farmville, Virginia. It was then published in August of that year in the *Atlantic Monthly*. It opens an autobiographical reflection that recalls the young “black boy” of

the essay “The Afro-American” of some two and a half years earlier. He describes its appearance as a reflexive figure in the relation of a failed exchange of “greeting cards”: “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” (Du Bois 1897c, 194; 2015k, 68, para. 2).<sup>20</sup>

In the account of June 1897, the term *veil* undergoes a decisive metaphorization. Under the impress of a theoretical projection, its semantic and grammatical character begins to shift from a description of a discrete action, which could almost appear as voluntary, to the performative nominalization of a constitutive dimension of the organization of a social field. If the 1894 deployment purported to account for an incipient action, then the 1897 operation names a repetitive and sustained outcome of an ongoing social process. If its first appearance was in the form of a verb, then its grammatical accretion in the latter presentation is now that of a noun. The “veil,” then, is adduced here as the fictional name of an *infrastructure* of passively inhabited yet *actively* operated representation, a form of denial or denegation in every sense, that becomes effective as the rendering of social ordination, the implication of which can be understood to function on every level of social existence from the relation of supposed collectivities to the subindividual mark of apparent self-reflexivity.

And then, in a fragment of writing titled “Beyond the Veil in a Virginia Town” that most likely dates from the late summer or early autumn of 1897, perhaps composed during the time of his fieldwork in and around Farmville, Virginia, or shortly thereafter, Du Bois describes this order of presumptive, yet effective, distinction, this representation that is a concatenated form of a certain social “fissure,” in some detail, and he does so under the heading of the concept-metaphor of “the veil.” Its yield on an epistemic level is a theoretical generalization of the problematic named therein to the whole of the social field in question:<sup>21</sup>

Midway between the memory of Nat Turner and John Randolph of Roanoke, beside the yellow waters of the Appomattox, lies a little town whose history winds about the falling stars in '32 and about “The Surrender.” One would not call—ville a pretty town, nor yet has it the unrelieved ugliness of the west. There is a certain southern softness and restfulness not to say laziness about it that gives a charm to its sand and clay, its crazy pavements and “notion” stores. But the most curious thing about—ville is not its look—old brick mansions

and tiny new cottages, its lazily rolling landscape and sparsely wooded knolls that beck and nod to the three-peaked ridge of the blue Alleghenies—the most curious thing about—ville is the Veil. The great Veil—now dark, sinister and wall-like, [now?] light, filmy and silky, but every[where] a dividing veil and running throughout the town and dividing it: 1200 white this side and 1200 Black beyond the Veil.<sup>22</sup>

You who live in single towns will hardly comprehend the double life of this Virginia hamlet. The doctrine of class does not explain it—the caste misses the kernel of the truth. It is two worlds separate yet bound together like those double stars that, bound for all time, whirl around each other separate yet one.

Two little boys are walking along the street. “Big execution in town today,” says one; “white or colored?” asks the other. Two men are standing in the post office. “I’m running fifty hands in the foundry now,” says one. “White or colored?” asks the other. Two countrymen urge their jaded mares across the Appomattox and up main street. “Big meeting at the country,” says one; “white folks or niggers?” asks the other. And thus it runs through life: the Veil is ever there separating the two peoples. At times you may not see it—it may be too thin to notice, but it is ever there. And we have added an eleventh commandment to the decalogue down here: you may have other Gods before Me, you may break the kill commandment and waver around adultery but the eleventh must not be broken; and it reads: Thou shalt not cross the Veil.

Of the life this side of the Veil you all know much; it is the twice told tale of country town life flavored with war memories, and a strange economic experiment, curiously influenced by the other world, but withal quite like [to] Illinois or Connecticut in its business and gossip, its Church [fairs] and [ \_\_\_\_\_ ], its courting, marrying, and dying.

But beyond the Veil lies an undiscovered country, a land of new things, of change, of experiment, of wild hope and sombre realization, of superlatives and italics—of wondrously blended poetry and prose (Du Bois 1897a[?][circa], 1980b, 1985b).

The epistemological significance of this fragment for us is that here the desedimentative force of the thought of the “veil” is brought to term and directly proposed. And this force moves on two registers or along two lines of concatenation. In one register, Du Bois seeks to describe what we might call both sides of the veil, in their irreducible relation, in a “Southern” town. The general epistemological implication of the thought of “the veil,” that is, its capacity to name the production of a putative “white” social horizon as well as that of a supposed “black” or “Negro” one within a general

“American” scene, is brought into explicit relief. This general implication, that is, its capacity to bring into relief something fundamental about the subjectivation of a putatively “white” social and historical subject as well as that of an ostensibly “black” one, is one of the most original dimensions of Du Bois’s discourse.<sup>23</sup> Yet, of equal import, in another register of his discourse, indeed, appearing as its frame, he proposes a movement beyond the mark of limit, outlining it without a discrete nominal term as its proper name yet remarking it as “beyond the veil.” The task of a *re*-representation of this “beyond” then might well be understood as the first naming of the project that he would undertake five years later, more or less, in September 1902, when he began to work in earnest on the production of the text *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. This remarkable book then would appear as the elaborative realization in narrative form of the proposal of this fragment that such a “beyond” might remain as a yet-to-come horizon of “new things, of change, of experiment, of wild hope and sombre realization,” the imagination of which could well be rendered in another form of representation than that given by way of “the veil” in its proscriptive sense—a representation that would be one “of superlatives and italics—of wondrously blended poetry and prose.” It hardly need be said, then, that this has been perhaps the most widely recognized contribution of Du Bois’s work at this stage of its itinerary. In this latter form, then, that given by the rhetorical dynamis of the concept-metaphor of “the veil,” the problem of the representation of a vertically “fissured” social horizon would come to provide the rhetorical frame and theoretical impetus for the narrative that issues as *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. And the thought of going “beyond” the limits of such a horizon would remain its most radical contribution, that of proposing the necessity of a certain practice of interpretation, which indeed stands at the far edge of the human sciences and the humanities in general, certainly then and perhaps even *now*, whatever the latter is as such.

Returning, then, to the letter of the text of the essay “The Afro-American,” the whole thought of this social “fissure” and the related “veiling” of apperception by which it is engaged by “Americans” in general as it is given herein may rightly be taken by our critical and retrospective discourse as the first enunciation, within Du Bois’s own thought according to the terms of concatenation that would eventually be specific to his discourse, of the theoretical proposition of “the problem of the color line” and the theoretical metaphorization that takes shape under the heading of the term “*veil*,” within Du Bois’s discourse.

What is the status and implication of this social “fissure,” according to Du Bois’s thought in this essay? The most obvious impact is its negative effect upon the group that he calls “Afro-American.” It imposes or effects a proscriptive limitation of opportunity, on the level of the group, individually and collectively, to fully realize the potential of the gifts or capacities that they may be able to announce within historicity. Assuming that some would claim that “these discriminations may, in some cases, be merely protective measures of society against its proletariat,” Du Bois nonetheless declares, “They change this character however, when they force back rising talent and desert among blacks, and leave uncurbed ignorance and lawlessness among whites” (AA para. 9). The marks that produce such a fissure are then primarily a means of maintaining a practical status quo of privilege and presumption that is without any fundamental justification. Yet also the impact of this “fissure” on America as a whole, in his view, has been to foreshorten its historical projection and to confound its actions on the level of the nation-state, producing both unwise and contradictory gestures.

**3. THE PECULIAR SENSES OF DISCOURSE.** If such a condition is a historical limit on this project, how has it been addressed by reflective thought? According to what organization of thought and understanding has it been engaged? Have the dominant critical discourses, political, legal, and economic, proposed a viable understanding of this situation such that a real transformation could be produced?

Du Bois makes a basic distinction in this essay among the discourses concerned with the so-called Negro problem, between that of others, collectively configured under the heading of “the American State” (AA para. 10), and that of the so-called Negro American himself, understood as a self-reflexive collectivity.

**A. OF THE STATE.** The discourse of “the American State,” for Du Bois, is formed by way of three diverse but interwoven perspectives. These are the “Ricardean” (the *laissez-faire* approach of the government proper), the “Philanthropic” (inheritors of an abolitionist disposition), and the “Radical” (a certain maintenance of the projection of the Old South) (AA para. 11). In Du Bois’s view, the Negro American’s own idea of the so-called Negro problem remained distinct from such positions but was still only nascent at the midpoint of the 1890s. What, then, is the relation between these three schools of thought pertaining to the Negro problem that have been given by others and the nascent viewpoint of the “Afro-American”

intelligentsia, especially the ideas of one of the latter's young, up-and-coming members, one W. E. B. Du Bois? In essence, none of the three positions given from outside of the discourse of African Americans themselves provides a perspective commensurate with the problematic named as the so-called Negro question, according to him. At the root, however, is a failure of policy and leadership on the part of the national-level state.

The hitherto dominant position has been that of the "Ricardean" (or "Smith-Ricardo") school, taking nominal reference to the figures of Adam Smith and David Ricardo. The position named by this reference had proposed to "emancipate" the slave, in which such action meant only the legal decree of the abolition of the practice of enslavement. It would then, and in fact did, leave the freed slave to so-called free competition (as Du Bois describes it). According to him, the policy proposed and enacted by this school of thought was the "most extreme" case of the application of the "Smith-Ricardo" doctrine of *laissez-faire* that had issued from the eighteenth century:

The situation violated every condition which the English school of social philosophy presupposed as necessary for the application of their laws. Instead of a stable state of society, an absence of great class differences and prejudices, and an approximate equality of opportunity for the competitors, there was a state of society only to be described as revolutionary, a maximum of class hatred and unreasoning prejudice, and the competing "equality" of master and slave. Scarce a single step was taken by the State to remedy this." (AA para. 11)

In a crucial comparative reference, Du Bois scores this policy as outside the norms of recent historical experience as given on the continent of Europe:

Russia, to whom America has often thought it fit to read lectures on national morality, gave the emancipated serfs a part of the land on which they and their fathers had toiled: not an inch was given America's freedmen; the builders of the monarchic Prussian state took care that the ignorant German bauer was in a condition to compete before he was left to "free competition:" the democratic American state did not give its freedmen so much as a spade." (AA para. 11)<sup>24</sup>

This school of thought, according to Du Bois, was inapplicable in theory, and the policy that issued from it was historically abnormal, if not moribund, from its inception. And this censure of the American scene would hold regardless of our own judgment with regard to the Russian and Prussian examples.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, so to speak, the "Smith-Ricardo" approach

had simply continued and often even exacerbated the difficult problems faced by the Negro American in the United States, yielding the present of Du Bois's earlier description of the limits on opportunity experienced by this group.

Fortunately, in Du Bois's reading of the mid-1890s, "the private efforts of philanthropists in some measure, hindered its radical application, the patient stubborn striving of the freedmen accomplished unawaited results, and the white showed itself more friendly to the blacks than the freedmen had expected" (AA para. 12). Otherwise, the outcome of the state-level "Smith-Ricardo" policy might have been far more grave than its actual dire effects. But this "Philanthropic" school, also a product of eighteenth-century thought, was "a development of those one-sided moral and social ideals which made man purely the result of his individual environment" (AA para. 12). While striving for "the highest ideals of humanity," they have yet been fundamentally limited in their approach:

They have seldom escaped narrow fanaticism or great-hearted blindness to facts. Seizing upon the Rousseau-Jefferson half-truth: "All men are created free and equal," they sought to secure the rise of the Negro by a course at College, and the recognition of his rights by legal enactment, or executive dicta. Here naturally, they largely failed. Their laws remained dead-letters, their mandates were hooted down by the mob, while the vast system of private charity which they set on foot to aid the helpless and forsaken freedmen was without general plan, expensively distributed and, shortsighted in its object. The whole philanthropic movement in regard to the Afro-American forgot the real weakness of his situation, i.e., his economic helplessness and dependence; that whatever "equality" he could be said to hold in the American state, was an equality in "poase" and not in "ease."<sup>26</sup> It gave him churches before he had homes, theories of equality instead of personal property, theological bickerings instead of land and tools, and mushroom "colleges" instead of a good common school and industrial training system. (AA para. 13)

And even as this perspective gradually broadened and became more systematized, it remained, although "a huge work of highest importance," that it was "built on the narrow vacillating and humiliating basis of personal charity" (AA para. 13). Thus, finally, as Du Bois so deftly put it at this moment, "The better self of the American people has not yet realized that this situation is something more complicated than a case of pariah almsgiving" (AA para. 13). This "spasmodic charity" of a generation by the time of Du Bois's writing had ultimately shown its inability to conceive



of the whole of the so-called problem of the Negro as one pertaining to the whole of the possibility of the United States as a historical projection.

Even so, in the face of the indifference of the national state and the incoherence of the philanthropic gesture, a reaction had set in that would renounce the Negro's status as an equal political and historical figure within the project of America as a whole and at all levels of the socius. This was the thought of the "Radical" school, in Du Bois's nominalization:

The grand thought of this radical school of opinion lies on the oft-repeated phrase: "This is a white man's country," i.e., in all questions affecting the weal or woe of America, the only people whose interests are to be considered are the members of the Caucasian race. This 15th century phrase is stated baldly and bluntly by some classes; by others it is dressed in 19th century clothes; it is said: We are dealing with facts, not theories of morality; there is among us a vast horde of people, alien to us in looks, in blood, in morals and in culture; our people will not associate with them, and cannot live in peace beside them; they stand on a lower plane of humanity than we, and never have in the past evolved a civilization of their own, nor under a favorable trial today do they show any ability to assimilate or forward modern culture; therefore as a lazy, shiftless, and bestial folk, they must in accordance with the universal law of the survival of the fittest yield before the all-conquering Anglo-Saxon, and must be either transported, isolated or left to slow and certain extermination. (AA para. 14)

Du Bois describes this view as belonging to "many Americans and Europeans" (AA para. 15). Indeed, it must be noted that throughout this essay he is at pains to differentiate a certain reactionary radical disposition within the southern states from the whole of the American South and especially a relatively progressive wing of its leadership. Beyond the South, this disposition could be found throughout America and even abroad in Europe. Du Bois sharply and directly questions two core premises of this "school" of thought. Contrary to their presumption, he holds that their view is not the attitude of the American people as a whole and that the Negro has shown much in their development since Emancipation (as it is commonly understood in African Americanist discourses of the time of Du Bois's writing, as he indexes it this text). While he does not respond here in the form of a declarative statement to the most general and preemptory claim of this school, that is, that the Negro as a group "never has, and never will, do anything to aid and advance the culture and civilization of the day" (AA para. 15), the whole of the remainder of the essay "The Afro-American" should yet be understood as an effort to formulate a decisive answer.

It is an answer that moves on multiple registers. And it is here that the problem of the discourse of the Negro American himself is announced.

**B. OF "THE THING ITSELF."** In order to engage the terms of this latter school in their most deep-seated dimensions, a whole line of intervention is proposed by Du Bois. It is a formulation that is of signal epistemological importance for our understanding of Du Bois's thought, for it will come to retrospectively name the initial course of his specific vocation. The terms of this "school" of thought, as Du Bois's characterizes it, encode the most fundamental metaphysical order of question that subtends the entire discourse of the Negro at this time, distributed across all three of these positions as described so far by Du Bois, despite its variegation within their respective locutions. A kind of knowledge that would be new in terms of the discourse of the Negro in the United States at this time would be necessary in order to propose a way to go beyond the dispute of opinion and the poor empirical measure of the present and to decisively displace the root presumption of this "Radical" school. Du Bois describes this problem of knowledge as "the kernel of the whole problem." The "real truth and the real problems may be laid bare" only by way of a new practice of knowledge with regard to the question of the Negro (AA para. 17). As we have already noted above, Du Bois would be led to formulate and elaborate this necessity in a systematic fashion during late 1897 while engaged in the research that would eventually yield *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Du Bois and Eaton 1899, 1973). However, already in "The Afro-American," the most decisive epistemological dimension of that later statement, and indeed of all of Du Bois's subsequent work, is already given its definitive theoretical place. It is the formulation of the Negro American as otherwise than a putatively simple object of knowledge. He conceptualizes the Negro as also a possible subject of such a project. The Negro, if there is such, is a fundamentally composite entity in terms of the question of human reflection, understanding, and forms of knowledge: "Meantime one of the most important elements of the problem is without doubt, the attitude of the Afro-American himself, his opinion of his situation, his aspirations, and ideals. For it is the peculiarity of problems in social science, as distinguished from physical science, that the thing studied as well as the student, is a living breathing soul, all of whose numberless thoughts and actions must be ascertained and allowed for in the final answer" (AA para. 18). As I notice elsewhere, this dimension of "the study of the Negro problems," as Du Bois will come to name them in

general, that which pertains to the Negro's subjectivity, is eventually understood by him as the epitome of the problematic of such study. He will later call it in epistemological terms "a distinct social mind."<sup>27</sup> And this order of a "distinct" social life might be understood itself to yet manifest two interwoven subsidiary dimensions within it: that of the social life of the group as a whole and that of its self-reflexive discourse, in this last sense that of its own self-criticism or self-reflexive leadership (especially that form which might be called the work of an intelligentsia, although not necessarily or predominantly an academic one).

And so for Du Bois at the end of 1894, the problem a generation after the legal abolition of slavery and the failure of the project of Reconstruction is that no perspective had arisen within this group itself that could be commensurate with its situation. It is this form of problem that takes shape as the most proper concern of the essay "The Afro-American" in a theoretical sense. Its task is thus to announce a new—"Afro-American"—understanding of the situation of the Negro in America from within the subjectivity of this group itself. As we have already noticed from the outset of our consideration of this essay, Du Bois presents the so-called Negro question in America according to a frame of reference that is fundamentally comparative on a global scale. This group, he proposes, faces a historically abnormal situation with regard to the production of a leadership:

The peculiarity of the rise of the Afro-American is that he has been compelled to advance by means of democracy toward ideals which American democracy has set before him. The invariable rule of advance among peoples is the gradual evolving of leading, ruling classes among them, who guide the masses, and incorporate strata after strata with themselves until a sufficient number of the whole race become raised to that average of culture which we call civilization. So to place a nation that [for whom] this usual method of advance was hindered, did not mean the substitution of some new method—it did not result as 18th century social philosophers taught, in the lifting of the race bodily from the bottom into one dead level of equality; it merely [merely] meant that the natural development should be slower, and the natural aristocracy longer deprived of their rightful places as leaders of their own people. Thus it has happened that the majority worship and deification of mob-rule, which has too often in America displaced the high ideals of true democracy, has within the ranks of the freedmen themselves, acted as a disintegrating force at a time when unity and subordination was most needed. (AA para. 19)<sup>28</sup>

In the comparative sense, Du Bois formulates two ways of understanding the development of leadership and ideals. One, given in his own theoretical voice, declares that such development follows an “invariable rule,” in which there is “the gradual evolving of leading, ruling classes,” a “natural aristocracy,” who “should assume that legitimate leadership and beneficent guardianship which the cultured classes of all nations owe their proletariat” (AA para. 19).<sup>29</sup> The other, the conception of which he attributes to “18th century social philosophers,” imagined “the lifting of the race bodily from the bottom into one dead level of equality.”

At variance with both of these ideas—the historical norm and the revolutionary ideal—is the Negro situation in the United States, which from the end of the Civil War to the *fin de siècle* had taken a peculiar path: a slower development of a leadership and no simple uplifting of the whole. Without the availability of any true established comparative norm for such, a situation that Du Bois will shortly describe as one in which the Negro can be understood to have “suddenly broken with his past” but yet remained “out of touch with his environment,” the Negro “ex-slave was compelled, out of the dead-level of his degradation to evolve his leaders and his ideals” (AA para. 20, 19). Thus, while the ideals of the “American State” had inevitably influenced those of the Negro, their effect had actually but yielded confusion for the Negro. That is to say, while the Negro “instinctively” withdrew from “that soul-blunting competition, that *Sturm und Drang* of the gigantic business life, as the great cause of all the disabilities and indignities he suffered,” this withdrawal only “increased the prejudice against him,” for his disposition was not “profitable” (AA para. 19). Yet, within the group itself, this absence of any “natural aristocracy” meant that “it has happened that the majority worship and deification of mob-rule, which has too often in America displaced the high ideals of true democracy, has within the ranks of the freedmen themselves, acted as a disintegrating force at a time when unity and subordination was most needed” (AA para. 19). Approaching the midpoint of the 1890s, the matter can be seen in this light as a distinctive moment in African American intellectual-political history: Frederick Douglass would shortly pass from the scene, as would Alexander Crummell shortly thereafter; Booker T. Washington would be collaboratively anointed (in late 1895, by a kind of joint disposition on the part of both northern and southern white economic and political leaders); and a new leadership from among the ranks of African American women would begin to announce themselves, namely, Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, among others.<sup>30</sup>

The young Du Bois then would try to announce himself and his vision within this volatile and difficult moment of transition in leadership and the production of a new sense of ideals among African Americans.

Positioning himself autobiographically, he writes in the form of the first person plural. In all of its apparent simplicity, it is the rhetorical level of the most decisive theoretical course of thought moving within and across the essay as a whole:

We Afro-Americans claim that the United States has made the dangerous mistake of calling a mass of complicated social problems which lay before the nation, by the common name of “Negro Problem,” and of then attempting to find some one radical remedy for all such distresses.

We claim to see under what is commonly called the Negro problem at least four different problems; We regard the Negro problem proper as nothing more nor less than a question of humanity and national morality. Is the American nation willing to judge, use, and protect its citizens with reference alone to their character and ability, and irrespective of their race and color? Is the conscience of the American Republic so far behind the social ideals of the 19th century, as to deny to a human being the right of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” solely because he has Negro blood? This is the kernel of the Negro problem, and the question which the American people have never boldly faced, but have persisted in *veiling* behind other and dependent problems. (AA paras. 22–23; emphasis mine)

The vocative position adduced here will in all truth announce another order of perspective within this American discourse of the Negro. In brief, it announces a metalevel perspective. In so doing, it shows how the discourses of the Negro are themselves a constitutive part of the so-called Negro problems. In essence, all three of the schools of thought as Du Bois has described them, even the most benevolent (the “Philanthropic” project), along with the apparently, or supposedly, most benign (the “Smith-Ricardo” doctrine), presume in effect, if not as their declared first premise (as in the “Radical” position), that the Negro group itself is the root of the problem. If one does not presume an ontological root as in the last of these three, it remains that for the other two the fundamental issue is ultimately still understood to take the shape of the historical forms of limitation manifested within this group itself. The position announced by Du Bois under the heading of the “Afro-American” begins from an equally fundamental but very different presumption: that the form of problem named as the so-called Negro problem is produced by the organization of

American society in general and on the level of the nation-state as a whole. It is in this sense, then, that one can simultaneously name its “kernel,” “the Negro problem proper,” and yet insist that in its fullness it is not one but several “other and dependent,” interwoven problems.

On the one hand, in a gesture that should perhaps be understood as a counter to the premise of the Negro himself as the root of the problem, Du Bois proposes that if any conceptual breadth should be given to the nominalization “Negro problem,” then it should most properly be understood as a quite general one that is situated “as nothing more nor less than a question of humanity and national morality” (AA para. 23). The Negro question, if there is such, is not first of all or only a question about the Negro. In a philosophical and practical-theoretical sense, it is first a fundamental and general question about the dominant conceptions of humanity, morality, and nation afoot within the domain of the socius called America.

On the other hand, the social difficulty encoded here takes shape as a whole ensemble of social problems. Subsequently, over the remainder of the fourth section of this essay, Du Bois enumerates three domains of reference: the *educational* condition of the Negro, the *political* capacity of the group, and the *moral* forms of habitation and socialization. It must be annotated at this juncture that while Du Bois thematizes the economic condition of the Negro throughout this essay, even emphasizing the role of Negro labor in the nascent and partial economic recovery of the so-called New South, he does not theorize it here as a distinct sphere or order of social problem as such. In all propriety, however, it should be understood according to his stated discourse in this essay as not only interwoven within but subtending, *in a specific theoretical sense*, all that he remarks under the heading of the Negro problems in the plural: the persistence of the Negro’s economic debility renders intractable each solution in every other sphere. The most essential theoretical statement here, however, is that the so-called Negro problems are something other than a form of the simple. They are not in any sense given all at once. Described by him in the context of the Negro, they actually name the forms of a general social problem within the American field in general. This fundamental postulation of the essential heterogeneity of the problematic at issue here will be elaborated across his entire career. For example, it is maintained by Du Bois some three years later, in the late autumn of 1897, at the end of his period of theoretical and vocational “casting about” (as we have notated it above), when he returns to this epistemic threshold again as the opening

of the programmatic essay in which he outlines a certain conception and approach to “the study of the Negro problems”:

Thus a social problem is ever a relation between conditions and action, and as condition and actions vary and change from group to group from time to time and from place to place, so social problems change, develop and grow. Consequently, though we ordinarily speak of the Negro problem as though it were one unchanged question, students must recognize the obvious facts that this problem, like others, has had a long historical development, has changed with the growth and evolution of the nation; moreover, that it is not *one* problem, but rather a plexus of social problems, some new, some old, some simple, some complex; and these problems have their one bond of unity in the fact that they group themselves about those Africans who two centuries of slave-trading brought into the land. (Du Bois 1898c, 3, para. 6; 2015l, 78–79, para. 6)

Whereas proximate to the end of 1894, Du Bois emphasized the non-simplicity of the so-called Negro problems (even as he remarked their historical development), in late 1897 he will insist on their temporality (thus intensifying the sense of their nonsimple root or their heterogeneity). In the later moment, he is able to render the question of the historicity of such forms of problem into distinct theoretical relief. And in the later moment, this insight is conjoined with a rapidly maturing sense of his conception of a general “sociology,” or science of the social, and of his specific vocation within its project. Already engaged in his work on the study of the Negro in Philadelphia, over the course of late 1896 through late 1897, Du Bois would begin to clarify for himself just what task was set for him if he would recognize an engagement with the so-called Negro problems as the most specific and concrete form of problematization that would define his own work. We see the first precocious steps along that path in this closing section of the essay “The Afro-American.”

For the young, effervescent Du Bois, the Negro at the mid-1890s does not measure up to the standard that he would set: “We Afro-Americans acknowledge freely that we form a larger part of those many social problems that confront the American nation; we must educate ourselves, we must learn our duties as voters, we must raise our moral standards” (AA para. 26).<sup>31</sup> However, just as equally, he maintained that every categorical claim about the condition of the Negro, whether presented as empirical or not, was untenable. Across the closing section of the essay, he systematically defends the efforts of the Negro to uplift themselves, as a



group. Announcing himself on the register of the orator and the preacher, he declares in the closing paragraph, “Few peoples have ever striven more earnestly to gain the respect of civilization than we in the last quarter-century” (AA para. 26). As this project will unfold in Du Bois’s discourse over the next decade, it will eventually acquire, in the closing chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, for example, the implication not only of producing the Negro within a given horizon of respectful “civilization,” whether understood as America or the modern world in general, but eventually of deepening and improving it. The impossible possible world of the Negro “beyond the veil” becomes there, as it was already becoming in the mid-1890s, the name of the project of immanent striving that will yield another world in the time to come. In this sense, we can say, too, that the figure of the “Afro-American,” announced within the confines of all manner of historical limit, is yet for Du Bois a name for the futural form of possibility within this American “world.”

It remains, however, to remark perhaps the most powerful theoretical aspect of this text as a discursive intervention. As part of the project of announcing an “Afro-American” sense of the Negro problems, Du Bois has been led to challenge the forms of understanding and knowledge by which the Negro question has been understood. And, more radically still, he has questioned the very terms by which the hegemonic discourses would name the problem in question. That is to say, he has questioned the terms of their *representation* of the Negro problem. And, by way of this critical riposte, the way in which the discourses themselves are part of the problem in question appears in distinct relief. This is to say that Du Bois practices a recognition that the discourses of the Negro are themselves part of the problem, even if he does not himself thematize it on a metalevel of his own discourse or in the manner that we have done here. The “*veiling*” of the “question of humanity and national morality” that is at issue is not just a failure of understanding or knowledge with implications for an abstract construal of the question but rather a practical-theoretical failure that leaves aside from the debate the very premises that predetermine and precomprehend the whole of the supposed question. If it would be critical and not only reflexive, the approach to this question according to the terms of a subjectivity that would understand itself in the first-person plural to be named by such a heading turns the whole question over and indeed puts at issue not only the terms of its self-representation but the terms of the representation of the supposed Negro question in general. The “Negro

problem” then is simply the name given within discourse to an entire dimension of historicity that has constituted the domain called America, or more specifically in this instance the United States of America.

**4. THE THOUGHT OF THE EXAMPLE.** It can now be said that it is on this horizon of historicity and within the interstices of problem announced therein that the discourse and practice of Du Bois took its initial orientation and acquired its most specific sense. As we have just recognized in our recollection of the essay “The Afro-American,” it had been the very threshold condition for the announcement of his ownmost trajectory. In the autobiographical engagement, we have been able to recognize the initial steps of a self-reflexive intellectual and the first political maturation for the young thinker, one W. E. B. Du Bois, in terms of such an order of reference. However, we have also already begun to recognize that the dynamic movement of question that opened this autobiographical passage to the historicity in question acquired its enunciative form only retrospectively, by way of the metaleptic and reciprocal passage from one form of historicity to another: of the individual as supposed ipseity, of nation (or nation-state), or of something else altogether on a more general level than that of the national state. It acquired its legibility in the passage that opened for him joining a certain Europe and a certain America. Certainly, the question of the Negro in the United States is discursively projected into a comparative horizon that should be understood as global in its extension. It is an order of horizon that is global in space and epochal in temporality. Now we can remark that it was this dynamic reflection announced in the idiomatic form of the autobiographical that has yet opened a distinctive epistemic view that could lead to the conceptualization of an entire dimension of historicity as a problem for practical-theoretical engagement. That is to say, we have also been able to suggest the practical-theoretical fecundity in thought that began to announce itself within Du Bois’s inhabitation of that formation. In essence, the forms of such inhabitation as reflexively produced within his discourse—here remarked especially as the internal discourse of the essay “The Afro-American”—are understood to be anything but simple, always other than the one, somewhat and somehow always other than the simplicity of a given here and now. In this sense, we have now been able to fold across and through each other these two main registers of Du Bois’s discourse that we have been following, the autobiographical and the historiographical. While we note that it enabled the critical remark of limit—in the practice of both policy and

discourse—it yet should be emphasized that for Du Bois it also opened an affirmative sense of the heterogeneous—of the more-than-one, of the double, of the peculiar and problematic sense of world (that of, say, the little “black boy of Atlanta”)—as a name of possibility, beyond the here and the now. For Du Bois in the 1890s—in America (whatever is such)—the “Afro-American” announced itself as a practical-theoretical name for such a thought of the beyond.

A decade later, Du Bois will outline this thought with direct reference to the world-historical horizon of modern historicity, on a planetwide scale of implication.

#### B. OF HORIZON II: “THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PEOPLE” (1904)

In the opening paragraph of the essay “The Development of a People,” Du Bois gives the incipit, antecedent to the text proper, according to which his discourse is presumptive with regard to its own possible value:

In the realm of physical health the teachings of Nature, with its stern mercy and merciful punishment, are showing men gradually to avoid the mistake of unhealthful homes, and to clear fever and malaria away from parts of earth otherwise so beautiful. . . . But if we have escaped Medievalism to some extent in the care of physical health, we certainly have not in the higher realm of the economic and spiritual development of people. Here the world rests, and is largely contented to rest, in a strange fatalism. (Development 292, para. 1)

On the basis of a disposition that operates in a theoretical sense as a matter of principle, Du Bois will propose in his essay a first order of reference to knowledge, both science and the learning of those who would seek to know, for the adjudication of the terms of “a people’s advance,” or, more properly put, for humanity in the most general sense of the imagination.

The essay is organized as some forty-seven paragraphs over twenty pages, divided into three discursive components: a conceptualization (paras. 1–16), a narration (paras. 17–29), and a statement, this last given in the form of judgments and propositions (paras. 30–47).

With regard to the conceptualization according to which Du Bois will organize the epistemological domain of his essay, the topical heading of concern is a form of human collective that Du Bois names as “a people.” It is notable that this reference is not a “race group,” as in the 1897 essay “The Conservation of Races” (Du Bois 1897b, 2015c). Too, the reference in this essay is more formal than the sense of “folk” in the 1902–3 gathering

of writing that yields the book *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, published in April of the latter year. But the term of reference here is not yet that of a “culture” group, as that would come to be somewhat formally nominalized in the work of Franz Boas and his students across the second and third decades of the twentieth century; for the concept of culture was not yet a stable lexical term of art, let alone a formal epistemic premise, in discourses in the Americas or Europe, for example, in the years 1903–4 (Boas 1911, 1989; Stocking 1982).

Yet the idea of “a people” is for Du Bois a general heading (perhaps presumptively universal in pertinence). It might be thought of as an idea or concept from the sciences—the human sciences, we might say today—but then, if so, we might specify it as of a nascent sociology, or a science of “man,” which would be a general “anthropology,” including an ethnology, and perhaps even some index of the discourse under the heading of *Geisteswissenschaft* of Germany in the decades on either side of the turn to the twentieth century (Gooding-Williams 2009, 19–66, esp. 37, 47–49; Clarke 2015). In any case, in his conception, it would concern the social problems of any society, in a comparative horizon on a worldwide basis, and encode a commitment to bring forth reform for the benefit or uplift of all (Du Bois 1897d, 1897e, 1898c, 2015i, 2015b, 2015j). It recalls Du Bois’s statement, in his principal early essay “The Conservation of Races,” that any judgment of the status and value of an African American *historical* articulation must accord with the “constitution of the world” (CR 5, 8, paras. 3, 9). Likewise, it projects a conceptualization of human social being as historical (perhaps as part of an evolutionary process but not a predetermined one, in any sense), and this would specifically take its concern from an orientation to think matters African American in the frame of human sociality as a kind of whole. Du Bois’s analytical understanding of his problematic can be remarked in its distinction with regard to the subsequent itinerary of the concept of culture within the human sciences as it was contested and promulgated across the twentieth century. Whereas the dominant sense of this conceptualization, of “culture,” if taken as a viable premise, approached it as if a thing, accomplished, that ought be understood as such and then analyzed (understood by practices of interpretation), in this essay Du Bois’s thought of “a people” would include the past in its concern; however, in order to account for the African American situation, his order of attention and criteria of assessment turn on the basis of an approach that seeks an understanding of that which is yet to come. Hence, his concern is not so much a critique

of the past as it is a commitment to the future. He wishes to wrest from knowledge some theoretical anticipation in thought as to the futural demands of existence for such a group. We may further specify this matter. Nor would it be that for him the limits of the past could serve as criteria for ascertaining the terms of the future. Finally, his sense of futurity would not maintain the future as something immemorial that might be retrieved or projected into a future. Rather, his attention in this essay is toward that which is not yet (and could in all truth remain unrealized and, on the terms of any given present, unrealizable). All just might be at stake in the future of “a people.”

With regard to the determination and judgment as to how “a people” ought to function, at least as idea, that is to say, the putatively general terms according to which one may understand the “development” of “a people” (general, even if not so explicitly declared by Du Bois as universal), that of seeking to know what is necessary to enable a kind of liberty, freedom from necessity—for this one can outline an evolutionary process (in the mundane sense). The process can be thought of as “steps”: from a concern with physical reproduction, “subsistence,” through maintenance, to “accumulation,” and to the priority of learning in conjunction with a decisive commitment to “train the young into the tradition,” to an eventual and possible preminent and privileged freedom to engage in the imaginary and symbolic production of values. The dimension that constitutes the epitome of such traditionalization for Du Bois is the “spiritual,” that is to say, “the transference and sifting and accumulation of the elements of human culture which makes for wider civilization and higher development” (Development 295–96, paras. 10–11).

A narrative is at the theoretical center of the text. He describes the constitution of the Negro American, or even the African American, as historical, a development, a duration marked by events, that can be specified, named, and remarked, which he will do in this essay. It entails a broad historicity. It is an account of the production of modern international systems of enslavement, from the trade in Africans across the Atlantic basin from 1441–42 to 1883 and the organized practice or emplacement of systems of coerced labor throughout the region of the planet soon called as the “Americas” and the “Caribbean.” The historiographical core of this narrative is a conceptualization of the modern historical epoch as a whole. As such, modern systems of enslavement produced in and as the Atlantic basin—from Luanda (organized in the sixteenth century) on the southwestern coast of the continent of Africa; to the islands off the southernmost coast

of the continent now thought of as “South America”; to the bays of the area that has come to be known, within this geographic system, as Nova Scotia; to the Scandinavian region; on, through the British isles, and the continental regions of the peninsula now known as western Europe; to the domains of the Mediterranean—were entailed as the threshold and determinant level in modern commercialism, in all of its diversity and depth, as the inception of modern imperialism, modern colonialism, and the world-historical efflorescence of capitalism as an integrated system of economic organization (Development 298–304, paras. 17–29). For Du Bois, for some quarter of a millennium, the most distinctive form of exploitation and economic accumulation within the domains that we came to think of as world-historical in the modern period derived from modern systems of enslavement across this basin, what he describes in this essay as rivers of “Black Gold” (Development 299, para. 17).<sup>32</sup>

The commercial imperative remarked in this narrative may be given theoretical amplification. We now know that at this early modern juncture, a considerable amount of the gold in circulation in what is now western Europe derived from the goldfields of Africa—already from Kush-Nubia in the ancient period and then, in the early modern period of the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, including both the empires of Ghana and Mali in the west, on the edge of the Sahara, and as well the gold trade centered in the early modern kingdom of Zimbabwe, within the southeastern region of the continent. Hence, although many Europeans already had gold as a guiding fantasy within their diverse forms of imagination of the African continent, the Portuguese upon the purchase on the northern west coast of Africa and resale at Lisbon of a group of some thirty-five persons, whom we now describe as “African,” such as Du Bois describes it in this essay, when a bit of gold dust entered the exchange of the explorers along the coast of Africa out of Portugal, the general historical extension and elaboration of such an idea was rendered practically commercial and thus became something more than what had been as primarily a mercantile or imperial venture (Robinson 2000a [1983]). Thus, in terms of Du Bois’s thought, it may not be wont to take the date 1441–42 as a theoretical metaphor, given in narrative, for Du Bois’s thought of early modern historicity, in which modern enslavement stands neither inside nor outside of modern imperial colonialism, of a supposed European world economy, of what in contemporary understanding is often taken as the inception of capitalism as a system, of all that we have come to think of as modernity as a global or planetwide horizon (Development 299, 17).<sup>33</sup>

Although not declared by Du Bois, the first order of thetic statement that one might take from his narration—with Du Bois’s conceptualization of the developmental processes entailed in the making of “a people”—is that the eventuality that he describes produced in simultaneous and reciprocal manner a kind of “freedom” for those promulgating the enslavement and a kind of forced “subsistence” of un-freedom or inextricable determination by necessity, by way of coercion, for those who were inscribed into such systems as enslaved (Development 298–304, paras. 17–29).

It was this eventuality that yielded the world-historical order of the time of Du Bois’s writing, most precisely as one would see it in the southern Virginia town of Du Bois’s example in “The Development of a People”—perhaps it is the example of Farmville, studied by him in 1897 to which I made reference earlier in the discussion of Du Bois’s 1894 essay “The Afro-American” (Du Bois 1897a[?], 1898a, 1894a[?], 2015a).

As a secondary-order thesis but a thetic corollary to the first, Du Bois proposed that this inscription induced a double “revolution” that led to the outcome in the southern town of his example. The first was the destruction of a context that he describes as African, of supposed primordial and immemorial *historical* linkages, bonds, and ideals, for those persons who would come to be known as African American. An outcome and eventuality of this revolution was then the system of extreme mundane violence enforced as servitude. (Although he does so here without naming the matter of its direct role in the historical constitution of “Europe,” he will do so elsewhere.) Likewise, Du Bois would throughout his itinerary annotate the matter of the impact of this “revolution” for the continent of Africa itself. Such notations may be found, for example, as principal terms of the essay “The African Roots of War” and the book *The Negro*, each of 1915, and *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History*, of 1947 (Du Bois 1915b, 1915a, 1947). The second “revolution” was a result of emancipation, which yielded another destruction of bond and premise, in the sense that the historical world in terms of which the now formerly legally enslaved had constructed symbolic horizons of some integrity, of values and ideals of living, even otherwise, or despite, the existential basis of the determinations of this variegated symbolic order, was no longer extant; it was no longer emplaced. Another displacement was the order of this new historicity. The yield in Du Bois’s historical present was the production of “degradation and uncleanness”—according to centuries-long systems of social and political terror and domination and economic exploitation (Development 304–10, paras. 30–47).



As a theoretical premise, we are justified to suggest that, given this persistence of a sense of world for African Americans (as we might ourselves name them in our own moment) despite or even within the historical experience of degradation, Du Bois would insist on an “infinite gradation” of patterns of habitation among the people so configured by history, from low to high. The high perhaps might best be thought of not so much as a simple exception to this historicity but as an expression thereof, from this historicity. There is nowhere in Du Bois’s thought the suggestion that such a group might have some preternatural dispensation. The matter might best be thought of in terms of the nineteenth-century discourses of duty—of obligation that is given, decided always already, within tradition. (It might be understood as something otherwise than a choice, for the latter, choice, would be given as a matter of individual decision and responsibility.) In this sense, in such a situation, “leaders” must supply “ideals.” For Du Bois, in this essay, they must simultaneously make up for the twofold destruction of the past, as well as for that from the past that ought to be adjudged as not worthy of passage to coming generations. In his schema, they ought to be the primary source: for setting “the tone to that all-powerful spiritual world that surrounds and envelopes the souls of men; their standards of living, their interpretation of sunshine and rain and human hearts, their thoughts of love and labor, their aspirations of dim imaginings—all that makes life *life*” (Development 306–7, para. 35).

The essay’s explicit theme, apparently dominant, yields in the main a narrative of the imposition of limit. It yet remains that the primary and motivating concern of the essay (its *incipit*), its guiding orientation, the object of its thought, is to adduce the distinct possibility (in both conception and action) of the reconstruction of the potential and actual experience of the lives of the progeny of the Africans enslaved in the New World since the fifteenth century. The concern is to ascertain the potential for the construction by them and by way of them of a more generous and truly new sense of world—a future—that is still yet to come. Such would be a world that in its arrival could become a generative sense of further possible worlds, perhaps all that could yet be imagined, in its gift.

It may now be understood that for Du Bois, in this essay, all is *istoria*—there is history; or all is historical; or all knowledge is or must be historiographical. Which is to say with philosophy as science, of an understanding which modern philosophy (perhaps since the critical project of the European Enlightenment, especially during the twentieth century) has sought to claim as its own, all is *historial*—of duration, indefinite, perhaps

illimitable. Herein, put in apparently simple terms, there are three primary temporalities of *istoria* for Du Bois: past, present, future. Of those three, the most decisive is the futural aspect, that is, with regard to the temporality that attends to “a people.” This is also, then, to say that “a people” is a temporal reference; that is to say, the key matter is the group’s relation to the future. Said another way, still, their relation to that which is not yet, has not yet been, remains yet to come, becoming; this is the decisive matter for thought and action. This aspect of temporality, precisely as the terms of *istoria* for Du Bois, can be affirmed as—in principle—illimitable. It cannot be limited by prejudgment or predetermination. If telos, it remains open. This we can think of in contemporary thought as a delimitation within and of the thought of Du Bois with regard to his sense of an African American collectivity.<sup>34</sup>

Setting the thetic mark of the essay, its thought, by resounding the lower registers of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, a perennial disposition on his part, as its central tonal register, Du Bois proposes the theoretical reception of a twofold initiative for a figure that might too easily be taken in thought as *ahistorical*. One is the historiographical recognition of the decisive or originary constitutive status of the “Negro”—even as enslaved—in the making of the modern world. The other is a theoretical imagination of the illimitable possibility that may be understood as encoded as the enslaved. For Du Bois, in this essay, in turn, this latter possibility goes under two subheadings, leadership and learning. In this dimension of the text, a submerged generic order of the text, as also a form of appeal or petition to the conscience of the enlightened, might be adduced.<sup>35</sup> What can be rendered which has not yet been but could in being rendered become available for existence? “Development” would be something that can be cultivated, that is to say, made; something that is an expression, if you will, of a process or a practice, in the plural. The project of the essay is to conceptualize or outline a way. While this essay itself does not provide so much of an elaborated specification of the character of the sense of possibility that could become legible, this theoretical reticence or forbearing may perhaps be understood as felicitous. For it is the insistence on possibility itself in this essay, on the futurity of possibility, that remains decisive for thought in our own time, in our contemporary time, astride the second generation, if you will, of the twenty-first century. This whole way of thinking, Du Bois’s, is then somewhat different from what has now become a traditionalized conception of culture, via the human sciences, and now a generalized cultural studies (wherein culture is too

easily understood as if a thing already fulsome in its emergence and duration, which may be codified, more or less, and analyzed). The matter at stake in Du Bois's thought, although his approach certainly includes such a project, ought still be available for thought in our own century as radically otherwise than such an itinerary. For all remains at stake.

**1. FIRST NOTATION.** According to the trajectory of this affirmation—already nascent in 1894—across the opening years of the new century Du Bois would propose the figure of the African American (in fact under diverse names) as the principal metaphor for this opening, that is to say a new *sense of world* in general that emerges as modern historicity. This epistemological temporality, if you will, of the coming of the new century in thought for Du Bois, should assume our attention even if we recall that the autobiographical sense of this metaphor was already legible in Du Bois's reflections in Berlin in the winter of 1893, on the occasion of his twenty-fifth birthday (Du Bois 1893). More simply, yet emphatically, it may be said that while remarked everywhere in Du Bois's discourse of the turn of the century, the conception was realized in its quintessential articulation in the thought and writing gathered in the text of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* of early 1903 and then also articulated in the handful of texts that followed almost immediately in its wake, as it were, within the next eighteen to twenty-four months. Certainly these texts include the famous essay under the title "The Talented Tenth" (Du Bois 1903n, 2015m). Likewise, we ought to include here the incisive and prescient theoretical text under the heading "Sociology Hesitant," likely prepared in late 1904 or early 1905, even though it was published posthumously, approximate to a century after its composition (Du Bois 1980i, 1905?, 2015i, 2000b). So, too, ought we place here the writing (done in English in its original) gathered by Du Bois in early 1905 and published in 1906 in a German translation (with the translator not attributed) by Max Weber, and translated back into English as a kind of whole, in the manner that Du Bois apparently conceived it for a European intellectual audience, with suitable annotation, only a century after its original publication (Du Bois 1906b, 2006, 2015f; Chandler 2006b, 2007). However, this conceptual eventuality in Du Bois's thought is especially marked by our essay "The Development of a People," issued in early 1904 (Du Bois 1904, 1982d, 2015d).<sup>36</sup>

**2. SECOND NOTATION.** Yet, after the epistemic maturation across the second half of the nineteenth century of a general discourse and thought

of human societal development in Europe and America, Du Bois's early twentieth-century concern with the "development of a people" under the heading of the Afro- or African-American could appear to some as anachronistic, not to gainsay perspectives or standpoints contemporaneous to the time of our present discussion, astride the opening quarter of this so-called twenty-first century.

Yet, in this still new century, our own, the pertinence of the question that is proposed in Du Bois's 1904 essay under that title is somewhat more radical now than at the time of its first enunciation. For the question—of the relation of the so-called darker world of peoples, supposed as underdeveloped, to the so-called lighter peoples of the world, supposed as more civilized in some expansive sense of this latter term—has become existential on a planetwide scale of reference.

The question of that larger frame is "the problem of the color line," as Du Bois formulated it (a matter that is elaborated as part II of this study).

That is to say, with regard to its enunciation in his discourse, the relation of the "darker" to the "lighter" peoples, of the world, known in the thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe and America as "nations" and then as "races." Now, since the early twentieth century, in genteel company, with regard to such geographic contexts, one might reference "cultures." It has now become polite, in the twenty-first century, to no longer admit this question, at least not in an open manner, or in explicit terms. Yet it remains afoot.

For this old, worn-out question, which was previously understood by many who have at the times in question been emboldened by their own access to hegemonic forms of power (both within and among localized domains, that is to say, so-called nations and states, yet also on a worldwide scale of a common scene) as *their* problem, a problem for those folks over there, has returned. One might have once put it as a problem of the so-called darker peoples, or, less astutely, as a problem for colonized folks, or as an issue for those who have in the past been colonized. Yet, the question has returned, alas, astride the twenty-first century, in a newly existential manner, at once concrete and specific *and* apparently universal, planetary, in scale and implication.

If in the moment of Du Bois's writing one could imagine that what was at stake pertained to those "darker" peoples by way of the initiative and the actions of those "lighter" peoples, now, in our own time, the very future of the whole of the world, so to speak, is at stake by way of the very forms of the new ways (even if proclaimed as of ancient, or even archaic,

lineage) of becoming as such, the coming-to-be of peoples, that is of the so-called darker peoples of the world.

If it was once thought, in part by way of certain aspects of Du Bois's discourse as well, that the African American must accede to the hospitality of the world (and thereby become properly civilized), now, under the heading for thought that we develop from the *essay* of Du Bois (to stake the metaphor), the whole of the world is becoming, or rather has become, African American. It is no longer, if it has ever been, a question of the becoming of *a* people; it is, rather, a matter of understanding the way in which a supposed "people" have become such, which is to say, most precisely, the being at stake as such.

At this juncture in our inhabitation of his thinking, we can note that the center weight of the essay "The Development of a People," apart from any expectation, is not in its declaration of premise (although the merits of his formulation, as noted above, are more general than some might suppose), nor is it in its statement of judgments and propositions, however telling they were at the time of the essay's original publication and, indeed, notwithstanding its striking continued relevance after almost a century and a quarter, in the passage of time. For, indeed, contemporary thought in general commonly finds a suitable conceit that can allow it to either step aside from the question of "what was slavery and the slave trade" (Development 304, para. 29) or thoroughly assimilate the answer to that question to an assumed or affirmed already given, accepted account of modern historicity, in which the history of modern systems of enslavement is treated as a derivative expression of a more general and fundamental order of social process.

The decisive presumption, that is the theoretical bearing, of the essay is indeed in its brief narrative.

The pivotal terms of this narrative and the essay may now be understood as expressed in one sentence: "The African slave trade was the child of the Renaissance" (Development 299, para. 17).

In this analysis, Du Bois may be understood to adumbrate, but declare with lucidity, a turnkey historiographical perspective.

For there were, we might propose, in fact two "renaissances" in early modern Europe (if in fact we are to assume there were any). One of them was humanistic and is justly closely and widely regarded. The other was scientific; its bearing was practical, most distinctively given in its technology. For Du Bois, it is the latter that ought to be understood by contemporary thought. And of this latter sense of renaissance, while it is most

certain that he is noting and affirming, profoundly, the principled commitment to inquiry, the idea and practice of science, of philosophy in, of, and as science, in all of such ancient initiatives of the Mediterranean, and including its conduit into the modern period by way of the Arabic and African (notably Islamic, as well as Christian) learned world, indeed including its recollection in the early periods of the modern epoch, it is notably its technical eventualities that Du Bois may be understood to index with this insight.

Likewise, from this same perspective, we may note two pivotal technologies that operated within this historicity as arising in the context of the Sinophone sphere of world. This is to remark both the compass, a measure of divination for centuries before its full deployment for navigation in the eleventh century CE, during the Song dynasty, and gunpowder, developed during the Tang dynasty of the ninth century CE. Along with certain technologies for shipbuilding and maritime habitation, they were turning points in the Portuguese project, more than a quarter of a millennium in duration by the 1440s, to find their way by ocean, down the west coast of the African continent, and eventually to India, and to the eastern coastal regions of the Indian Ocean, to China, Korea, and Japan in the “East” (Lach 1965b).<sup>37</sup> If, then, the modern systems of enslavement are decisively rendered in part by way of the ascription of ancient learning in a modernizing Europe and the conscription to a military sense of purpose of foreign-born technologies (of the so-called East), and if in turn the history of such incipient enslavement produced in part the historical problematization, in its turn, of the terms of the *historical* emergence of a possible collective of persons under the heading “African American,” then it is indeed a history and our understanding of it that is most at stake for thought and action, both then (at the turn to the twentieth century) and now (at our own moment amid the early decades of the twenty-first century).

There are, then, four senses of revolution at stake herein: three senses of the past and one of the present-future. With all the presumptions of modern histories of what is known as Europe, the western peninsula of a greater Asia was radically revolutionized in its being and possibility in the early modern period, by way of incipient processes that were not so much defined or determined by the horizons of its indigeneity or natality. It was neither primordial nor preternatural in its emergence or maintenance. Likewise, a certain incursion of such revolutionizing was rendered afoot on the African continent, initially through its corridors of exchange that took shape along the western coastal regions but most precisely as what in a paradoxical sense

might be understood as ostensible modernization, throughout the continent, including its southern and eastern shores and the hinterlands thereof. Yet, too, the very modalities of trade, the general exchange of knowledge, and the senses of historical time, place, and imagination may also be considered to mark out a sense of revolution (even if tertiary, according to an analysis of some kind, a certain form of judgment). That is to say that in this third sense of revolution, modernity is marked, if you will, by the distinctive doubled inhabitation of all that is Africa and Europe. To tell of this history, as does Du Bois in the course of his narrative of modern enslavement, is to speak of the mutually agonistic constitution of all that is Europe and all that is Africa, in the modern world.

Taking its mark from this latter sense of revolution, the violence that Du Bois remarks in this essay as the destruction of “African” ideals (not tout court, even if he does not specify the matter here) is a fourth sense of the manner in which he speaks of revolution in his brief narrative. Emancipation was a “second” break, a “partial breaking with the past,” as Du Bois conceptualized it. The double destruction, from an originary African domain and then from the contexts (at once geographic and temporal in specification) of centuries of formal systems of enslavement, gave shape to a distinctive problematization: leadership for a group whose conditions of emergence are such that they cannot simply accept present or extant “standards” for living. Rather, they must “make up” for the destructions and losses of the past. Rather than anything reducible to compensatory work, it is a solicitation to the possible terms of a genesis, or geneses, that is, originary production of the highest values, ideals, perhaps at least novel in their dispensation, if not entirely new. A demand for a revolutionary production of values, of ideals, issues in terms that are at once *historical* (in its reference to the collective) and *existential*: the world of what might be African American, of “a people” known as such, arises from the capacity of such a group (with a mark set by “leaders,” of which he gives a nominalization of the moment) to respond to the present and whatever might be yet to come, by whatever resources may be at hand or can be cultivated. Without any declaration, the implication of his statement in the latter stages of his essay of 1904 is that African Americans ought to be led to revolutionize this second break, or second sense of a historic revolution, that is upon them. As such, the African American situation is given in and as history.

For Du Bois, the telling of their story is positioned as a demand for the ethical enlightened. Yet, too, in its deeper registers, I am wont to suggest, it may pose or propose an exemplary example of possibility, in the future



(of the turn to the twentieth century). At the penultimate moment of the closing chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, Du Bois notes three gifts brought to the horizon of America by Africans and their descendants in this new context of world: the gift of “sweat,” the brawn of labor, mental (of care) as much as physical, for centuries; the gift of “song,” the cultivation of arts, of making a way out of no way (in the proverbial African American phrase), of which all that is art may be named; and then the gift of “spirit,” that is to say, of hope and capacity to believe in the future (Du Bois 1903k). There, as I noted earlier in our discussion of “The Afro-American,” that is at the end of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, Du Bois offers a metaphor, or, better, a concept metaphor, for nominalizing this process. African Americans are the “warp and woof of all that is or has been the making of America” (Du Bois 1903k). (Du Bois’s text has a common or colloquial form of the word, that is woof, where the word “weft” is perhaps more in use in our own time.) Amid the ongoing systems that would produce only ignorance and degradation, for Du Bois, the Negro or African American is already afoot in the production of the terms of a new, perhaps ongoing, revolution of values, of habitation, and of imagination of the future.

This lesson, if understood according to the imperatives of the example, as theoretical resource or provocation, is worldwide. It is “global.” And yet its full implication is still yet to come. For the sense of “development” at stake in Du Bois’s text is a conception of African American historicity, or, better, historicity in general, that is not so much turned to attend what has gone by, or what is given, but toward the very possibility of the remaking of the very sense of the world, the very origin, or, better, genesis, of world, of the sense of *the* world, perhaps the generation of another world, as it were, of a new world.

With this understanding, the question concerns the making of all that is, or may be, all that we may articulate by way of time, which is also to say, already and first as it were, as space. It is not, nor can it be, simply, given. By way of this reference in thought, to Du Bois’s specific essay, the concept metaphor of the existential horror that has been understood under the heading of the “middle passage” (or perhaps one may recall the euphemism “the hold of the slave ship”), as one might index it, of persons that will have been enslaved, is perhaps or potentially radical for *only* a time. For what remains at stake and beyond such a “narrow Now” is the possibility of a commitment to become—that is to say, to give, to enable, to allow hospitality, or to receive, to accept or affirm the passive in generation. In a

*historical* sense, it is to affirm passage, the ways of passage, not only within but “beyond this narrow Now.” This is the thought that I propose to continue to track and elaborate in the path of thinking of Du Bois at the time of the turn to the twentieth century, notably in the discourse of 1904 as given in our essay, “The Development of a People.”

**3. THIRD NOTATION.** It may be understood then, that in this essay, Du Bois provides a historical account, marked by its distinct and specific character, of the present situation of the African American in 1904. In so doing, he would not abide the hegemonic representation, which might present the Negro simply, as abject, a sense that is even now, still, too often given and taken as a normal account of matters. In order to do otherwise Du Bois proposes an intervention among the conceptions at the root of the common narratives of modern history as a whole.

Whereas, in his accounts of the mid-1890s, 1894 or 1895, he may have posed his discourse as a narrative of moral failure, on the part of Europe and the colonists in the Americas, with an indictment thereof, his account abreast the middle of the first decade of the new century is one that accents and annotates the eventualities that are produced by willful, motivated, and antagonistic judgments and actions, which are in turn susceptible to assessment by a certain disposition and judgment (which of necessity is reflexive, or self-critical). Such antagonistic production in turn produces concomitant effects, social and historical (even if also theological), that will eventually issue as an entire historicity, or a fundamental and general dimension thereof, that is, of a historical epoch. Yet from this self-reflexive thought and critical perspective comes a reconceptualization of modern historicity in a general sense.

For even if in 1904 Du Bois attunes this historiographical sense to the frequency of eventualities, with this thought he enters a dimension that is not circumscribed by the event of enslavement nor the operations of emancipation, but one that sustains a frequency that encodes the *futural* sense of such eventualities, including a sense that might be beyond, or otherwise than, even the legible mark of such futurity. It is a thought of the centuries, we might say, the *futural* sense of the twentieth century, or of the twenty-first century (even if it is the so-called Asian century), that may be understood here, that is to say, a thought of the possibilities of a sense that has not yet been, and thus remains (Adelson 2017). Du Bois’s purpose, as it were, is then both to propose the possibility of human action and to do so by way of a critical philosophical, as well as historiographical,

operation of judgment, that is, the use of reason, the practice of supposed rational inquiry, a form of critical self-reflection upon the conditions of existence and knowing, expressed as the practice of science. He proposes this basis for action among the Negro American and among the supposed “friends” (who are in the main referenced in an unspoken, undefined manner and thus are not enumerated).

In providing this account, even though he does not declare it as a scientific contribution in itself, we may not be on the wrong foot to suggest that nonetheless Du Bois presents the perspective that he adduces as a contribution to understanding, in a political sense. It may be understood as an effort toward good social relations, a beneficence of knowledge that is rooted in the practice of scholarship and research—motivated by an effort to make critical sense of the world of the late nineteenth century and the century to come, that is the twentieth. Quite specific to Du Bois’s enunciation is his own previous work in scholarship: the research for his doctoral dissertation project, from 1892 or so, and its final textual encoding, as presented for the degree in 1895 and then published in 1896 as *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* (Du Bois 1896, 1973h). By the time of the preparation of the discourse of “The Development of a People,” Du Bois has been at work, thinking through the historicity that he offers as the concern of its core narrative for something on the order of a decade or more. In his essay, we are receiving knowledge by way of Du Bois’s emplacement, at the time of his writing, at the leading edge of scholarship on this dimension of modern historicity.

**4. FOURTH NOTATION.** This order of question was adduced by Du Bois in the opening stages of his essay “The Conservation of Races,” already, as it were, from early on in 1897. That is to say, everyday political and social and economic matters—such as “questions of separate schools and cars, wage-discrimination and lynch law” while always potentially decisive in the existential instance, remain overdetermined and may not in and of themselves, simply and discretely on their own terms, be of general implication or determination for thought and, eventually, for action. In Du Bois’s formulation, the matter must be approached on a higher (or more fundamental) order of understanding. As he writes in paragraph 3 of the essay, one must “survey the whole question of race in human philosophy.” He then specified it according to two reciprocal formulations: “the hard limits of natural law” and the “constitution of the world” (CR 5, para. 3). Du Bois then proceeded, from the very next paragraph in “The

Conservation of Races,” to pose a philosophical questioning of the concept of race that one might suppose could be inscribed into any project of a science of race, the object of which would be understood as simply and directly given in nature (or, its reciprocal opposite, the categorical disavowal of the ostensible social and historical implication of forms of natural difference as such). There, in an incipient moment for his intellectual practice, Du Bois offers a critical epistemological judgment with regard to any form of knowledge as science that would presume the possibility of a natural science of race: “that the grosser physical differences of color, hair and bone go but a short way toward explaining the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress” (CR 6–7, para. 5). The disposition of Du Bois’s questioning in early 1897 was notably one that would seek a guide for judgment in “philosophy.” From, or within, “philosophy,” as he names it there, such an inclination would seek to understand and follow the “natural law” that could be known by way of its practices and the accumulation of knowledge that might be configured thereby. This disposition to philosophy may be understood even more precisely as the practice of philosophy-as-science, that is to say, the operations of a subject that would seek to understand, or come to know, an object, in some fundamental sense of its character or existence. In this case, it is a sort of being that would seek to know (as a kind of subject) something of itself (as object). That reciprocal subject and object is most precisely the human, understood as a whole in common, as a form of being. One should address the matter in terms of “human philosophy,” or, as I would specify it with other words: a philosophical understanding of the human. While the referential index to values remains (the disposition that is dominant in the 1894 essay “The Afro-American,” or in the writing of 1895–96 in his doctoral dissertation), above all to values as ideals, the highest form of values, as Du Bois understood such, most especially all that one might consider as morals, forms of morality, in the 1897 text another order of reference for judgment has become articulate within Du Bois’s thought. That additional manner of reckoning, now ascendant in Du Bois’s articulations, is the bequest of philosophy, understood and practiced as science, in the general sense of knowledge, here interpretive and historiographical.

Seven years later, early on in 1904, in the wake of the gathering, under the heading of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, a sheaf of the essays that he had cultivated from early 1897, just past a decade following his return to the United States from study in Europe, taking the statement of problem and the terms of elucidation in that book as a fundamental

reference (for which the essay “The Afro-American” of 1894, which we have retrieved and marked in this study, may now be understood as an emergent, preliminary, as yet compressed *essay*), Du Bois staged anew the question of the historical status of the African American, the Negro in America, the distinct place of the so-called Negro in the context of modern world history as a whole.

**5. A PENUMBRA.** It may now be indicated in what sense that restaging took place in the concise form of the text “The Development of a People” (Du Bois 1904, 2015d).

For to the extent that it unfolded in the wake of the completion and reception of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* in 1903, “The Development of a People” may stand not only as an extension of the guiding problem of the very early forms of thought encoded in the unpublished text “The Afro-American,” which as we have seen had already posed the problem of leadership and the construction of ideals for a social group, but also and most poignantly as an elaboration *of*—in both senses, from and about—the book *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. For the conception of the 1904 essay deployed the book’s problematic on the scale of a multiply constructed presentation of an entire social field, African American, American, and otherwise; this latter notation is to say that such a domain, the social field in question, may be understood as also hemispheric and worldwide in reference. Likewise, if the “Afro-American” essay marked out Du Bois’s initiating concern to place matters African American within the maelstrom of any conceptualization of the American project, then “The Development of a People” as a statement of theoretical concern produces another horizon of reference, the epoch as a whole on a planetwide scale of reference as the genetic possibility of that supposed incipit of world. The referential question of the latter essay concerns the arena of comparison of all times and all places of the world, or the “world of worlds” since the fifteenth century of what we may consider today the common era.

It therefore may be understood as apposite that the essay had a more-than-decade-long penumbral gathering and opening within Du Bois’s writing, that is, the scriptural record of his intellectual maturation. Of this itinerary, as already remarked, we may summarize the question posed in the essay of our concern here as already open within the text of the effort that is “The Afro-American” of 1894; as decisively inflected into the philosophical organization of matters of historicity, by way of the concept of race, in “The Conservation of Races” of 1897; emplaced within a

willful historiographical articulation and a nascent sociological horizon of indices in the closing of *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* of 1899, and the essay “The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind” of 1900; and then, too, as brought to a visionary, even prophetic, political-theological clarity, yet as a legible inscription, in the essays gathered as *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, this latter a text completed in its textual suturing from September 1902 to April 1903 (even as the writing therein dates from across the whole of the previous seven years). Our essay of focus, “The Development of a People,” of early 1904, is thus the culmination of a tendentious global-level vision of the making of a supposed “New World,” pertaining to the entire modern epoch, modern in a sense that might be inclusive of almost all the diverse notions of such contemporaneity.

**6. FURTHER PROBLEMATIZATION.** In our essay of focus, Du Bois may be understood to assume the kind of radical bearing for thought, a pertinence that I propose is at once epistemological in general and theoretical in its specific implication, of the questioning and understanding that he had formulated in “The Conservation of Races” of 1897 as also the domain of concern in his inquiry here, in 1904. (As I noted earlier in this study and have elaborated elsewhere, in the 1897 text Du Bois formulated the thought that the general possibility of “intermingling” of form or attribute rendered incoherent any conception of difference among humans in bodily form or natural attribute as an unfailing expression of the essential capacity and limit of a form of being as human [CR 5, para. 4; Chandler forthcoming]). In 1904, however, the matter is staged as *historial*—here understood more in the sense of the actual, the historiographical, than the possible, the virtual—rather than as a matter of morals. It is now not so much a speculative commitment that leads Du Bois’s thetic practice. Rather, it is now an attention to the given, the supposed empirical organization of matters, then or now, that is to say, the eventual (the sense of which may be noted as that which has happened or may still be happening, forms of the *futural* pertinence of which may still be yet to come). The idiomatic register given at this juncture is still philosophical (or in a sense postphilosophical, proceeding always in light of that tradition of thinking but otherwise and putatively beyond it). Yet, now, it is no longer speculative in its attention but attuned to eventuality, the legibility or even *leitmotif* of events, and of their telling, in their utterly irreversible, yet exemplary, singularity. Indeed, to describe it in more general terms, I propose that it is *historial*, of or about

the very possibility of the making of sense, as historicity. In this sense, its tonal center, so to speak, its rhetorical register, is historiographic (more representational than expressive): at once nascent and schematic, yet distinctly authoritative in the concatenation of its locution, the syntax of its delivery, in what it yields for practices of inquiry and knowledge. That is also to say that the author of the essay—even though the text has the register of an appeal or petition—may be understood to insist, by presuming its value, on a commitment to the exemplary practice of a science, herein in terms of the accumulation of knowledge, less in terms of fact (for such is not contested or allowed to become the terms of contest, for example, between writer and reader, perhaps) than in terms of an inhabitation and setting forth of a certain learning; and only as such, by way of this presumptive reference of understanding, may one understand matters as then of or related to an articulation of facts, or a *factum*, of knowledge.

Two annotations may be useful here, one national-local in reference, the other global-level in indication.

Within the story of all that may be thought as national-local, as “America” in project, the essay carries out its work by elaborating the *historial* question that may be analytically emplaced at the heart of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, traversing hard-won access paths to terrain that might belie its marks of historical possibility and limit that are layered within its apparently recessed but heavily impacted deeper sedimentations, even finding ways in the discourse of this specific essay, just as he had done in that book of essays, to theoretically limn—in metaphor and apostrophe—perhaps of fragments, broken inscriptions, the cryptic apparent resonance of rasps of *asonic* whispers and wails, as well as the telling forms of silence, that may be gathered, or scattered, thereby, according to these otherwise than dormant (even if not so present) modes of habitation, past and *futural*, perhaps, at once (Du Bois 1903n, 2015m).

Too, while in the planetwide horizon of our story, the place of Asia and Africa, so too a certain Europe, are geographically of nodal moment and location for reckoning the emergence of the epoch, it is the inception of a historical entity—which Du Bois places herein under the heading of “a people”—through and beyond systems of enslavement contemporaneous to the eventuality that concerns us and their aftermath that is at stake for our understanding. Further, while the Americas—the erstwhile misnamed New World—are the geo-locus of his directed attention, or tendentious theoretical intention, the matter at stake in all truth concerns the possibility and implication of the emergence of an originary historical configuration, in



principle and in general. The problematization, the problem for thought, that sets loose the formulation of question that articulates in the form of our essay is the contemporary status of the so-called Negro American in the context of the American world and the turn to the twentieth-century world, this latter on both a hemispheric and planetwide scale of reference.

Du Bois proposes a context—which I note, simply, as epistemic and theoretical, in the general senses of these terms—for adjudicating this status. In this essay, it is not so much a determination of just what is the situation, as it were (a matter that is a central overall concern of his study, a sociology of African Americans, and America, during the decades framing the turn of the century); rather, the question is how to explain and alter, to improve, radically if possible, the conditions of those understood as African American and the whole question of the Negro in and for America in general.

This question arises within the general historicity of the centuries-long, nay, half-millennium-long, eventuality that, in its effects, rendered a configuration of social being, a kind of sociological entity, if you will, even into the present of the writing of the text, of early 1904, just after the turn to the new century, at the beginning of the twentieth century. That is to say, Du Bois adduces a privileged historical or eventual horizon that he proposes must be gathered and rendered available for thought in order to assess the standing of his guiding example, this new historial being—presumptively and tendentially understood as Negro-or-Afro-or-African-or-Colored-American (Development 298–304, paras. 17–28). That horizon is the institution and promulgation of systems of enslavement that articulated forms of relation—in virtually all senses of this notion, from theological, to political, to economic, to aesthetic, to technological, to philosophical—that were new in the denouement and the aftermath of the ancient Roman Empire. The key, then, is the abiding clarification offered in the essay of the status of enslavement in the historicity of the epoch. Notably, for Du Bois, the horizon acquired originary articulation only in the wake of the so-called Renaissance in the region of the world that will come to be known as Europe (Development 299, para. 17). Marked in terms that reference the Christian calendar, no matter its intention to articulate a common era, the temporal indication for the time in question is the duration astride the time of 1441–42, when the first persons, whom Du Bois will describe as African, from the Senegambia region of what we now consider as West Africa (captured or purchased), were sold into slavery in Lisbon, Portugal, that may be understood to articulate

within modern historicity through to the time of the early 1890s, within the half dozen years following the last legal abolition of modern enslavement in the Americas (in Brazil) in 1883. While the geographic breadth of remark and interpretive comparison is worldwide, if you will, the touchstone of theoretical reference is to recognize anew the general emplacement and import of all matters considered that may be or will come to be understood as African, including its diaspora of persons (multiple and plural in almost all senses) within a planetwide ensemble of references astride the opening years of the twentieth century.

What may herein now be proposed is that in the narrative as given to us by Du Bois, the protagonists articulate less as replete, or self-possessed, or abiding, subjects, in any sense, as if sovereign, the countenance of which would provide the standard for our understanding of any historical form of being; rather, the historical reference for our story may be gathered only as the double-sided configuration of a form of problem: the relation of a certain Europe, that is, if you will, only in and by way of all that is considered as of Africa, or a certain Africa that is reannounced to the contemporary centuries in its futural or intentional apparition by way of a certain figuration of Europe. On the one hand, *in fact*, what is entailed is the coming to historical articulation, as such, of all of the major “trading nations” of what will come to be understood as western Europe—the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, the English. On the other hand, the *productions* that will constitute *the factum* of all that will yield the epoch that we often call modern (its articulation including not only the Americas and the Caribbean but also, notably, all that we take as Asia, from India, to Korea, Japan, and China, to Southeast Asia, and to the regions too easily remarked as Micronesia and Indonesia) take their nodal incipit in and by the productions of Africa (both from and about such), first of all West Africa but, in fact, the whole of the continent and more, of matters African.

The most decisive dimension of this problematization for Du Bois is that aspect of it that is our understanding—in all senses and in general. In this text, Du Bois is not so much concerned to privilege formal practices of knowledge, even as his mode of critical reflection places the status of learning as of paramount value. That is also to say that his insistence on learning and the cultivation of knowledge, in combination with his exemplification of his own learning, and then too his solicitation of his audience to claim or accede to a learning complementary with that of the writer, produces a profound historical understanding. It is an understanding that may be construed as an insistence on the fundamental pertinence

of historiographical practice for leadership of all kinds, from pedagogy to politics, to practices of art (notably all that might be called aesthetic), to religious belief, for example. The essay seeks to intervene on that dimension of problematic—that is to say, how we understand the terms of the question of the Negro. Du Bois produces a distinct conception, one that may be regarded as original, of the terms of this problematization.

**7. PREMISES.** I suggest, in light of this problematization, that at the outset of the essay, in a theoretical sense, there is a distinct ensemble of premises (an organization of concept and analytical commitment) that Du Bois proposes. It composes a kind of epistemological reference, a certain kind of analytical presumption, or a topographical metaphor, with bearing for the mapping of the terrain that is taken as an object for analysis (Development 292–98, paras. 1–16; Du Bois 2015d).

The guiding premise is that there is for any historical being a measure of indetermination in its devolution. Considered as an object of analysis, its being may be translated as illimitable, such that it may be understood to yield possibility. Human action might thus operate such indetermination as the terms of possibility, through self-reflexive, critical, even rational thought, toward a chosen form, a practice of reformation. Such action would seek perfectibility in the human and in the organization of society in general. It may be understood as a kind of directed evolution of the being social of the human, of working together for a common good.

Then, there is a corollary premise: that the problem in question has been produced. In this sense, it is indeed historical—historial—of and by way of eventuality on the part of humans, above all in some collective sense.

Hence, as a further relative premise: the situation, as given, in a historical instance or circumstance, can be altered. A thoughtful, critical, even self-critical understanding, one that is historiographical in its references, can be realized so as to enable judgment as to what might be done to address the situation. Action can then be undertaken to change the present conditions, indeed, to seek to change society, as it were, in general. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the schema of Du Bois's thought at this time, in terms of this essay, such action would first be that of the Negro, the Negro American. In the sense of priority only, others—the putative learned addressees of the essay—would need to admit the problematic character of past collective action and then abide by the principle of do-no-harm, or commit to a policy to remove obstacles, or the potential

for such, such as themselves or the institutions of which they are the determining force, as any form of unnecessary or unjustifiable limit.

To enable the establishment of such a possibility without stepping back from any of the claim of moral value that is the abiding register of his formulations in “The Afro-American” of 1894, “The Conservation of Races” of 1897, “The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind” of 1899–1900, and the essays as gathered under the heading of *The Souls of Black Folk* of 1902–3, in “The Development of a People” of 1904, Du Bois turns to single out the authority of knowledge for the adjudication of what should be done. The actual can be understood—historiographical practice can enable self-critical understanding to bring to light, if you will, the root character, or even cause, in a theoretical sense, of the problem. If not exactly as science in the prevailing sense of the turn of the century in America, then as a practice on the order of a science, the bringing forth of analysis of a supposed actuality, taken as an empirical referent, might allow a nonsentimental, nondogmatic, and ostensibly objective use of human understanding to determine whence the problem has emerged and taken a given form. The analogy here is the nineteenth-century arrival of a biology, which determined the cause of the disease of the human body, the physical, as from a biochemical pathogenesis—not from the willfulness of a malevolent God or gods. So, too, then is the implication—undeclared though it is, at the lexical level of the text—that a sociology (suitably historiographical, perhaps) of the turn to the twentieth century might be able to determine that the dis-ease of human society (in all senses but not metaphysical) is by way of a *historical* semiosis. This latter would be the analysis of a different sort of pathogenesis, perhaps a metaphysical one, if you will, the devolution of certain kinds of morals, that is to say, immorality, incoherent ideals, or the absence or vacuity of ideals, perhaps indifferently pursued or practiced. The premise is that an understanding of the character that Du Bois’s is proposing is both of and about the very “constitution” of the world, as Du Bois had put it in “The Conservation of Races” (CR 5, para. 3). In like manner, as simply the other side of the same coin, if human understanding and action thereby are not in accord with such an order, that of the general and fundamental constitution of existence and its articulation within or as historicity, human social existence will not prosper. It will wither away and die.

This disposition is practical, perhaps pragmatic; yet it amounts to the proposition of a kind of political epistemology. He seeks to stake the tenability of human social being on a combination of knowledge and leadership.

His premise entails a commitment to a philosophical ground for such inquiry. The example of biology offers an odd allegory, or allegorical presumption (for a learned intellectual class), that although unremarked as such is then construed by Du Bois as an exemplar, by a nascent catachresis, or kind of unconventional metaphor, for a sociology—theoretical in his enunciation but practical in its intention.

Perhaps the matter can stand for emphasis: that for Du Bois, the premise here is not theological. It was taken as a domain of the divine by Thomas Jefferson, in a related line of query, both in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (astride 1785) and in his epistolary ruminations toward the end of his life (in the 1820s)—marking the wrath of a just “creator”—on the future of the American republic configured by the conjoining of a distinctive projection of democracy to a historical system of enslavement (Jefferson 1984, 269–70; Chandler 2014c, 27).

Notable, too, is that Du Bois’s perspective here ought to be understood as distinct from the kind of mistaken biological metaphor of Herbert Spencer (as Spencer put forth a supposed sociology during the latter part of the nineteenth century), even as this reference remains without declaration in the lexemes of his text. Even though the essay “The Development of a People” was produced by Du Bois almost a year before he would write what ought be a touchstone text for any consideration of his early thought, “Sociology Hesitant”—the composition of which dates to late 1904 or early 1905, responding to the massive Congress of Arts and Sciences held in St. Louis, Missouri (which was itself presented as an international scene of putative practitioners of the human sciences, which he will criticize in this response) in September and October 1904—Du Bois’s perspective in the *early* 1904 essay on “the development of a people” may notably be understood as distinct from the kind of mistaken biological metaphor that Spencer had supposed.<sup>38</sup>

Likewise, in addition to the two distinctions that I have just annotated, in the midst of the early passages of the essay articulating his opening premises, Du Bois distinguishes his sensibility from any idea that might seek to construct an analogy of human social organization to mechanical process, a process that would be theorized as already given in its adherence to a set of rules and procedures (Development 296, para. 11).

It is human action, learned or enlightened, that would set the mark toward which Du Bois turned, that he eventually proposes should serve as both the basis and the means of the adjudication of the terms of the

possible futures for “the development of a people,” such as those that may be understood as African American, at the turn to the twentieth century.

**8. ANNOTATIONS AND A BRIEF ELABORATION.** The conceit of the narrative that Du Bois constructs in “The Development of a People” is that along with the presumptive terms of a lead narrative of the making of a putatively common modern worldwide historicity often told in Europe and the Americas that projects the rise and consolidation of practices that promulgated the ideal of the dignity of the human, I suggest that his account in this essay enables us to recognize the lineaments of the terms of another dimension of the historicity entailed. The narration gives us the thought that the modern epoch also saw the promulgation of an interwoven set of marks and practices that produced and consolidated a tendentially novel sense of the denigration of the human. The devolution of this practical sense ought to be understood as simultaneous, perhaps coterminous in the early stages of its emergent articulation, with the development of the ideal of human dignity, within modern historicity.

**A. FIRST ANNOTATION.** I offer here an *epistemological* annotation.

At 1441–42, as given its historical remark in the opening third of Du Bois’s essay, with regard to the terms of the historicity of thought and knowledge, the epistemic orders of general historicity (as analytically distinguished from the events or eventuality of the general social, economic, and political orders, for example), we would be wont to assume a coherent common concept of the human—a theological, philosophical, or political thought or idea—taken as a universal premise or predication, for a form of social and historical being (Development 300–301, paras. 19–21).

Taking our own mark from a thoughtful inhabitation of Du Bois’s discourse (notably his writings of 1894 to 1904, for example, already in “The Afro-American,” even if such reference is not given literally or in the text of our specific essay, “The Development of a People,” of 1904), we are not remiss to indicate that at the historical moment of 1776–90, taken as a distinct historical reference (even if not utterly singular), an idea of such dignity of person, with all of the crooked manifestations of its birthing, had taken shape within philosophical and political discourse within the Americas, namely, the discourse of the British colonies of North America, attendant to its concomitant devolution within the diverse arenas of a nascent configuration that would begin to suppose itself under the heading of

Europe; I have annotated the discourse encoded under the name Thomas Jefferson as an example of such (Chandler 2014: 20–30; Jefferson 1999).

In terms of understanding and knowledge, matters of the episteme in a general sense, leaving it without discrete nominalization in our consideration so far, the novelty at issue here might be clarified in a twofold manner. It is attached to the emergence of the concept of the human—afoot and at stake in the domains of Europe a still nascent Americas and the Caribbean by the midpoint of the seventeenth century. It is produced and at stake in a manner coextensive with the rising discourse of science (which is the lead mode of formulation or gesture toward a formalization within discourse here), including philosophy as science—notably in the centuries-long emergence given in the nodal eruption of the supposed sciences of the human across the second half of the eighteenth century (not so much the religious discourses, nor so much those of politics and legality, even as each is articulated therein and thereby) (Foucault 1990, 314–53, chap. 9; 1973, 303–43, chap. 9; Mudimbe 1988, ix–xiii, 1–43, 187–203; Wynter 2003; D. F. D. Silva 2007, 95–151, 287–92).

Rather than beginning with the presumption that the idea of the human ought to be taken as a domain marked out by the terminal establishment of pylons, as some might suppose, we can begin with a different premise. We might proceed by way of recognition of the pertinence of a different kind of analogy, not of the architectural but rather of the textile: that of the *warp* and *weft* in the construction of fabric for a cloth or a tapestry. This is to stake and extend to matters of supposed knowledge the metaphor that Du Bois proffered in a related locution, concerning the symbolic and the historial in general, as a notation on the idea of “America,” in the penultimate paragraph of the closing essay of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, as noted above (Du Bois 1903k).

For the question that arises in the modern epoch, as the very concept of the human, is the supposed relative status of sameness and difference within the emergence, maintenance or duration, and denouement of any form of social and historical being that may be understood as utterly originary in its genesis. Such being ought to be understood, thus, as indefinite in its historial articulation. Hence, it is also, thereby, illimitable in its realization. While one dimension, supposed sameness, is usually proclaimed as the basis for a sense of the common, the other dimension, the necessity of difference is usually presumed, without proclamation or radical problematization (or, presumption is usual with regard to the implacable imperatives that arise thereby and according to such). Or, that is to say,



this latter is put into practical operation without critical consideration, despite all manner of disavowals, except in the most benign forms of politesse. What remains for philosophy in the general sense, for critical reflection and discourse, is the question of how one might conceptualize the maintenance of both sides of the limit—of the distinction of sameness and difference, ostensibly one marked off from the other—in weighted asymmetry, in an otherwise-than-classical sense of balance in its ostensibly reciprocal devolution. The thought is that there may not be any preternaturally given devolution in the unfolding of *historial* being. Rather, all is at stake: here, now, then, there. If so, the emergence and articulation of “a people” as such encodes the question of the very historial order of being as human.

For indicative purposes here, to offer a few discrete nominalizations, as a matter of situating the conceptualization that I have just proposed, one can recognize in Du Bois’s locution in this essay several diverse orders of historicity of the sixteenth century through the eighteenth: from the ideological dynamics of the political and economic revolutions of the demos in the British Isles (notably the so-called Glorious Revolution); to the discourses of some of the leaders of the indigenous groups of the Caribbean and the Americas in relation to the imperial invasions of Spain and Portugal (for example, that led indigenous leader of the Taino nominalized by the Spanish friars as Enrique); to the historically late, supposedly enlightened, yet dappled discourses under the heading of philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Immanuel Kant; to the precocious ruminations in the form of *poësie* of those enslaved in the supposed New World, as such could find articulation in the writings of Phillis Wheatley; or the poignant world-historical initiatives of Polydor, Mōise, or Toussaint L’Ouverture, on the island known during the eighteenth century as Saint-Domingue.

A horizon of historial reference at once nodal and perennial in temporization may be given.

Although not yet coherent in explanatory claim, nor stable in semantic reference, nor simply available in lexical entity for thought and discourse astride the middle decades of the seventeenth century, by the midpoint of the following century, a full century later, this novel sense began to acquire articulation as a kind of classification that was adumbrated as a potential scientific and philosophical heading for thought and research: the concept of race.

A century thereafter, over the second half of the nineteenth century, the concept of human culture acquired a certain status in the rising sciences

of the human (taking strong lexical reference from the German, *Kultur* and *Bildung*, yet nonetheless encoding therein references to the Romance legacies, namely, *sensus communis*) as the dominant heading for address of the difficult matter of difference among the supposed humans. Such a heading, the latter, the concept of culture—for how we think about difference among humans—remains dominant in our own time.<sup>39</sup>

In this essay Du Bois does not remark this tendentious novelty as a theme, as I have nonetheless adduced it here. Indeed, while named virtually everywhere in his writings of the two decades straddling the turn of the century, his analytical judgment as to the effects of the practices that denigrate groups of humans is acute, precise, even resolute—for he would brook no compromise on the tenability of the moral status of all those understood as human; all for him are *person*. There is nonetheless an abiding theoretical ambivalence in his discourse—legible according to the protocol of critical fidelity to the integrity of his thought—as to the epistemic determination of the sense of difference among humans that is at stake. That is to say that even as he ought to be understood to bring into critical elucidation the contradictions of logic and the concomitant incoherent conceptual formulation of the philosophical and supposed scientific discourses of the human that proposed such denigration, there abides within Du Bois's thought an apparent irresolution on the order of the *strategy* in thought (not at all with regard to his clarity about the practical-theoretical character of the problematization) in the address to matter of the determination of the tendentiously novel gathering of the senses of denigration of the human. Yet, as I have proposed elsewhere, this difficulty is constitutive.<sup>40</sup> Further, the practical theoretical terms of what is at stake for thought can be elaborated by way of Du Bois's early engagement with this problematization (Chandler, forthcoming).

**B. SECOND ANNOTATION.** I now offer an annotation, with emphasis on the historiographical event, of *historical eventuality*, in thought as practice. With regard to the moment of 1441–42, within the historical domain that will come to consider itself common in some sense, despite all manner of differences, as Christian and of a putative Europa, there begins to emerge within the social field (certainly for the literate and ruling economic and political classes) a certain order of sense that a possible determination of the status and pertinence that one might adjudge for any being encountered as a foreign “human,” that is to say, even if taken as perhaps “human,” that such being might be construed as categorically different from oneself,

different from one's sense of one's self—different in kind, in essence. This would be a self that is conceived as the subject of, or under the aegis of, a religious authority, or theological sovereign, namely, God (or, in Catholic Lisbon, or even within the domain of the Crown of Aragon, under the pope), thus Christian. So, too, in an understanding that could run in a parallel or subterranean manner to the theological, in the reference to a sense of self, one would be the subject of a political sovereign, a ruler (usually as monarch, of one kind or another, a king, usually, or queen, or even kaiser), a figure that might declare its own sense of self as the exception to all, within any social or historical dispensation (Lach 1965–93; Pagden 1987).

In the aftermath of the political declarations of 1776, or in elaborations thereof, while retaining in sedimented form the principle of opposition, the legible surface of this historically novel practice (the tendentious judgment according to the terms of a putative conception of distinction gathered under the heading “race”), as precisely the articulate promulgation of the new epistemic sense of a historical being under the heading human, the titular claim may be understood to shift in apparition to a distribution of mark according to the logic issuing from that first and founding premise. The other (as foreign, alien, radically new in both being and bearing) might be adjudged as not yet *fully* human, or perhaps *not yet* perfected, as human. Such judgment in the epistemic and historical instance proffered itself (perhaps as its only means) by way of the tutelary image of the relatively recently consolidated idea of the European.<sup>41</sup>

This historicity in its devolution might be given in and by way of the example of the emergence of that perennial exemplar of the world-historical known in historiographical discourse and knowledge as Virginia. Already afoot as historical figures as part of the arrival of the Spanish in Mexico and Florida in the sixteenth century, Africans were also among the first in the incipiting decades of what is now known in the historiography as “Jamestown” in the early seventeenth century. With practitioners of labor subjected by contractual financial overdetermination, as well as by the military violence of the English against the indigenous peoples of the region (after the Spanish in the previous century and ongoing), from the first decade of the century through to the beginning of its sixth decade, determinations of status (in all senses—from theological to legal) were perhaps decisively inflected by one's relation to coerced labor. Conditions of indenture and then, too, of enslavement, and likewise the terms of sexualization by gender and forms of marriage, would articulate profound and perhaps existentially ultimate forms of hierarchy and subjection, of one's

person to that of another. Yet our understanding would be remiss if we propose to claim a presumptive status during those decades in this historical domain for something that we might today place under the terms of a concept of race.

In the critical epistemic sense (in which what concerns me here would include any stable formation of general understanding as well as tendentially formal practices of thought and knowledge), in this historiographical sense, such terms did not yet exist. The nascent legibility of any lexical index of what we might nominalize with the term race, or its derivatives, as an idea, is in the processes of its emergent articulation. The formal efforts to place a concept of race as a heading for knowledge or philosophy is not yet apparent in any definitive manner at the midpoint of the seventeenth century, in the historical domain that we know as either “Jamestown” or “Virginia.”

Across the century, the devolution to the articulation of differences unfolded: by way of the eventful refusals to release Africans or their descendants from coerced labor across the 1630s, clustered at the turn to the decade of the 1640s, as distinguished from the indentured English and others of the British Isles, for example; to the 1643 law (of the colonials of a supposed English provenance in situ) supporting the assignment of African women to field labor, notably taxing them as laborers (as opposed to the more common domestic labor for women from the British Isles, understood as English); to the quietly cataclysmic 1662 law of the Virginia colonial legislature that made the status as enslaved of the African woman heritable (that “all children borne in this country shall be bond or free only according to the condition of the mother”), its articulation simply the historically specific expression in symmetrical converse form of the sedimentation of the logic encoded in an old Roman patriarchal principle (*patria potestas*); to the 1667 law of the colony that excluded enslaved persons from the beneficence of the legal covenants extended to Christians in the colony; to the 1691 legislative action that emplaced a declaration that any person understood as “white” who married a “negroe, mulatto, or Indian” would be permanently banished from the colony within three months of the act of marriage. By the end of the century, these actions had produced in situ, if accorded a retrospective thought, as if of principle, to the effect that it could be tendentially claimed over the century that followed these eventualities to announce a new sense of the idea of *chattel*, portable and inheritable property, as pertaining to a form a being, ambivalently understood as “human,” a certain legal fiction. An enslav-

ing class, led by male property owners, of British provenance, proclaiming themselves as subject of the English crown, would promulgate this idea as if pertaining to those Africans and those descended thereof; this new idea, to remark the matter, would be declared to attend to those in the colony who earlier, that is, at an earlier time, within a century, were understood to stand within the colony of Virginia as *persons*, indeed as persons of the “commonwealth” (Hening 1810, 1:146, 552, 2:170, 260, 267, 270, 280–81; Holt 2010; Saller 1994).

At the turn to the eighteenth century, at least according to the dominant legality on the terrain, as it were, this latter supposition was no longer the case within the English colony of Virginia.

**C. THIRD ANNOTATION.** Marking this reference, from the unfolding of the dispositions of the law in colonial guise, in the apparition of what has been proclaimed as Virginia, there is promulgated within the colonial theater that we have come to know as America (something more and other than simply the world of the colonists), a distinct thought of the human, at once a discourse of a putative horizon of the common of the human as a form of being that is yet constitutively riven in both its emergence and maintenance, or apparition.

On the one hand, according to the discourses and the history that may become legible by way of the index that I have given above, there is a claim to the common, a putative worldwide sense, *sensus communis*, on a planetwide scale, declared universal in its becoming and in its implication. Such a claim makes it possible for the commoner, again in situ, precisely as “a people,” to insist on status in common with the supposed aristocracy (within the frame of whatever whole is declared, of the supposed sovereign reference, of the home country or the colony, of home and colony, or the colonies of the crown), and likewise, eventually, also in relation to the sovereign. As such, this order of commonness is understood to issue as if a distinct and radical difference. It was the supposed emergence of another “people” on the world-historical horizon. In this instance, sameness is understood to affirm a claim to difference. This is the thought of the Declaration of Independence of the British colonies in North America of 1776, as proposed in writing by Thomas Jefferson (see Jefferson 1999).

This is a potentially radical understanding of either sameness or difference. It would announce the radical form of the very existence of any and all that might be construed as “a people,” that is to say, the historial. It may be thought of as a name for the very making or production, or construction,

of any ideal or morality thereof, of the human, perhaps as such that might subtend or guide a claim to the shared as a practice of idealization.

On the other hand, any refusal of the common, such a sense of the common, a certain sense of the same, always, ineluctably, yields another, a new, yet always derivative, sense of difference. Arising in a traditional sense of historical being, this other sense of difference is always understood or declared as categorical, as issuing from an oppositional logic (as either-or, all or nothing). In a philosophical sense, likewise within traditional legality, the categorical insistence on, rather than a pragmatic judgment of, the distinction as fungible is its definitive operation. It must or will always proliferate apparitional codifications as if to justify its principle. (The exemplar par excellence here is the legal system of the codes of apartheid in southern Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Others would be various aspects of European colonialism in general, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries; so, too, it would include the legality attendant to the codes of law of the systems of enslavement throughout the Atlantic Basin in general, the Americas, and the Caribbean, from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century.) This other sense of difference is always understood as secondary, dependent, subordinate, and inferior to the supposed originary or radical emergence of difference. (The supposed inferiority of the difference understood as secondary or derivative could easily be inverted in its kinesis, from an ostensibly negative quality to an affirmative judgment. In colloquial terms, it is akin to the practice of a kind of “slumming.”) It is always heavily marked by sexualization and engendering (gender in general).

The declaration of difference, “independence,” of the sort marked out in Jefferson’s discourse, debated and affirmed in situ in the early summer of 1776, has been supposed as of the former kind, a supposedly originary proclamation of difference.

The radical disposition within the discourse of African Americans that have been enslaved in the Americas and the Caribbean and of those who claim descent thereof has been taken in general as the latter sort of claim.

Perhaps it is apposite for critical thought to take as our exemplum a node of the problem of thinking what is often considered matters of kinship within ethnological discourses, anthropological and otherwise. For behind most of our general ideas of forms of human collective, almost as an immemorial reference, stands the image of a supposed traditional kin group. The idea is that of a group the relations of which are in some

decisive manner *of* (both from and about) heredity. Such relations are a form of bond, thought of as the most unfungible sort of social relation. The metaphor of such a group circulates through our most common terms of self-reference—those of nation, of state, of religious belonging, of “culture.” It is often taken as a *sine qua non* with common and dominant ideas of family. (In the twenty-first century, it is often used to speak of or describe shared interest groups—we are “family.”)

In traditional guise, kinship or kin relations are the metaphorical extension of birth relations. Even now, in the twenty-first century, half a century after the consolidation in American ethnological discourses of the 1960s of a formal critique of such an idea and practice, such a disposition toward matters of kinship is common; such is typically expressed in genealogies, often represented in graphic form (Schneider 1972, 1984). One must either assume or change such inherited conceptualization in the form of knowledge.

In order to account for the principle that we limn from Du Bois’s order of historiographical attention in “The Development of a People,” another idea of kinship, if not entirely new, may be adduced: birth relations are a metaphorical expression of kinship relations (Sahlins 2012, ix, 65, 74). Alternatively given, we might say our understanding of birth relations is produced by way of the system of values and meanings by which we understand kinship relations.

Notably, in this second principle (a not yet traditionalized idea) for understanding kin relations, mutuality (mutual care) is but one possible aspect of such a system and not at all general, or radical. Whereas one might attend to the thought of mutuality with a markedly affirmative sense of existential connection, without any analytical presumption of the given stability of a distinction of self and other, in this second way of thinking of the matter (yet to become a traditionalized thought), kin relations are better understood under a generalized understanding of the idea of the *agon*. (The notation is by way of an initial reference to the ancient Greek linguistic topos—agonistic, perhaps the semantic sedimentations, in all senses, of the derivative lexemes, such as *antagonistic*, even possibly *protagonistic*; for such nominal references might remain generative for critical thought here. In principle, as well as practice, any list of the possible terms of art or reference must remain open. The *agon* is one among others.) A general conception of kin relations may be best thought under the heading of the *agon*. If we may think of mutual care, there is yet no



principle of theoretical determination that would exclude its organization as agonistic. The general form can, and thus must, always be of at least two different registers. Indeed, to continue to stake our historical example, such differences are indeed the very kinetic organization of systems of kinship produced as “America,” both then and now. This agon is at the root (both genesis and telos) of what has devolved as the historical projection most precisely understood in all of our discourses in general as “America” or “American”—in the horizons of the modern epoch.

In the context of the discussion that we have proposed as an annotation to Du Bois’s thought in “The Development of a People,” such a new disposition in thinking matters of kinship may appear as necessary for a coherent account of the double reference of the promulgations of the idea of the human across the early modern centuries, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth. Permit me to recall here my indication above that such double reference is my reference to the interwoven production of discourses and practices that give us the simultaneous and coextensive dignification *and* denigration of the emergent figure of the supposed human as definitive of modern historicity.

If for the stake of historiographical fidelity we remain with our world-historical exemplar of colonial Virginia, we have at hand the example of the relation of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson (Gordon-Reed 1997, 2008; Spillers 2003c; Chandler 2014c, 109–11).

Sally Hemings (1773–1835), the birth daughter of Elizabeth Hemings and John Wayles, was inherited in the month of May of the year of her birth by her birth sister, Martha Wayles Skelton (also a birth daughter of John Wayles), who became the first wife, and the only one recognized in formal legality, of Thomas Jefferson. Hemings may then be described in museum curatorial provenance attendant to the first exhibition at historic Monticello on her life and relations as a “daughter, mother, sister, aunt . . . seamstress, world-traveler, enslaved woman, concubine, liberator, mystery.”<sup>42</sup> After nearly a quarter century of genetic and historiographical query, at the inception of the second decade of the twenty-first century, we can now affirm with knowledge that beginning in Paris, when she was just past about fourteen or fifteen years of age, while she was serving there as an enslaved maidservant for Mary Jefferson (Thomas Jefferson’s youngest daughter with his legally recognized wife, Martha, who had died in childbirth some four years earlier), Hemings was subsequently, eventually, inscribed within an approximately thirty-seven-year relationship of some intimacy (that is to say fulfilling many of the duties of a wife in care for a

husband, leaving aside for another inquiry a critical understanding of the terms of such practice of intimacy, for either, both, or all, parties entailed) with Thomas Jefferson. It resulted in six birth children (four of whom lived to adulthood—Beverly, Harriet, Madison, and Eston).

Elizabeth's mother, Sally Hemings's grandmother, was Susannah, who is sometimes described in the scholarship as a "full-blooded African" woman; she was held enslaved by the Eppes family (nearby the plantation of John Wayles of Charles City County), by whom she was made sexually available to a visiting English sea captain of the name of John Hemings. In historical turn, Susannah's daughter, Elizabeth, delivered over her life course an extended progeny, of several generations, such that at Monticello they constituted approximately a third of that plantation's enslaved population, which included as many as 115 persons (Gordon-Reed 2008). Elizabeth Hemings may thus—according to a discreet dimension of historicity—be understood to have been one of the most powerful persons afoot on the plantation that was Monticello, in Virginia. At Monticello, too, the life of Elizabeth Hemings, Sally's mother, was closely entwined with that of Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson. Historical notation reports that Elizabeth was even present, along with other Hemings women, at Martha's death. (Indeed, Martha might have been considered Elizabeth's "niece," by some reckonings of kinship.) There is no official record of John Wayles's birth children with Elizabeth Hemings. Nor is there such for Thomas Jefferson's birth children with Sally Hemings. Enslaved persons, notably those who were women, had no right by positive and nascent statutory law in the Virginia colony of the late eighteenth century to refuse sexual, or gendered, advances, or other such insistence, by their formally recognized legal owner, or his designee, as it were.

Yet, as we give thought to the mark of Africa, shall we name it—in this instance given by way of woman, enslaved, and her progeny—the matter of things African in modern historicity on a world-historical scale may not be understood as somehow apart from the modern epoch but rather as actively constitutive of its very possibility and manner of unfolding. Such an understanding is precisely at stake for any and all traditional historiography—or so Du Bois's thought in this essay leads us to acknowledge.

It is given above all in the example of the care for the other—as other.

We may attest to this thought by way of example—here as theoretical metaphor.<sup>43</sup>

On the order of our earlier notations with regard to "The Development of a People," a reading of the kinship relations supposed as afoot in the late eighteenth-century domain of colonial Virginia, if annotated

according to the traditional analytical priority of an ensemble of births, by which then kinship relations may be ascertained, the interpretive yield is a more or less refined genealogy. Some of those births are understood and conceived as legitimate; others are understood as illegitimate. Such a supposition is easy to think, even intuitive in the context of contemporary discourse, then and now, of colonial Virginia. The matter is in all truth more simple, still. Hence, it is thereby much more difficult for thought to accede to a commensurate understanding.

For in late eighteenth-century Virginia, Sally Hemings and Martha Wayles were not understood as having legal kin relations. Or better, this supposed nonkin relation was the term of their kin relation, within the context of the Virginia of their time. Rather, their kin relation was determined by the eventuality of the condition of a system of legal enslavement (and its inverse, legal freedom, of a nonetheless gendered kind), on the one hand, and the valuation of a conception of a *historical* difference among humans, on the other. This latter was tendentially an ostensible categorical difference (no matter if the difference is adjudged by only one drop, or alternatively formulated by only 99.9 percent of a supposedly possible 100) among humans. The difference is codified in symbolic form in the idea and concept of distinction by supposed “race,” at once semiotic in its being or existence, yet quite actual (in whatever sense such actuality is reckoned). Yet by way of such emergence, it was also at stake for philosophy and science by the coming of the later decades of that century, the eighteenth.

As described earlier in this study, this distinction, which I continue to describe here as yet without name, as it were (within the terms of my analysis), was not yet stable in the “Jamestown” of Virginia of the opening three decades of the initiative of colonization by the English, say, perhaps, in 1632, for example. However, in the course of the devolutions of that century, the seventeenth, as I outlined earlier, its symbolic ground was decisively imprinted by the decree of *partus sequitur ventrem* of legislative action in situ led by a propertied minority of the colony in 1662. Thereby it was codified in the 1691 stricture against supposed intermarriage (which was not so much against the potential production of intermixture—an adroit misnomer, perhaps—in the form of progeny, as it was an effort at a prophylactic against its legal sanction or the production of any new status for such progeny).

Yet something more than a century later, abreast the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the terms of kin valuation in terms of the idea and

concept of race were not only established and coherent in formal legality but presumptive in all general matters of the life of the colony, of Virginia.

Its bearing for our attention to Du Bois's problematization is multiple. By way of such presumption (of the late eighteenth century), the system in operation does not yield the further presumption of a categorical difference for a reading of the kin relation of Sally Hemings and Martha Wayles, nor does it yield only a distinction of enslaved and free person, for example (or man and woman, owner and "concubine," of Sally Hemings in relation to Thomas Jefferson, and vice versa, and so forth), but it articulates most precisely and most radically the terms of the kinship relation that matter (as determination, in all senses of this idea of force) for each progenitor as a birth parent, their relation to their sense of self in such relations, each in relation to the other, by others to each of them, and to both in relation, and most fundamentally by those who are or may be understood as progeny—of the relation or union of the supposed parent-progenitors.

At the most radical level of existence, on the order of the very possibility of the social, that is to say, the collective level of historicity, the matter—the terms of kinship—thus articulates the relation of such progeny to their "people": those that may appear socially and historically around and in relation to Sally Hemings, then and now, as it were; those clustered around and in relation to Thomas Jefferson; and then the relation of such progeny to the American "people," and thereby, too, to the African American "people," or, better, peoples. The matter may be that they always have "people," always and only in the plural. They are not only part of *a* people, as it were. They always have peoples, all of them, and then more to come. This is the real secret of the problematic for thought that Du Bois opened for address in his essay of 1904. Perhaps this is the true inheritance of "the souls of Black folk."

In the schema that may arise as a guide for knowledge and understanding that issues from that traditionalized conception of matters of kinship, the yield in the first instance is only a genealogy. It complicates rather than affirms a critical account of the motivation and production of values, in their social or historical effect. Further, that genealogy can yield only a bifurcated mapping, giving parallel lines of descent, doubled in appearance, but it cannot sustain a critical theoretical articulation of those lines (in relation, within a social domain or historical reference). The valuations that organize the kinship relations, beyond the supposed genealogical, produce a variegation in status accorded each line, of which a traditional

understanding nonetheless cannot of itself give account for knowledge and understanding, historiographical or otherwise. That is to say, in traditional genealogical reference, one line is ostensibly legal (sanctioned). In the same such reference, the other line is supposed as para-legal (not exactly illegal but without legal sanction). This may offer a description as the premise of a native historiography; yet, it cannot account for the condition of possibility of what it describes nor the terms of its own access to or account of that history. It is a restricted, rather than general, sense of kinship, as a form of the social or relation, among humans.

Another approach, one that not only affirms the inversion of the metaphor (birth relations ought to be understood as the metaphorical extension of the organization of kinship relations, rather than vice versa) but also recognizes the *agon* as a form of *historial* relation of possible kinship system or domain of reference, not only accounts for the possibility of the late eighteenth-century Virginia outcome with regard to the progeny of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson, but brings us to the task of rendering legible the motive forces that articulate their possible *historial* relation to the productions of their peoples—always at least and never only double.

So too, according to forms of reference enabled by this other approach to kinship, arise the terms of our own access in thought, to such historical eventuality (from “Jamestown” to eighteenth century colonial Virginia in general, as given in Monticello) as an articulation at once of possibility and limit or of dignification and denigration. That is to say that it arose of a historicity that is always at stake, then and now, now by way of then; and, we must note that it is a then that remains always at stake in its historical bearing in the now); the then in this sense is one that has not yet ascribed to itself the possible terms of its futural right of *historial* articulation, or rearticulation.

**D. A BRIEF ELABORATION.** The historicity gathered into view by Du Bois pertaining to matters African American, which forms the capsule narrative of the central third part of this essay, announces a distinct understanding of the problematization attendant thereby (Development 298–304, paras. 17–28). It is the question of the relation among generations as the instituting condition of tradition, rather than that relation appearing as the historically given outcome of tradition (an understanding in which the relation of generations is not in question but appears historically as the outcome of a presupposed tradition). The relation to the future is the decisive, perhaps even the only, pertinence of tradition. The matter of their

being—all those understood as *of* all that may be placed under the heading African American—is at stake in the very apparition of existence.

On the order of reflection at which the problematic is announced for thought that would be radical, the question becomes: How does one receive and grapple with the hitherto unimaginable, such as in the situation of the historical Phillis Wheatley (ca. 1756–82), or those such as her (for example, those of her generational cohort, such as a Sally Hemings); or the circumstances of the practitioners of the making of the tradition of songs and music that we now know as the “spirituals” across the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries; or the conditions for thought of one W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), or those such as him; existential, always, in thinking, of the possible remaking of history?

Across the duration of distended belief, from one century, through a third, and into a fourth, and now a fifth, from ostensible acceptance without resignation to an “unhopeful hope,” one discovers that the nodal concern, if not given so much as telos or a harmonic outcome, is a supple and resilient commitment to being at stake in the future (Du Bois 1903k). For here there is no purgatory or beneficent salvation, as ultimate claim (such as one might have found in the professions of Saint Francis of Assisi or the writings of Dante Alighieri). Rather, there is an insistence on the illimitable realization of that which is not yet, as an expression of responsibility in the here and now for that which is not yet available within the given. Unmarked though it is in the kinesis of the “striving,” even as maintenance, it is nonetheless weighted heavily on the bias toward giving, generosity in general, as the opening for all that will come to have been considered of highest value or valuation. Thus, rather than pose the query: What if Phillis Wheatley, or the practitioners of the spirituals in their creation, knew the history of the modern world as did one W. E. B. Du Bois, or us (whoever we may be), for example, how might they have judged and taken action? Rather, the question is, How might W. E. B. Du Bois (for example)—not just receive the bequest of a Wheatley or the symbolic inheritance left by the givers of the spirituals, but rather in such reception—recognize how the being at stake for those past generations might be, or become, at stake for those generations yet to come? Perhaps it is a matter of being at stake as a determination of a decision, the outcome of a judgment (rather than simply a response to a demand), for the as yet impossible possible future?

So it may be, for those who might claim the status of the progeny of Sally Hemings.

In the course of Du Bois's essay, this question may be understood to unfold according to two interwoven senses of historicity. These two senses both appear in Du Bois's essay under the nominal heading of revolution. The initial sense is that of destruction, the destruction of ideals called or named retrospectively as African (given here only a brief lexical notice, totalized, monumental or mundane, undifferentiated in time or place—as if memorial—in nominalization). In such reference, they are always presumptively of patriarchy. The other sense of revolution is of production. It is the production of ideals and ways of existence in the face of ongoing destruction (destruction normalized and routine, or even specifically violence, violence not only of built space, or the body of a person, but of all that one may consider of “soul” or psyche, of imagination, of the order of so-called dreamworlds). Likewise, it is the circumstance of production amid new senses of relation—of new or novel contexts for their emergence, both toward diverse senses of the past and potential allegories of the future, for which no terrain, let alone any map, can be imagined, let alone proposed. There is in such revolutionary production no futural referent that one might assume. As an example, one cannot even hope to imagine, let alone know, the face of the ancestors yet to come (both future and past—there are those surely yet to be invoked as such), given only in the historicity that is not yet and has not yet been, in any yet possible sense. As Du Bois names it, a leader, as it were, in such historial problematization, faces not just the destruction of an archaic or immemorial past (of Africa; yet also in general), but so, too, the destructions within the the existential past, that is to say within the life-course of the generations afoot in the Americas, of productions announced in the midst of ongoing destruction (of such archaic referent and its concomitant aftermaths), of all those who might be configured, affirmatively or negatively, in relation to matters African American (Development 304–8, paras. 29–36).

This work of revolutionary production, in the face of originary and ongoing destruction, has always and already been afoot—as the very course of African American practices. Understood to be set on its course in the wake of the production of the book *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, gathered in 1902–3, the essay “The Development of a People” may be understood—*à partir de*, we might say, the provenance and claim of the monumental essay “The Talented Tenth” (written in the months immediately following the publication of that book of essays)—to insist on the moral horizon of a responsibility on the part of all enlightened



persons to the possibilities of the highest “culture” of “modern life” (Development 311, para. 47).

The question of new senses of ideal or idealization for a new leadership is staged as a problem as the tonal center of the soundings of the poetic voice in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, in whose wake our essay, “The Development of a People,” has found its sonic registers. In that book of essays, the voicing of that locution is always biographical and autobiographical. It carries particular cadences and colors, yet marked by the particular timbre of our indefatigable narrator (and his avatars in character and problem).

In the memoir-essay on “Josie,” “Of the Meaning of Progress,” in which someone married another (we think it the narrator of our story), our heroine stands as the monogram of her community in general (or those such as her throughout the “New South” of the 1880s) but most especially she articulates as the paradoxical exemplar of her generation—at least one of several generations lost in the failures of leadership and social dispensation in the aftermath of the American Civil War. The loss in question, however, is most sonorously sounded when also heard in its resonances in the others of her generation and among those generations contiguous to hers, some that preceded it and some that succeed it (or those who arrive on the scene in the latter moments of the passing of the one that properly belongs to her). It is with the double elegy of those generations, the essays on the death of Du Bois’s firstborn, his son Burghardt, and on the journey of Alexander Crummell, that we can attune to the somber tone of the last third of that book (the part that Du Bois, in the book’s “Forethought,” placed as addressed both from and to those “within the Veil”).

Still, a certain resolute hope finds its distinctive legibility in the short story “Of the Coming of John,” which sounds the book’s penultimate sonic notation, just before any resolution of theme and consequence. So it is that in our story, upon returning to his hometown from a sojourn of higher education, John is politely and adroitly shouted down, so to speak, by an older “African American” generation, in the locutions of a deacon, when the young sojourner who has returned home speaks from the pulpit of the African American church of new worlds to come; and then, later, he is hanged in judgment, on penalty of death, in the woods by members of what is most likely an older “white” generation, subtending the perjorative disposition previously voiced or enacted by a member of a younger “white” generation, so as to in effect render silent the “voicing” of his action in defense of the

hope and possibility of a younger African American generation. This is to say that beyond the limits of a subterranean narrative of a divinely given “white” knight in shining armor (which is the reference to *Lohengrin* in the story), one might hear the narrative resonance of the kind of rustle that comes as one’s fingers brush unseen and forgotten pages of fine papers, once carefully set aside into the quiet corner of a drawer or small closet, with precious notations, of some night thoughts and morning dreams, perhaps hastily written down, with impatient fear of forgetfulness. Therein, we might find a few encodings that could recall a voice such as that of Jennie, John’s little sister, for whose protection he would commit the mortal sin.

We note that it is Jennie who, as the story unfolds, follows him from the scene of his failed oratory at the church and asks of him the question of the ages:

Long they stood together, peering over the gray unresting water.

“John,” she said, “does it make every one—unhappy when they study and learn a lot of things?”

He paused and smiled. “I am afraid it does,” he said.

“And John, are you glad you studied?”

“Yes,” came the answer, slowly and positively.

She watched the flickering lights upon the sea, and said thoughtfully, “I wish I was unhappy,—and—and,” putting both arms about his neck, “I think I am, a little, John.” (Du Bois 1903f, 242, paras. 19–24)

We recall that it was the memory of the eyes of his sister Jennie, along with the face of their mother, in his mind’s-eye memory that led John to turn and commit himself to what he thought of as his “duty” in his hometown and thus to return from the North to the South and pursue his life’s work there (Du Bois 1903f, 238, para. 16). While John’s nascent vision was perhaps unimaginable, almost unspeakable, in his own time, it remains that in the conceit of the story, Jenny survives (unblemished we might venture)—perhaps to live, and to fight, in another time, for another day.

That is to say, it was some eight years after the book of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* before Du Bois’s writerly locution could realize in print the full-throated form of the fictional voice that we think might be considered akin to Jennie’s. That is the voice of Zora, the heroine of Du Bois’s first novel, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (Du Bois 1911, 1974b). Zora, born in a swamp, in a brothel, finds her way out, gains her schooling, and then saves from failure and refounds the school in which she was educated. She then, by way of a mighty vision, by way of a kind of

“double-consciousness,” one might say, leads a revolutionary coalition of local African American tenant farmers and sharecroppers, along with local Italian immigrant laborers and artisan-workers, to acquire, drain, and reclaim the swamp as arable farmland, which is then successfully farmed and cultivated by a cooperative of members of the local community. She accomplishes what John Jones was unable to realize in his fictional lifetime. Zora may be understood as Jennie-John, reborn in a full-scale fictional narrative. As a historical factotum, she was perhaps the first “dark-skin” heroine in African American fictional literature.

Across the doubled generation of its telling in Du Bois’s book of essays, one the generation of Crummell, the other the generation of one Burghardt, as well as that of the fictional eventualities of its *récit*, this order of historiography encodes a vision that is perhaps potentially still radical, of an impossible possible new world.

That which was not given to Du Bois according to a traditional historiography, coming into its own professionalization at the time, he could come to produce in literature, a vision of a possible future. By all measures this text ought to be taken as an elaboration not only of the shadowed pathways that remain hidden in the rich undergrowth of the book of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* but, too, as an elaboration, by the labor of a fiction, of those essays that follow immediately upon the setting forth of that big little book of thoughts, of which “The Development of a People” can be understood to give us a historical conception of suitable breadth and depth. That essay refers us back, perhaps through the historicity that was colonial Virginia, to the very inception of the epoch, with remarkable theoretical perspicacity.<sup>44</sup> For it may be considered the theoretical telling of the possibility of another historicity, one yet to come, perhaps of the sort that would be such as our fictional Jennie and her generations, and the potential for another kind of historiography, of both that eventuality and its retelling, or telling anew.

This staging in story and fiction can be our guide to a highlighted annotation of the singular status of the question of the relation of generations in Du Bois’s thought. It is not so much that Du Bois’s essays call to our attention the obvious or presumptive arbiters of mundane or intramural value (such as preachers or teachers, and clergy, or businesspersons, for example) that should hold us in reflection. Rather, it is the obscure or even submerged, almost hidden dimension of leadership that we might seek to bring within a resolute focus. Almost everywhere, Du Bois calls for an unconditional reception of “the gifted children” that find their way in the

historicities attendant to matters African American. To our mind's-eye memory might come such figures: from historiography, Sally Hemings of Virginia and Paris, Phillis Wheatley of Boston and London, Josie of the hill country of eastern Tennessee, and the young Du Bois of Great Barrington, son or father, gone "south"; from fiction, Jennie Jones of eastern Georgia or Zora of southern Alabama. So it is with the voices of the children that "cheer the weary traveller" at the close of the last chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Du Bois 1903k, 263–64, para. 26). For the whole of the "duty"—a major word and thought for Du Bois at the turn to the twentieth century—of the supposed "talented tenth" is quite something other than a practice of elitism (Du Bois 1903n, 1982j, 2015m). In Du Bois's disposition, it is by way of an affirmation of each generation (namely—but not only—such children as gifted), *as the carriers of that which has not yet been and is, perhaps still, yet to come*, that there can be, or is, an affirmation of those already gone, of those who made a way out of no way, precisely when there was no way. For they will become what they were only by way of this affirmation of the future, even of a fictive future (Waligora-Davis 2006). Perhaps, indeed, in this thought of an affirmation of the future, as we have proposed to recognize it in the thought of Du Bois, there is available a new way to think of leadership, that is to say, by way of the affirmation of a certain followership. It may well be a radical and other way to think of tradition and the relation of generations.

## CODA I

The nineteenth century was the first century of human sympathy,—the age when half wonderingly we began to descry in others that transfigured spark of divinity which we call Myself; when clodhoppers and peasants, and tramps and thieves and millionaires and—sometimes—Negroes, became throbbing souls whose warm pulsing life touched us so nearly that we half gasped with surprise, crying, "Thou too! Hast Thou seen Sorrow and the dull waters of Hopelessness? Hast Thou known Life?" And then all helplessly we peered into those Other-worlds, and wailed, "O World of Worlds, how shall man make you one?"  
—W. E. B. DU BOIS, "Of Alexander Crummell" (1903b)

According to his thought in this passage, the matter of the relation of the example and the movement of "ideals" for Du Bois must be understood in a manner that is as fundamental and simple in premise as it is complex

and ultimate in implication. In apparition here as a cipher, perhaps, the matter is toward the problem of thinking that which remains yet to come, beyond the line of today, of “this narrow Now,” proposing another world, another sense of world, another possible world that is yet impossible; we can call it the general principle of “democracy”: recognition of sameness is by way of the asymmetrical affirmation of difference. Or, rather, the affirmation of possibility should not be understood as rooted in the inhabited sense of loss as the passage to sympathy but rather in the irruption of possibility as the passage to the affirmation of empathy. Empathy would be otherwise than an accession to any form of a supposed sovereign, or the universal, or the absolute; rather, it would announce the kinetic possibility of the irruption of freedom. The sense of being in this way is always an affirmation of the possibility of the future that is at stake in the present: here and now. Du Bois’s thought may be understood as an affirmation of a general principle of freedom in historicity. It is thus a parallax.

Toward an affirmative attention to such a thought, we have considered two orders of example in this first part of our study. One is existential in an autobiographical idiom of thought. The other is historiographical (nascently sociological) in a theoretical discourse.

The autobiographical register of Du Bois’s writing, addressed most generally in the opening section of part I, may be thought of as a practice in which a subject of thought is rendered as an object. For this reference, one might take Du Bois’s text *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, of 1940, as the guiding or exemplary consideration.

This register marks a scenography in Du Bois’s intellectual habitation that is the scene of massive metaphor and the play of the most thoughtful practice—of almost mundane, thoughtful, existential imagination—which yet in its implications could perhaps, at times, yield an irruption of catachresis. What has been leavened in this study of his discourse of the turn of the century is that his autobiography produces an affirmation of a sense of self as *ipse* that is always at least and never only double in both its possibility and that which it may become. That frightful apparition, while remaining otherwise than a domesticated doppelgänger, attuned the would-be protean thinker-writer to the ineluctable necessity that the journey given of the existence to which he belongs (without possession), also for those like him, remains without any accession or passageway to home, for such may never have been given. What is both required and given is a passage beyond any parochial formation, in its sedimentation. Here we might remark the thought of an illimitable concatenation of association,

of like and unlike all at once, as it were, such that an asymmetrical rhythm might arise within the relation, of person—of peoples—by way of an indissoluble movement of kinetic dissociation. (Perhaps it might be akin to the fractal movement of the waves and sedimentation across the ocean bottom.) An existential journey, whether of the one or the many (as life story or as historiography)—even if as sojourn—is marked by such punctuation, may no longer be rendered as an experience only of faith. Rather, it would bring to relief the interminable markings of one's own limits, of the instance of ambivalence as legible trace of impossible possibility. A way forward, so to speak, might be found only by going forward. Here perhaps I may be allowed to remark in summary that we have an autobiographical writing of the most profound sense of hope, even in the face of the absence of almost all resources for a commitment to the future. Perhaps this writing was subtended by the historiographical availability of the sense that others had gone before, that they, too, found ways to make a way out of no way, or so the proverbial understanding comes to us.

In the historiographical practice of his writing, in thought and discourse, as considered here, we were able to follow the order of example by indexing two of Du Bois's earliest essays, the posthumously published essay "The Afro-American," circa 1894, and "The Development of a People," of February 1904, a threshold essay for his early thinking (issued by Du Bois less than a year after he completed and released the book, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, in March and April 1903). With these two references, marking the inception and the denouement of the decisive early decade in Du Bois's intellectual itinerary, we can ascertain the way in which a sense of general modern historicity was at once (simultaneously, reciprocally) productive of the specific apparition of African American historicity, thus general in pertinence and implication, and yet also constitutive in that according to a critical path of thought matters African American may be understood to announce a distinctive, perhaps originary, problematization general to modern history (for social and historical collectives in general) whether of nation or state, and perhaps also in terms of a heading that would soon be afoot, that is to say all that is now commonly understood under the heading of an idea or concept of culture. Without declaration, thematic claim, or remark in first-person guise, the latter essay may be understood to operate the rhetoric of an appeal or petition (to conscience) that insists on a doubled identification of both the writer and reader, the reader by way of the writer, with the object of concern, the object of the discourse, African Americans. Hence, even as the

writer of the 1904 essay does not declare in his own voice, as the subject of the locution (as does the 1894 essay, even if at times only by implication rather than direct claim), he should also be understood as of the object, the demand that is put to the supposed reader—in part by way of a putative acceptance or affirmation of an implicit appeal from the writer—to recognize and affirm the object of concern, African Americans, as indeed “a people,” of historicity as it were, of the same historical bearing as both the writer and reader—as we ought to understand all human groups—this appeal insists on an acknowledgment that would be hard-pressed not to include admission to a recognition of a certain perlocutionary force that would attend the status the first-person articulation of such a group, in whatever tongue or ensemble of such, in whatever idiom or diverse forms of such, that is as a subject of historicity.

It should be noted that although it is neither mentioned as text nor declared by thesis, for the decisive historical matter that is in question with regard to the ruminations in these two essays that I have marked as historiographical, “The Afro-American,” of circa 1894, and “The Development of a People,” from 1904—each indexed at an ostensible national level, of America as project, and then too in terms of a worldwide horizon, of African Americans as a world-historical reference—the thought of the later essay may be formulated in this context thus: if one takes in mind the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, as both text and proclamation, as the touchstone example of comparison, ought “leaders” of or among the supposed “people” of which Du Bois is writing declare in turn an “independence” (understood here in light of that modern practice of “declarations of independence,” perhaps of colony from supposed metropole or in the announcement of a new supposed nation as a political and legal state that would claim the right to be recognized on the contemporary world historical horizon, across the past two and a half centuries) with regard to the specific eventuality of their emergence, that is to say, as an originary historical genesis as a self-proclaimed singular domain of symbolization and sense of world and thus an irruption of “a people” (as Du Bois uses this term in 1904) onto the world-historical scene?

Although proposed in only a nascent fashion in the 1894 text (called forth in this study from its obscurity, for, as I have noted, it remained unpublished until 2010), as well as at best only indirectly stated in the published 1904 essay, across the decade in question, Du Bois’s answer, even as it must be specified, is always an affirmation of recognizing an originary historical articulation from and among African Americans.



Yet, as I believe can be recognized, he does so in a manner quite distinct from that most famous “declaration of independence” of our time (see, for example, Jefferson 1999).

Yet, already in 1894, Du Bois came to consider knowledge, discourse, and practices of representation as a dimension of the problematization of matters African American. Indeed, a formulation of forms of representation, including practices of learning and knowledge, is perhaps the most powerful theoretical aspect of the essay “The Afro-American.” In like manner, knowledge as science—perhaps especially its theoretical aspect, as a proposed nascent sociological perspective on human collective practices—is at the core of the project of the 1904 essay. Too, by producing a text that simultaneously proposes a general theorization of social practices as they pertain to “the development of a people,” which takes the history of African Americans as both its declared object and a guiding epistemic problematization that would solicit fundamental thought, Du Bois’s own accomplishment insisted that recognition of the originary genesis in the production of a historical being, at once social and historical, a historical sense, a certain sense of world, was at stake.

Indeed, by way of a practice of elaboration in the first part of this study, I have sought to render legible in what manner at the turn to the twentieth century Du Bois proposed that African American history carries the lineaments of a sense of world that has been “beyond the veil”—for his contemporary forms of knowledge and understanding—that might yet be dressed out in suitable apostrophes and periods, the quintessential example of the latter subsequently given during our period in the form of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, of 1903. More precisely, further, I have endeavored to begin to raise into hearing the still resonant tones of the lower registers of a discourse that proposed for theorization a conceptualization of a commitment to historical genesis that despite or beyond all manner of vicissitudes and disavowals in knowledge and forms of representation and overdetermination in the instance according to systems of exploitation and direct oppression, has carried forth by way of those most at stake in the subject position of this world-historical figure, which we too easily know under the heading African American or Afro-American, who have persisted in holding forth a solicitation of a world that has not yet been and remains yet to come. The historicity attached to this figure may thus mark the scene in which the harbinger of a new world may yet take shape.

However, a more lineal formulation of Du Bois’s theoretical disposition can be offered, as enabled by the elaborations that we have been able

to adduce so far in this study. There is not, nor can there be, any declaration of “independence.” For their historial production is already a constitutive genesis—of the “warp and woof” of the fabric (to once again quote Du Bois from the closing of his 1903 book of essays)—of all that has come to be America. So, too, the historicity of their historical articulation is of the very constitution of all that has come to be understood as the modern world in general. Yet their emergence has also set loose something distinctly generative: a certain form of historial being the reference to which—as past or future, past and future—is *atopic*. That latter thought is to say that the very kinetic organization of historial being is such as to place at stake as the terms of emergence (as historical and as historial in the most profound sense of human existence), for any ipseity, that its very condition of emergence may be understood as otherwise than any presumption of the historial priority of its own natality—even in its ostensible constitutive address to itself. It can only see itself, as it were, and to suggest the metaphor, always at least and never only double in both becoming and apparition. This holds in both its possible geneses and the problematization that is always engendered in any supposed passage or accession to what may have been given as historicity. Thus, the problem bequeathed to contemporary thought by this example, as Du Bois positioned it at the onset of the twentieth century—“how shall man make you one”—is no longer available on those terms. Instead, the question has become, How did the world become only and always of one and the other, that is to say, always other than one?

## CODA II

As we have sought to adduce, by reference to the opening stages of his itinerary, certain aspects of Du Bois’s work had early begun to yield an ensemble of techniques, modes of practice, we might say, that were elaborated according to the imperatives of a thinking through of the status of the example.

They are a legible pattern of marks that remain from an indefatigable practice carried out across some nine decades. In part I of this study, I have attended to the opening stages of his itinerary. Yet the yield of this part of our study proposes that even the writings of the last decade of his itinerary, those of the late 1950s and early 1960s, should stand in contrapuntal relation to the imagination of an illimitable form of association

of the young Negro Du Bois in Berlin, the capital of imperial Germany, more than half a century earlier. According to the perspective that I have been able to adduce in part I of this study, in the time of the inscription of even the last writings, one might anticipate that one might find maintained therein, within their near-octogenarian sense of knowledge of the world, both the still effervescent “unhopeful hopefulness” of resolute youth and the depth of insight delivered from a critical intelligence in the fullness of its power (Chandler 2021). Forms of historical example that one may find decisive across the whole of his later itinerary may be adduced as already signal examples on both an epistemological and a theoretical level within in the earliest moments of his intellectual maturation.

Still more, Du Bois’s writings in general survive as a kind of epitaph of a thoughtful and receptive passion sustained until the end of nearly a century of living. While this work as a whole cannot and should not be taken to form a system—even if one were to track them across the whole life course attendant to his itinerary—they might yet be inhabited or rethought in a certain critical manner as an exemplary practical-theoretical organization of question and problem. They can be retrospectively gathered as the object of a critical discourse; they might be inhabited as a practical-theoretical organization of question and problem, even as such would always remain partial and their very form at stake in the eventuality of their elaboration. That is also to say that the exemplary example here would remain, if at all, only in the possibility of its dissipation and disseminal dispersal. Such practices, techniques, modes, dispositions remain as a form of problem for thought that might be desedimented and reinscribed, elaborated, in contemporary discourse by way of a certain practice of paleonymy. This, has defined my efforts so far in part one of this study.

And, in this latter fold of my text, along with, or within the bias of, the autobiographical and historiographical practices of inhabiting the difficulty of the example as we have followed it here, I have tried only to outline some of the terrain of Du Bois’s discourse, or to gesture toward the openness of the horizon of his imagination, within which such practices might be reengaged as a problem for theoretical labor in our time.

The historical example then becomes the site of epistemological conjuncture in Du Bois’s thought. It articulates the given as situation to existence as a committed practice. On the one side, it is the situation of a group as revelatory of historical circumstance. On the other side, it is the activity of a group as an exemplification of both limit and possibility. Du Bois, it must be emphasized, was committed ultimately, we might say, to

the question of historical possibility: to the movement of that which is illimitable within the possible as existing limit. That is to say, once again, I have posed this order of problem for us: how to think with Du Bois a certain maintenance of both sides of limit.

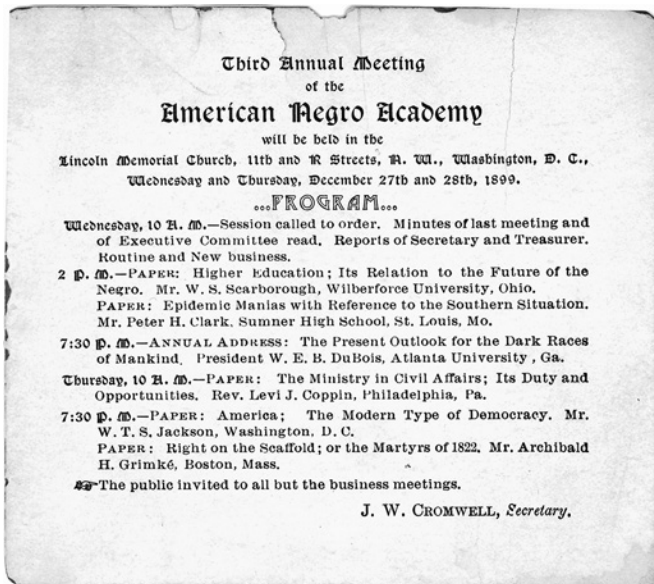
It can now be said that if it is understood that thought is not only a derivative continuity of context in general but rather is also engaged as the operation of a freedom, as principle or surreptitious play, then Du Bois's itinerary in its possible forms of passage—autobiographical, historiographical—remains at stake for us as a radical possibility of practical theoretical organization of project in the contemporary moment. And, perhaps, it would be likewise in the future. It is, of course, a form of the example.

At such a conjunctural concatenation, the paradox is that it is the apparently “dead” order of the letter of his text, that which is in all its appearance opaque, that remains a legible carrier of a certain atopic movement of freedom or chance, showing at the level of thought. Thought may be understood here as a form of practice issuing from a constitutive opacity, that is to say, by way of such. Opacity as a name of possibility is thus its force of solicitation. It is thus by way of the movement of freedom or chance, showing forth in his discourse as a practice of thought, that I have proposed herein an example of the possible reelaboration of Du Bois's thought as a task for a critical labor in our time. It has taken the form of the proposition of our responsibility for conceptual, rhetorical, and theoretical labor in and across the topography—in the general sense—of his discourse. To attend to that in it that might remain atopic. Its time is always in this latter sense yet to come. It follows that the approach that I have offered with all of its limits and complications should be understood otherwise than simply as a statement. It is, rather simply, a certain formulation or reformulation of the problem of the thought of Du Bois for our time.

And then, further, on the other side, finally, I have proposed that one might most powerfully accept and engage the limits of Du Bois's thought by way of a hyperbolic practice—taking Du Bois himself at this letter. I have proposed, by my practice or my efforts toward such, to describe a historical sense of such practice as paleonymic—a certain reinhabitation of old terms of thought, old words, distinctions of value, in a radically new way of habitation, necessarily, of course, always more than only one.

In such a practice, the apparently given letter in both its perdurance and its dissipation remains open to its futural form. In this sense, as the limit, the given can yet be understood to mark “both sides,” at least and

never only, and as such registers the possible passage of form: of an auto-historiographical desedimentation that may yet turn up new soil on old ground; or of a discourse that accepts its formation as if the fractal formation of waves, for example, along the ocean bottom; or of the passage in thought as the irruptive dissipation and rending of remains without remainder, of both the shifting of earth and of flame. It is the practice of thought at the limit of possible world. It is thus under the heading of a response to the solicitation to such a practice—a material thought of the illimitable—that we might find and maintain in our own discourse the generosity of the writings of a certain W. E. Burghardt Du Bois on the question of the example.



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