

**WILLIAM EDWARD BURGHART DU BOIS (1867-1963):
“Race”/Modernism and the Commerce of Culture/Identity/Politics I**



Assigned Reading: The Souls of Black Folk (1903) “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” “Of the Faith of the Fathers,” “Of Sorrow Songs”

I. Introduction

A. Douglass - 19th Century

B. Du Bois' **brilliant and brooding intelligence** dominate the 20th century

1. modern Afro-American literature and politics operate within his **frameworks** (constructs) of his making

a. helped to **create and define the N.A.A.C.P.**

b. sustaining figure behind the **Pan African Congresses**

c. the most **influential Afro-American to become a member of the Communist Party**

2. **authorizing figure:** no matter what one's political philosophy is (bourgeoisie reform, nationalist, leftist) there **a part of Du Bois's career that grants one an Afro-American authority for it**

3. **literature:** Du Bois creates a mythical bridge uniting the divided consciousness of Afro-Americans at the turn-of-the-century

a. intellectual foundation

- (1) Harlem Renaissance
- (2) Negritude

4. Problem of reading (Souls of Black Folk)

a. **positivistic desire**

- (1) Du Bois as a realistic narrator

b. **figurative power**

(1) domain of literature

II. Du Bois (a brief life)

A. **"The Forethought:"** "And, finally, need I add that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?" (nal, xii; Franklin, 209)

1. note the ending with the **question mark**
2. suggest the question mark **not merely rhetorical**
3. when he wrote Souls he had to address question of his own **authority** to speak as an Afro-American

a. **authority**¹

- (1) sociological concept = power to persuade
- (2) literary concept (African-American literary criticism)

(a) "An individual or group considered to have valid knowledge and/or legitimate power"

(b) Mikhail Bakhtin: "The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word

¹Bakhtin, Mikhail (1981): "The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal" (342). "Discourse in the Novel." The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays. Austin: Texas University Press, 1981.

Said, Edward W. (1975) "Authority suggests to me a constellation of linked meanings: not only, as the OED tells us, 'a power to influence action,' or 'a power to inspire belief,' or something, a begetter, a beginner, father, or ancestor, a person also who sets forth written statements. There is still another cluster of meanings: author is tied to the past participle actus of the verb augere: therefore, auctor, according to Erik Partridge, is literally an increaser and thus a founder. Auctoritas is production, invention, cause, in addition to meaning a right of possession. Finally, it means continuance, or causing to continue. Taken together these meanings are all grounded in the following notions: (1) that the power of an individual to initiate, institute, establish -- in short, to begin; (2) that this power and its product are an increase over what had been there previously; (3) that the individual wielding this power controls its issue and what is derived there from; (4) that authority maintains the continuity of its course. (83). Said, Edward W. Beginnings: Intention and Method. New York: Basic Books, 1975.

Angles, Peter A. "(L., auctor, 'originator,' 'leader,' 'head') An individual or group considered to have valid knowledge and/or legitimate power. 1. In its positive sense, authority is accepted for the benefits derived that could not be derived, or as easily derived, from any other source, especially under the social and personal limitations under which people must necessarily exist. 2. In its negative sense, authority is regarded as oppressive and an illegitimate exercise of knowledge and power." (21- 22). Angles, Peter A. Dictionary of Philosophy. New York: Barnes and Nobles Books, 1981.

of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past."

b. his own sense of his relation to Afro-Americans was always tenuous

4. lacked autobiographical authority

a. not like either **Douglass or Washington an ex-slave**

B. The journey away from the Heart of blackness²

C. 1867-1963 (Reconstruction - March on Washington)

1. died a day before historic March on Washington

D. Born in Great Barrington Massachusetts

1. descendent of free black family

2. grew up, as he would describe it a **New Englander**

E. Educated

1. black college **Fisk University**

a. his journey into the South

b. teaching experience provided the basic material for "On the Meaning of Progress"

2. Harvard University/University of Berlin/ Harvard University

a. B.A. Philosophy/ Ph.d History

b. birth of the modern **social sciences**

(1) **political economy = sociology, economics, history**

c. Berlin introduced him to German romantic nationalism

(1) critical in the early formation of his vision

III. Du Bois the Writer

²I leave aside in this discussion, the real ambiguities in Du Bois's representations of his early life and the subsequent stories that are built on them.

A. primarily a **writer and intellectual** rather than an **activist**

B. did not have the skills of personal leadership

1. reserved and to a large degree a shy person

2. really an isolated consciousness

a. **strength**: tenaciously pursue a path even when no one else supported him

b. **weakness**: he could not make pragmatic compromises

C. Essayed in almost every **genre**

D. scholarship: primarily **sociologist and historian**

1. master of **methodology and the craft of sociology and history as ways of knowing**

E. creative genres

1. **six novels**

2. enough **poetry** to be collected in a slim volume

3. wrote one **play or "historical pagent"**

a. for the most part his creative fiction is ignored

b. indispensable to understanding the man

IV. The Souls of Black Folk (1905) : Introduction

A. defines Du Bois enduring presence in political and literary consciousness

B. **first Pan-African Text**³

1. "Pan-African text" = a text that has become **part of the common syllabus and intellectual heritage** of African and people of African descent in the diaspora

³Other "Pan-African Texts:" Aimé Césaire's Return to My Native Land, Du Bois's Black Reconstruction, C.L.R. James's Black Jacobins, Eric Williams's Capitalism and Slavery, Walter Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, and Frantz Fanon's Black Skins White Masks/Wretched of the Earth

C. three/four autobiographies

a. Du Bois's own genealogy of his autobiographies places The Souls of Black Folks first

b. mixture (stylistically, intellectually, and generically)

2. poignant reality to most often quoted statement: "One ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; **two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.** (Du Bois, 3; Franklin, 215)"

3. historical and sociological essays, biographical and autobiographical essays, essays in cultural criticism, fiction and allegory

D. **Style:** One critic has suggested that: "The first [is], a style that is smooth flowing, heightened yet controlled, lucid, highly readable, and definitely modern in its rhythms and sentence structure. This is the style he uses when presenting scholarly or social or historical facts. Like all good prose, it is a combination of important content and artistry in the presentation of that content. The second style, however, . . . is inclined to be flowery, emotional, poetic, and essentially Victorian in the unpopular sense of the term. This second style makes too much use of allegorical and mythological terms, has too many apostrophes and invocations, too many `thee's' and `thou's' in it" (Arthur P. Davis, 19).

V. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"

A. Folk history of the African American since Emancipation "briefly sketched in large outline" (McLurg 12/Franklin)

B. revision of "Conservation of the Races"

C. Begins autobiographically and then turns to a collective autobiography

1. clearer, rational, philosophical

D. Twoness

1. Takes on a collective and prophetic voice

2. Philosophical Argument

a. "history of the world
is the history of races"

b. each race has its
own **transcendent
genius** = "ideal"

c. genius = prevailing
spirit (character that
was uniquely theirs)

time and space
(1) stood above

d. history was the
unfolding of racial
geniuses = "**strivings**"

e. feared the
destruction of the
double-consciousness

"After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, -- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dard body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (McClurg, 3/ Franklin).

(1) "This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people, -- has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves" (McClurg, 5/Franklin)

E. At the end Du Bois hints at the genius of African-Americans

F.

G. Du Bois lays out the history of Afro-Americans since emancipation

1. the language of exposition is sacred and not secular

2. borrows from Old Testament story of Exodus

a. journey through the wilderness

b. "Emancipation was the key to a **promised land** of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of wearied Israelites" (McClurg, 6)

c. suggested **worshiping of false gods**

d. "headless/hoast" (McClurg, 6-7), "vote themselves into the kingdom" (McClurg, 7), "Cannan" (McClurg, 7, 8),

e. literacy: "another pillar of fire by night after a clouded day"⁴

(1) shared textual moment with Chesnut's "The Wife of His Youth"

VI. The veil

A. **complex figure**

B. positivistic reading

⁴Mentioned in the Bible: EXO 13:21, EXO 13:22, EXO 14:24, EXO 40:38, LEV 16:13, NUM 9:15, NUM 9:16, NUM 14:14, DEU 1:33, DEU 5:22, NEH 9:19, PSA 78:14, PSA 105:39, ISA 4:5, EZE 1:4, REV 10:1.

Exodus 13:21 And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night:

Revelations 10:1 And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow {was} upon his head, and his face {was} as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:

1. Baker, Houston A. (1987): "The Veil signifies a barrier of American racial segregation that keeps Afro-Americans always behind a color line -- disoriented - - prey to divided aims, dire economic circumstances, haphazard educational opportunities, and frustrated intellectual ambitions."⁵

C. figurative reading

1. "The Veil" as a trope

2. figurative power drawn on **biblical associations**⁶

a. veil that separates the parts of the tabernacle

b. separates holy ground from the holiest ground

c. marker between the sacred and the profane

3. stewardship of the most holy place

D. "Then, in two other chapters I have sketched in swift outline the two world within and without the Veil, . . . (McClurg, vii)

E. "Leaving then, the world of the white man, I have stepped within the Veil, reiaing it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses, -- . . ." (McClurg, viii)

F. "Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhaps, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil" (McClurg, 2).

⁵Baker concludes this passage saying: "In the penultimate vision of Souls that occurs in chapter fourteen, this Veil is rent. In an act of wish fulfillment par excellence, the narrator envisions an 'Eternal Good' acting to compel American justice. A merger of youth and age, African-American cultural anima and Western high culture, Negro masses and Negro thinking classes is the sounding result of this rending of the Veil" (57). Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. (PS153.N5B25) [wrk]

⁶Sollors, Werner (1986): "In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. DuBois developed an extended metaphor of the veil that separates Afro-Americans from American culture at large but also gives them a more profound vision and a higher destiny, DuBois imaginatively adapted two biblical images of the veil as a deviation within the temple {Exodus 26:33} and as the cover that the divinely inspired Moses wore when he came back from Mount Sinai and spoke to the people {Exodus 34:33-35}. Both images are typologically focused on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians {3:13-18}, a passage which promises a universal revelation nce the Old Testament veil has been sundered in Christ" (49). Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

G. "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, -- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world."

H. "In those sombre forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself, -- darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, his mission" (McClurg, 8)

I. "If somewhere in this whirl and chaos of things there dwells Eternal Good, pitiful yet masterful, then anon in His good time America shall rend the Veil and the prisoned shall go free" (McClurg, 263).

VII. "Of the Faith of the Fathers," "Of Sorrow Songs"

A. The Spirituals as Epigraphs

B. "Then in after years when I came to Nashville I saw the great temple builded of these songs towering over the pale city. To me Jubilee Hall seemed ever made of the songs themselves, and its bricks were red with the blood and dust of toil. Out of them rose for me morning, noon, and night, bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past" (McClurg, 251).

1. **second temple**

2. implied contrast to **Booker T. Washington's Up From Slavery (1903)**

C. dual epigraphs

1. gathered from here and there in western culture
2. wordless tune unidentified tunes

3. "Before each chapter, as now printed, stands a bar of the Sorrow Songs, -- some echo of haunting melody from the only American music which welled up from the black souls in the dark past." ("The Forethought," Franklin, 209)

a. voice of the west underscored by the tunes of the South

b. Sorrow songs produce an **authority (the voice of the slave)** that Du Bois can not claim

c. Sorrow songs produce an **authority (the voice of the slave)** that Du Bois can not claim

D. Story of the Jubilee Singers

1. undergirds this chapter

2. A story that was known to Du Bois and was already a legend at Fisk University.

a. Takes some liberties with the legend

b. Essentially about the saving of the school from bankruptcy

c. Commodification of African American culture

"So in 1871 the pilgrimage of the Fisk Jubilee singers began. North to Cincinnati they rode, – four half-clothed black boys and five girl-women, – led by a man with a cause and a purpose. They stopped at Wilberforce, the oldest of Negro schools, where a black bishop blessed them. Then they went, fighting cold and starvation, shut out of hotels, and cheerfully sheered at, ever northward; and ever the magic of their songs kept thrilling hearts, until a burst of applause in the Congregational Council at Oberlin revealed them to the world. They came to New York and Henry Ward Beecher dared to welcome them, even though the metropolitan dailies sneered at his 'Nigger Minstrels.' So their songs conquered until they sang across the land and across the sea, before Queen and Kaiser, in Scotland and Ireland, Holland and Switzerland. Seven years they sang, and brought back a hundred and fifty thousand dollars to found Fisk University." (McClurg 252-253/Franklin)

Appendix A The Veil

King James Version

EXO 26:31 And thou shalt make a veil {of} blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made:

EXO 26:33 And thou shalt hang up the veil under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the veil the ark of the testimony: and the veil shall divide unto you between the holy {place} and the most holy.

EXO 26:35 And thou shalt set the table without the veil, and the candlestick over against the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south: and thou shalt put the table on the north side.

EXO 27:21 In the tabernacle of the congregation without the veil, which {is} before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before the Lord: {it shall be} a statute for ever unto their generations on the behalf of the children of Israel.

EXO 30:6 And thou shalt put it before the veil that {is} by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that {is} over the testimony, where I will meet with thee.

EXO 34:33 And {till} Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.

EXO 34:34 But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel {that} which he was commanded.

EXO 34:35 And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

EXO 35:12 The ark, and the staves thereof, {with} the mercy seat, and the veil of the covering,

EXO 36:35 And he made a veil {of} blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen: {with} cherubims made he it of cunning work.

EXO 38:27 And of the hundred talents of silver were cast the sockets of the sanctuary, and the sockets of the veil; an hundred sockets of the hundred talents, a talent for a socket.

EXO 39:34 And the covering of rams' skins dyed red, and the covering of badgers' skins, and the veil of the covering,

EXO 40:3 And thou shalt put therein the ark of the testimony, and cover the ark with the vail.

EXO 40:21 And he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the vail of the covering, and covered the ark of the testimony; as the Lord commanded Moses.

EXO 40:22 And he put the table in the tent of the congregation, upon the side of the tabernacle northward, without the vail.

EXO 40:26 And he put the golden altar in the tent of the congregation before the vail:

LEV 4:6 And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the vail of the sanctuary.

LEV 4:17 And the priest shall dip his finger {in some} of the blood, and sprinkle {it} seven times before the Lord, {even} before the vail.

LEV 16:2 And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy {place} within the vail before the mercy seat, which {is} upon the ark;
that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.

LEV 16:12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring {it} within the vail:

LEV 16:15 Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that {is} for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:

LEV 21:23 Only he shall not go in unto the vail, nor come nigh unto the altar, because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my sanctuaries: for I the Lord do sanctify them.

LEV 24:3 Without the vail of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the Lord continually: {it shall be} a statute for ever in your generations.

NUM 4:5 And when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it:

NUM 18:7 Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office {unto you as} a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

2CH 3:14 And he made the vail {of} blue, and purple, and crimson, and fine linen, and wrought cherubims thereon.

ISA 25:7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations.

MAT 27:51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

MAR 15:38 And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

LUK 23:45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

2CO 3:13 And not as Moses, {which} put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

2CO 3:14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which {vail} is done away in Christ.

2CO 3:15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.

2CO 3:16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

HEB 6:19 Which {hope} we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

HEB 9:3 And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;

HEB 10:20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

The Holy Bible, King James Version Computer Edition, Copyright (c) 1984 by NASSCO. All Rights Reserved.