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Ernest Allen, Jr.

EVER FEELING ONE'S TWONESS: "DOUBLE IDEALS" AND "DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS" IN *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*

Two souls, alas! reside within my breast,
and each is eager for a separation:
in throes of coarse desire, one grips
the earth with all its senses;
the other struggles from the dust
to rise to high ancestral spheres.
If there are spirits in the air
who hold domain between this world and heaven—
out of your golden haze descend,
transport me to a new and brighter life!
—Goethe, *Faust*

In his *The Souls of Black Folk* published at the turn of the century, W. E. B. Du Bois posited the existence of a duality within Afro-American life.[1] Since the 1960s in particular it has become *de rigeur* for academicians and activists alike, in the face of their own apparent confirmations of Du Bois' observations at the empirical level, to either quote, paraphrase, or in some way make reference to those marvelously crafted lines of his 1903 work:

> 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 twoness—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.[2]

We have generally interpreted Du Boisian "double consciousness" as a reference to and confirmation of the existence of ambiguities and vacillations between assimilationist and nationalist tendencies in African American life. That is hardly surprising, in that the contemporary, popular notion of Afro-American "double consciousness" was shaped by early 1960s' ideological debates between the "separatist" Nation of Islam, on the one hand and those of the "integrationist" NAACP, SCLC, CORE etc., on the other. This

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interpretation was made all the more inviting by the lack of a precise terminology in *The Souls of Black Folk*, where literary flourishes tend to overwhelm clear, analytical distinctions.

While such a reading of Du Bois has often been of value to the comprehension of African American cultural and political dualities, my intent in this paper is to essay a more critical exegesis of his work. In *The Souls of Black Folk* can be found repetitive strings of apparently synonymous terms: "double consciousness," "double ideals," "double strivings," "twoness," "second sight," "double life," and "double duties." In breaking with previous interpretations—including my own—I propose that these key phrases can be divided into three related but essential groups, none of which can be directly equated to another: 1) "double consciousness"; 2) "second sight"; and 3) most remaining terms, including "double ideals," "double aims," "double thoughts," "double strivings," "twoness," and "two souls."

What can be said with certainty, at least, is that Du Bois' employ of "double ideals," "twoness," and like terms does not openly contradict the assimilationist/nationalist paradigm through which we have become so casually accustomed to interpreting them; however, the fact remains that in *The Souls of Black Folk* he neglected to use those terms in that explicit way.[3] Contrary to initial expectations, the fixed and narrow meanings of "double ideals" and surrogate terms must be teased out of the text. On the other hand, the meaning of Du Boisian "double consciousness"—a form of alienation, actually—remains the most straightforward. Not so for "second sight," which like "double ideals" must be pried from context, emerging as an equally distinct but more positively-laden notion. Although I eventually conclude that Du Bois' definitions of "double consciousness" and "double ideals" were too narrowly drawn to apply to most African Americans, and his argument concerning the relationship between the two concepts consequently and severely flawed (as was the long-term strategy which he proposed for their resolution) there is still much to be gained by subjecting his thesis to a respectful but critical analysis.

DEFINING THE COLOR CURTAIN

For Du Bois, blacks and whites in the American South were separated by a vast and tenacious Veil of Color which followed them from cradle to grave:

> Thus, then and now, there stand in the South two separate worlds; and separate not simply in the higher realms of social intercourse, but also in church and school, on railway and street-car, in hotels and theatres, in streets and city sections, in books and newspapers, in asylums and jails, in hospitals and graveyards."[4]

In a categorically descriptive way, Du Bois roughly apportioned contemporary, southern, social relations into five (overlapping) classes of social action and communication: residential life, economic relations, political relations, the contact of everyday life in general (including that of intellectual interchange in particular), and, finally, religious endeavor.[5] In analyzing these relations, he noted the existence of physical segregation, economic exploitation, and political disfranchisement of Afro-Americans, and deducted

the social cost of such policies not only to blacks but to American society in general. What struck him particularly in regard to interracial contacts, however, was the absence of meaningful intellectual commerce, a factor central to Du Bois' elaboration of what he had then come to view as the fundamental solution to the question of Afro-American domination:

> Now if one notices carefully one will see that between these two worlds, despite much physical contact and daily intermingling, there is almost no community of intellectual life or point of transference where the thoughts and feelings of one race can come into direct contact and sympathy with the thoughts and feelings of the other.[6]

For Afro-Americans the lack of such contact held ruinous implications:

> There is still enough of contact for large economic and group coöperation, but the separation is so thorough and deep that it absolutely precludes for the present between the races anything like that sympathetic and effective group-training and leadership of the one by the other, such as the American Negro and all backward peoples must have for effectual progress.[7]

Further revealing his own class propensities, Du Bois opined that such desired forms of communion had formerly existed during slavery between the "better class" of house slaves and their masters.[8]

Despite the separateness of white and black worlds, however, their respective inhabitants were inextricably bound together across the Color Curtain: events occurring in either one invariably and profoundly affected what took place in the other. As Du Bois remarked in his earlier study of a small Virginia town,

> 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.[9]

Thus while intimate contact may not have characterized intellectual transactions across the Veil, it was no less true that dominant ideals, flowing hegemonically into every niche and corner of African American life, recognized no such boundary. One painful consequence of this was that Afro-Americans were socialized not only from within the darker world which they spatially and culturally inhabited under segregation, but also from without by the white one which oppressed them.[10] Viewed from without—that is to say from the white American side—the Veil retained an opaqueness where an "invisible" and "inaudible" existence in the eyes of whites were the best that black Americans could hope for—at least in the short run. Within the black community itself the Veil imposed upon the Afro-American a *negated self-consciousness*: no direct vision, but the measuring of one another as well as oneself *solely* by the tape of the white world

which oppressed him or her. For blacks, therefore, the result of this "facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate."[11]

> From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century,—from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism.[12]

Thus it was the imposed, double life of African Americans which ineluctably gave rise to double words and double ideals: *A Negro, an American. Two warring souls dwelling in one.* Further exacerbation arose from the effects of rapid social change, transformations unleashed by the dynamics of the U.S. economy which impinged upon both black and white social worlds, but unevenly so.[13] The particular anguish of Afro-Americans whose resolution Du Bois considered key to the unlocking of all, was thus an existential one. What disturbed him was not so much that black Americans experienced duality in their lives, but rather that this duality was lived as self-alienation. The distinction is crucial:

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.[14]

The ostensible solution which Du Bois brought to the dilemma of "two unreconciled souls dwelling in one dark body," was that of *education*—a demonstration of his faith in the powers of rationalism. Three streams of thought awaited reconciliation: with "the multiplying of human wants in culture-lands" had arisen the need "for the world-wide coöperation of men in satisfying them," and thus the idea of "a new human unity, pulling the ends of the earth nearer, and all men, black, yellow, and white"[15]; second, on the part of whites, a passionate and sincere belief in the inferiority of blacks, who were "straitly foreordained to walk within the Veil"; and lastly, "the confused, half-conscious mutter

of men who are black and whitened, crying 'Liberty, Freedom, Opportunity—vouchsafe to us, O boastful World, the chance of living men!'":

> And so, in this great question of reconciling three vast and partially contradictory streams of thought, the one panacea of Education leaps to the lips of all:—such human training that will best use the labor of all men without enslaving or brutalizing; such training as will give us poise to encourage the prejudices that bulwark society, and to stamp out those that in sheer barbarity deafen us to the wail of prisoned souls within the Veil, and the mounting fury of shackled men.[16]

But how was this transporting of civilization to civilization to be effected? On the dusky side of the Veil lay the selfless and unstinting work of the Talented Tenth by which education and training would be imparted to the less fortunate of the race.[17] On the other side racist ideals, too, would give way under the benighted hand of education: "Such curious kinks of the human mind . . . can be met in but one way,—by the breadth and broadening of human reason, by catholicity of taste and culture."[18] Enlightened public schooling would reach not only blacks, but broad masses of whites. It was through such informed knowledge that the behavior of whites towards blacks would eventually attain a civilized state and the otherwise exemplary "twoness" of black Americans freed from its bed of affliction: "Thus in Thy good time," wrote Du Bois in his afterthought, "may infinite reason turn the tangle straight . . ."[19]

II. THE LIFTING OF VEILS: FROM DOUBLE IDEALS TO DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Summarizing Du Bois' core argument: *The principal dilemma of African Americans was that firstly, all black Americans must lead a double life, as blacks and as Americans; second, that "Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals . . ."*[20]*; third, "from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence"; fourth, certain, unspecified aspects of African American "twoness" were positive and should be preserved: in the merging of "his double self into a better and truer self . . . [the Negro] wishes neither of the older selves to be lost"; and lastly, education would provide the key to the resolution of negative, African American "twoness" by simultaneously "raising the race" and bringing rationality to racists.*

Before launching our critique, several preliminary points must be struck. Firstly, one should note that at least one element of Du Boisian terminology contrasts sharply with contemporary use. "Double consciousness" is a term which we sometimes use to refer to the informed ability of individual black Americans to maneuver themselves back and forth across the Veil; at other times to refer to the internal conflict of values among black individuals having undergone socialization in both black and white worlds. However, for Du Bois the term refers to the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others . . ."—not consciousness, but a *negated* self-consciousness.

Second, the "twoness" interior to certain aspects of Afro-American life arose from fundamental dualities, fundamental paradoxes within American society in general; that does not signify, however, that every "black/white" duality in American culture necessarily had to translate itself into a corresponding "twoness" within the African American community. For example, in *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois tended to emphasize contrasting ideals, but in an earlier work he had also spoken of *commonalities* between the lives of black and white Americans ("like those double stars that, bound for all time, whirl around each other separate yet one"). Given these undeniable, common interests, was it truly possible for *every* black ideal to be unalterably opposed to that of whites? Even if so, the existence of class differences within black communities as well as within their white counterparts, would still undermine Du Bois' argument for the emergence of unified ideals within either black or white camps, a crystallization of globally oppositional ethics which divided these camps, and their subsequent reproduction as dualities within African American life itself.

To what extent did dualities within *American* life transmute themselves into dualities within *African American* life by the turn of the century? For a given *individual*, the answer depended to a great extent on his or her general "location" within the larger nexus of social relations, consequent access to resources, as well as the relative degree of socialization which he or she had undergone in white and black worlds. Those who by dint of social class and segregation were confined to circumscribed but not necessarily unredeeming spheres of social existence, were much less likely to have experienced a subjective sense of "twoness" than those whose social standing allowed them passage at certified guardposts along the color line.

PURSUING THE SOURCE OF INNER TORMENT

What was the nature of African American "double life" and "double duties," according to W. E. B. Du Bois? The *specific* examples which he offered were those of artisans, ministers, doctors, intellectuals, and artists; significantly, neither sharecroppers, domestics, stevedores, nor day laborers were mentioned in the discussion. The dilemma of the artisan was "to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plow and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde"; that of the black minister or doctor, to be "tempted toward quackery and demagoguery" by the "poverty and ignorance of his people," "and by the criticism of the other world, towards ideals that made him ashamed of his lowly tasks"; of the "would-be black *savant*," "that the knowledge his people needed was a twice-told tale to his white neighbors, while the knowledge which would teach the white world was Greek to his own flesh and blood"; and finally, the beauty revealed to the black artist "was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people."

> 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.[21]

When we examine closely the *nature* of these "double ideals" which Du Bois posited as the source of eternal agony, most appear to invoke the existence of a tension between positive values assigned intellectual or physical labors which *black professionals* carried out within black communities; and a *contempt* towards such endeavors on the part of whites.[22] As to the origins of these antagonistic ethics, however, *The Souls of Black Folk* remains silent. With regard to the first, one must turn to Du Bois' *The Philadelphia Negro* for an explicit mention of his ideal of black middle-class *obligation:* ". . . however laudable an ambition to rise may be, the first duty of an upper class is to serve the lowest classes."[23] For the second, one need look no further than Du Bois' description of his period of intellectual work from 1885 to 1910, "which was directed toward the majority of white Americans, and rested on the assumption that once they realized the scientifically attested truth concerning Negroes and race relations, they would take action to correct all wrong."[24] Once logically and dispassionately shown the need for black uplift, how could rational white folk fail to voice their approval for such a worthy project? Stripped of their oratorical eloquence, then, these antagonistic, "double ideals" would seem to invoke no less than the *felt obligation* of "upper-class" blacks to serve the needs of their corresponding "lowest classes"; and a *desire for positive recognition* from whites regarding the value of this sacrifice.

At one pole lay the aim of this relatively privileged stratum to work among and serve their people, a goal which, in any event, tended to be weighed down by a pervasive backwardness and impoverishment which would continue to haunt the latter; at the other, a desire that one's achievements be properly recognized by the dominant society—not merely an ideal that remained unfulfilled, but one the denial of which only reiterated further self-doubt and self-recrimination in the minds of talented blacks. The sheer physical effort required to serve Afro-Americans resulted in a half-hearted goal; to seek recognition from whites for such yeoman service proved equally unavailing. The sum of these two semi-spirited efforts fell far short of a unified striving, all of which led towards the lowering of ideals and aims on the part of the Talented Tenth and a further reinforcing of the externally imposed myth of black inferiority.[25] Hence in their failure to achieve positive recognition from white Americans black professionals were ultimately condemned to see themselves as whites saw them: the collapse of Du Boisian "double ideals" engendered Du Boisian "double consciousness."

THE PARADOX OF DU BOIS' EDUCATIONAL SOLUTION: OBFUSCATION OR ENLIGHTENMENT?

Among Du Bois' artisans, ministers, doctors, intellectuals, and artists ranked the most highly educated—the most highly *acculturated*—of the race who, by virtue of that fact, had entered a process of self-estrangement as well as alienation from the broad mass of African Americans. For ironically, while it was "education" which Du Bois advanced as a panacea to the social afflictions of black folk, it was also "education" which operated in at least three observable ways to intensify the spiritual agony of this educated strata: in serving to distance themselves from the foundations of black culture through the

acculturation process; in propagating a notion of enlightened, rational behavior which had little to do with the way in which human beings—particularly *racist* human beings—operated on a quotidian basis; and in raising expectations that their achievements in the intellectual/artistic realm would be acknowledged by the larger society—or at least by its more "enlightened" elements. Without drawing explicit conclusions Du Bois appears to have at least partially recognized such pitfalls in Chapter XIII: "The Coming of John."[26]

Sometime towards the end of the 19th century, John Jones left his little sleepy-eyed hometown of Altamaha, Georgia, eventually making his way to college. The long and difficult process of education bestowed upon him not only a gradual sharpening of consciousness of the world about him, but of self-consciousness as well:

> He grew slowly to feel almost for the first time the Veil that lay between him and the white world; he first noticed now the oppression that had not seemed oppression before, differences that erstwhile seemed natural, restraints and slights that in his boyhood days had gone unnoticed or been greeted with a laugh.[27]

There were other metamorphoses as well. Returning home after seven years, it was apparent that John's socialization in the academy had wrought changes in his mannerisms: once open and warm in his personal relationships, he had developed a certain coldness—an aloofness or "sophistication," one might say—that family, old friends and acquaintances were not long in noting. But John wasted no time in opening a school for African American children in his segregated town. A thankless task, the "Negroes were rent into factions for and against him, the parents were careless, the children irregular and dirty, and books, pencils and slates largely missing. Nevertheless, he struggled hopefully on, and seemed to see at last some glimmering of dawn."[28] On the white side of town, meanwhile, ominous forces were gathering against John. It was said that he was "uppity" and disrespectful to white folks, that he was teaching black children dangerous notions about "equality," and that—God forbid!—he even had tried to force himself into a seat beside a white lady. Judge Henderson, the good white patriarch of the town, had heard enough. Making his good white way to the rickety shack of a school, he dispersed teacher and students, and ordered the facility closed forthwith. Thus came to an end the selfless labors of John Jones and, shortly thereafter, his life.

It would seem that the main lesson Du Bois wants us to draw from his richly detailed allegory was the "waste of double aims": "that the knowledge [John's] people needed was a twice-told tale to his white neighbors, while the knowledge which would teach the white world was Greek to his own flesh and blood." The role that Du Bois believed education should play in the resolution of this dilemma could not be more clear: cultivating in whites a sense of appreciation for the labors of the Talented Tenth would, in turn, restore to the latter their sense of self-esteem; on the other hand, proper training for the basic masses of blacks would uplift them from the miasma of ignorance spawned by slavery. Or perhaps one should draw from this account the lesson that, for black educators, the intensity of purpose surrounding the duty of educating black youth was

matched only by a unified sense of fear and contempt on the part of whites towards that same task. But given Du Bois' special gift for detail, yet another reading is possible—for example, one concerning the *way* in which John's intense questioning of the world about him led to his estrangement from ordinary, working-class black folk he had left behind in Altamaha.

While speaking one night at the Baptist Church, during the course of which he quite unthinkingly dropped a number of untoward remarks concerning religion, John was reprimanded by an old man who arose from the congregation:

> John never knew clearly what the old man said; he only felt himself held up to scorn and scathing denunciation for trampling on the true Religion, and he realized with amazement that all unknowingly he had put rough hands on something this little world held sacred. He arose silently, and passed out into the night.[29]

An educated person, what John eagerly sought was a continuation of the intellectual interchange that he had experienced in college. That was to be found neither in Judge Henderson's son, the White John, former boyhood friend and intellectual peer who had attended Princeton, nor among the people of his own tiny community. The educational process had left him completely isolated, lonely, self-estranged. But what had been the content of his education?

For Du Bois, the question as to the kind of *higher* education which black folk should receive was obscured by the intensity of the late 19th century debate concerning whether they should be taught manual or higher forms.[30] What one much better appreciates today, of course, is the fact that education consists not only of an accumulation of a specific body of knowledge, but of an unavoidable process of *socialization* attendant to the educational process. Content-wise, not only did the system of higher education fail to instruct John in the history and cultures of African peoples scattered throughout the globe, it socialized him in such a way as to further lead him to disparage his own social origins and to seek an especial kind of recognition, that is to say *respect*, from the dominant society—one which generally would be denied. In short, John Jones had become yet another puzzling example of what Carter G. Woodson would call, a generation later, "the mis-education of the Negro."[31] The alienation that Du Bois ascribed to *all* Afro-Americans most often tended to be a phenomenon characteristic of the most acculturated of the race—and intellectuals in particular. As Du Bois himself noted some three decades later:

> Thus considerable intercourse between white and black folk in America is current today: and yet on the whole, the more or less clearly defined upper layers of educated and ambitious Negroes find themselves for the most part largely segregated and alone. They are unable, or at least unwilling on the terms offered, to share the social institutions of the cultured whites of the nation, and are faced with inner problems of contact with their own lower classes with which they have few or no social institutions capable of dealing.[32]

Self-recognition and self-image is always the result of a complex process involving not only the subject herself but the acknowledgement of her existence by others. It is only in taking cognizance of the fact that, socialization notwithstanding, individual Afro-Americans had a *choice* as to whose recognition they deemed *significant* to them. Only then can we understand how Du Bois himself was able to transcend, as he termed it, "a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence." Or to state the matter in a somewhat different way, the critical difference between the assured self-confidence of a W. E. B. Du Bois and the "morbidity" of a John Jones lay not only in Du Bois' inner strengths and convictions—admittedly quite formidable—but also in the former's capacity to value *African American* recognition of his own existence and intellectual production over that of hostile white Americans in general. A corollary of that capacity was Du Bois' spontaneous ability to reciprocally recognize the humanity and worth of other black folk—an act not possible for educated blacks who could only see themselves and their people through the eyes of the dominant population. Uncannily, here was a practice that Du Bois himself consistently followed but failed to explicitly take account of in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Indeed, how infinitely less tormented might have been Du Bois' doctors, lawyers, artisans, *savants*, and artists, had they not accorded whites the opportunity to become sole arbiters of the worth of intrinsic African American ideals? A sense of overwhelming immensity surrounding the social task of Afro-American "uplift" there assuredly was, but of what measure to the Talented Tenth was the demonstrated appreciation of "ordinary black folk" towards those of the race who sacrificed their energies in this way? What difference in outlook might there have been had such acknowledgement by other blacks been deemed as "valuable" to those who sacrificed, as was a nod of recognition from whites for those same efforts?

DU BOISIAN "TWONESS" AND THE "GIFT OF SECOND SIGHT"

I have spoken of the different meanings attached to clusters of terms such as "double consciousness," on the one side, "double ideals" and "twoness" on the other. But what of "second sight"? The "twoness" of Du Boisian "twoness" resided in the fact that Du Bois recognized negative as well as positive regions of duality in African American life. What he wished to eliminate was not the two-fold character of African American life, but rather its most alienating, imposed characteristics.

It would seem that elimination of negative "twoness" signified a number of things: the abolishing of existential otherness as a negative category applied to peoples of African descent, the consequent recognition of their humanity; the establishing of an inclusive, American civic identity (that is, the suppression of the distinction between legal citizenship and unofficial "second-class citizenship"); and the corresponding elimination of segregated institutions and public places, racially-segmented economic structures, and double legal standards as applied to blacks. What remained would be Afro-American institutional and cultural dualities: in merging "his double self into a better and truer self... he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost." This positive sense of "twoness" would be reinforced by elevated cultural exchanges between whites and blacks. As Du Bois affirmed in his essay, "Conservation of the Races," blacks had a gift

to offer the world, and the final chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* revealed that this offering would be the "Negro spirituals."[33] It is tempting to interpret Du Bois' "gift of second sight" as being the same as that of his African American offering to the world. But "second sight" as "gift" is an ambiguous notion which might be grasped in at least two senses: as a gift bestowed upon one capable of seeing with such sight, or as one flowing from from the phenomenon of "second sight" itself. In the case of the former "second sight" suggests an expanded consciousness allowing one the ability to navigate two disparate cultures fluently, perhaps, or from the perspective of one's own culture, the skill to perceive in another that which is opaque to its own practitioners. Unfortunately, the use of either interpretation in *The Souls of Black Folk* is by no means apparent.[34] However, if we translate "second sight" as a gift flowing from black American duality, the term meshes smoothly with other concepts developed by Du Bois during the same period.

But with its positive connotation, the notion of "second sight" as a *gift* has no parallel with the way in which Du Bois employs any of the other permutations of "twoness" in *The Souls of Black Folk*. As such, it forms a special category of its own. Sharply distinguishing himself from Afro-American cultural (and biological) assimilationists of the era, Du Bois advanced the innovative thesis that American society in general should adopt and recognize as its own the music of the enslaved African. Ironically, of course, it has not been so much the "elevated" music of the slave, as it has been his or her more popular forms, which has been swept into the mainstream of American cultural life especially during the present century.

CONCLUSION

For Du Bois, manifestations of African American "twoness," in the largest sense, posed more problems than possibilities at the turn of the century. In this regard his focus was not so much on the potential consciousness of the African American mass as it was on the *blocked* consciousness of the Talented Tenth, whom he regarded as the saviours of the former. If the Negro Race were going to be saved, literally, by its "exceptional men," and those "exceptional men" were in crisis, this crisis then became the central problem for the entire group.[33] This arrested mentality of the Talented Tenth was attributed to self-estrangement, to an inappropriately named "double consciousness" deriving from the collapse of imputed "double ideals" of this class. An unanticipated product of the educational process, this dilemma, nonetheless, was to be resolved though education: the panacea which would reveal Truth to white and black populations alike, and set the social tangle straight.

Finally, the sole, positive attribute associated with African American duality was to be culled from the "gift of second sight"—the least developed of Du Bois' three differing pair-conceptualizations of "twoness" and its variants. The cultural gift which Dr. Du Bois had in mind was not something which could arise from within the confines of closed white and black cultures. Although already of modified African origin, proper cultivation of the gift required contact with the twice-told knowledge of white Americans. "He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he

knows that Negro blood has a message for the world." Only the Talented Tenth, with a "foot in both worlds," so to speak, was capable of bringing it into being.

With a little thought it becomes apparent why Du Bois' "two souls dwelling in one" could not have been the representation of national cultures in conflict with one another at the time *The Souls of Black Folk* was written. Du Bois was the first of any generation of black intellectuals—traditionally assimilationist-oriented—to acknowledge publicly that there was something of moral and aesthetic value to be found in African American folk culture. In 1903 he was prepared to recognize only the Negro spirituals and black folk tales, with the greatest importance placed upon the former. Aside from 19th century poet and novelist Paul Laurence Dunbar, it was not until the 1920s that a forward-thinking fraction of yet another generation of African American artist-intellectuals found strength to draw upon the soul of popular black culture—folktales, folk wisdom, Sunday morning sermons, the blues, and to a much lesser extent, African cultural antecedents—for the purpose of creating, nurturing, and celebrating a "higher" African American art form. At least another generation would pass before "jazz," or black classical music, found it possible to shed its pungent, New Orleans brothel origins and achieve status as a recognized art form in the eyes of the black intelligentsia—but only after white folk acknowledged it as such. And if the truth be told, it was only following the cultural debates among deracinated African intellectuals of the post World War II era that a few members of the African American educated strata began to think in terms of a division between "traditional" and "metropole" cultures. But that is another story.

Whatever its precise, analytical truth, Du Bois' 1903 essay stands as a lyrical monument to the most thorough and abject alienation of African Americans in the land of their birth, commencing with the founding of the republic up until the present day. The nature of that alienation undergoes noticeable changes as one traverses class lines within black communities, as assuredly as the character of African American self-estrangement as a whole has undergone important transformations over time. But social discontinuties aside, it is the continuties above all which explain why, at this very hour, the most haunting and inspiring passages of Du Bois' work continue to churn, to resound, in the weary, everlasting souls of black folk.

NOTES

[1] This essay constitutes an additional segment in the development and clarification of a larger work in progress, one devoted to a "historical sociology" of African American worldviews. A slightly different rendering appears in *Critique of Anthropology*, 12:3 (1992): 261-75. A shorter version of both papers was presented at the 89th Annual Meeting of the Association of American Anthropologists, New Orleans, December 1990. It builds in fundamental ways upon my earlier study, "Afro-American Identity: Reflections on the Pre-Civil War Era," *Contributions in Black Studies*, 7 (1985-1986), 45-93. A forthcoming, companion essay, "The Reading of Riddles," addresses the question of continuties/discontinuities between Du Bois' earlier essay, "On the Conservation of Races" and *The Souls of Black Folk*. I am especially indebted to Onita Estes-Hicks, Irma McClaurin-Allen, Eric Perkins, and Judith Wilson for their many discussions regarding the subject of this essay.

[2] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: New American Library, 1969 [1903]), 45.

[3] In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois' sole reference to intra-group ideological tension—or in his words, *ethical choice*—had to do with the double life of Afro-Americans being played out not so much within individual black lives, but in the form of a *regional* dichotomy between "hypocrisy" on the one side, "radicalism" on the other: deception and hypocritical compromise on the part of southern blacks, bitterness and open denunciation (and sometimes silence) among their northern counterparts; *Souls*, 221-25.

[4] *Souls*, 128.

[5] *Souls*, 189.

[6] *Souls*, 204-205.

[7] *Souls*, 128. This proposed "stewardship" for African Americans is comparable to that which he posed for Africans at the 1919 Pan-African Congress.

[8] *Souls*, 190.

[9] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Beyond the Veil in a Virginia Town " [1897], in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887-1961* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 49.

[10] As Du Bois commented much later in *Dusk of Dawn*, "The Negro American has for his environment not only the white surrounding world, but also, and touching him usually much more nearly and compellingly, is the environment furnished by his own colored group." W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Schocken, 1968 [original, 1940]), 173.

[11] *Souls*, 51

[12] *Souls*, 221-22.

[13] It would have been instructive had Du Bois chosen to elaborate further on this fascinating observation. It seems possible to read his remarks in the sense of the classic, societal contradiction depicted by Marx, where economic development (or the growth of the productive forces) exerts "pressure" upon existing social relations (here: racially segmented production and other social relations) in the form of economic restraints, incentives, or both. Eventually such testing and torturing of the "inner logic" of such relations may compel people to transform them in order that they be brought in accord with the state of the productive forces.

[14] *Souls*, 45-46.

[15] What Du Bois was euphemistically referring to here, of course, was the expansion of western capitalism to every corner of the globe, of which only the positive aspects appear to have been recognized by him at the time. In the aftermath of World War I, he envisaged a much more radical forms of world-wide cooperation for the satisfying of human wants. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thompson, 1975 [original, 1921]), 44, 98-104 especially.

[16] *Souls*, 121-24.

[17] See W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth" [1903], in Herbert Aptheker, ed. and compiler, *Writings by W. E. B. Du Bois in Non-Periodical Literature Edited by Others* (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thompson, 1982), 17-29.

[18] *Souls*, 123.

[19] *Souls*, 278. As Du Bois later noted, "I regarded it as axiomatic that the world wanted to learn the truth and if the truth was sought with even approximate accuracy and painstaking devotion, the world would gladly support the effort." *Dusk of Dawn*, 68.

[20] *Souls*, 221-22.

[21] *Souls*, 46-47.

[22] The example of the "wannabe" black *savant* departs from the established pattern by constructing the counterpoint between the *kinds of knowledge* which blacks and whites respectively needed,

rather than between the savant's task of imparting knowledge to black folk, and the contempt for such efforts on the part of whites.

23 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967 [original, 1899]), 317.

24 Du Bois, "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom" [1944], in Herbert Aptheker (ed. and compiler), *Writings by W. E. B. Du Bois in Non-Periodical Literature Edited by Others* (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thompson, 1982), 240-41. "You misjudge us because you do not know us," he once wrote; Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," 17.

25 Du Bois' later description of his "first introduction to a Negro world" carried with it a parallel but uninternalized agony which he attributed to different causes: "the ropes and myths and knots and hindrances; the thundering waves of the white world beyond beating us back; the scalding breakers of this inner world,—its currents and back eddies—its meanness and smallness—its sorrow and tragedy—its screaming farce!" Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 18-19.

26 See Ernest Allen, Jr., "Afro-American Identity: Reflections on the Pre-Civil War Era," *Contributions in Black Studies*, 7 (1985-1986), 52ff. Several decades later, Du Bois admitted: "Negroes, particularly the better class Negroes, are brought up like other Americans despite the various separations and segregations. They share, therefore, average American culture and curent American prejudices. It is almost impossible for a Negro boy trained in a white Northern high school and a white college to come out with any high idea of his own people or any abiding faith in what they can do . . ." *Dusk of Dawn*, 191.

27 *Souls*, 250.

28 *Souls*, 260.

29 *Souls*, 257.

30 "We will not quarrel as to just what the university of the Negro should teach or how it should teach it—I willingly admit that each soul and each race-soul needs its own peculiar curriculum. But this is true: A university is a human invention for the transmission of knowledge and culture from generation to generation, through the training of quick minds and pure hearts, and for this work no other human invention will suffice, not even trade and industrial schools." Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," 20.

31 Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, 1969 [original, 1933]).

32 Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 185.

33 See Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," 17. As my colleague, anthropologist Robert Paynter, has pointed out, Du Bois in his own *The Gift of Black Folk* considered African American objects as

> "gifts given to world culture. The choice of words is interesting, for the objects, actions and ideas Du Bois documents are not presented in his titles as 'achievements' of 'contributions.' 'Achievements implies a standard that African American creations are measured against—a practice that African Americans were and still are submitted to using the narrow standards of hegemonic culture. 'Contributions' suggest relations of distribution, of tithing or taxing or giving—prestations at some world feast, again run by and for the benefit of the chiefly power centers of Euro American culture.
>
> "But 'gifts,' as anthropology knows, are magical (Sahlins 1972; Mauss 1967). 'Gifts' simultaneously acknowledge and create social relations—especially relations among equals. And 'gifts' speak volumes, demanding a recognition of the giver and requiring a return from the receiver. 'Gifts' are the media of politics among equals."

Robert Paynter, "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Material World of African Americans in Great Barrington, Massachusetts," unpublished paper read at the 89th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans, 1990. My sincere thanks to Professor Paynter for permission to quote from his unpublished work.

[34] But the sense of the latter *is* preserved in Du Bois' "Criteria of Negro Art," published in 1926:

> We want to be Americans, full-fledged Americans, with all the rights of other American citizens. But is that all? Do we want simply to be Americans? Once in a while through all of this there flashes some clairvoyance, some clear idea, of what America really is. We who are dark can see America in a way that white America ns cannot. And seeing our country thus, are we satisfied with its present goals and ideals?

Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art" [1926], in Bracey et al., eds., *Black Nationalism in America*, 279.