

**"Beyond
This
Narrow
Now"**

**Nahum
Dimitri
Chandler**

**Or,
Delimitations,
of
W.E.B. Du Bois**

1900.

Signature du titulaire :

W.E.B. Du Bois

CARTE

EXPOSANT

“BEYOND THIS NARROW NOW”

BUY

NAHUM DIMITRI CHANDLER

“

**BEYOND
THIS
NARROW
NOW**

”

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DUKE

Or, Delimitations, of W. E. B. Du Bois

**UNIVERSITY
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give thanks to those many friends—who remain so close for me—who have supported my efforts as realized in this volume. This work is first of all—so too in the last instance—an expression of family, of the pyramid, of generations. For them, as gift, I give thanks.

1

In various formats, parts of “A Notation: The Practice of W. E. B. Du Bois as a Problem for Thought—Amidst the Turn of the Centuries” were presented on three occasions during my academic year as a Fulbright lecturer at Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan. Most especially, I presented it at An International Conference: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Question of Another World, which was held on June 15–17, 2006, in the Graduate School of Education at Tohoku University. An earlier version was presented on March 4, 2006, for the Tohoku Association for American Studies as part of its annual winter public lecture series held at Tohoku University, on the occasion of which Koji Takenaka, professor and chair of the Department of American Studies at Tohoku University, was kind enough to serve as translator. At Tohoku University, I also thank Professors Morimichi Kato, Kumiko Ikuta, and Yoshimichi Sato for their dialogue and engagement throughout the whole year. I wish to thank the Japan-U.S. Educational Commission and the U.S. Fulbright Program for the lectureship grant that made this experience possible. In addition, on June 20, 2006, this text served as the basis of a lecture for the seminar on American transcendentalism led by Professor Naoko Saito in the Graduate School of Education at Kyoto University. The support of Maria Phillips and Franc Nunoo-Quarcoo, perennially, has been of the essence. In addition, earlier versions of the principal ideas of this essay were presented over the course of a bit more than the past half dozen years as part of lectures on several occasions in the United States and Germany: on November 20, 2003, for the Lehigh Valley Consortium

in African American Studies, Lehigh, Pennsylvania, as part of two days of lectures and seminars on the work of Du Bois by the kind invitation and hospitality of Professors David Luis-Brown and William R. Scott; on September 23, 2003, at Villanova University, Villanova, Pennsylvania, in the Program in Africana Studies by the kind invitation of Professors Kevin Thomas Miles and Meghan Keita; on February 18, 2003, in the Honors College at Sweetbriar College, Sweetbriar, Virginia, by invitation of Professor Deborah Durham; on February 4, 2003, at Paine College, Augusta, Georgia, by invitation of President Shirley A. R. Lewis; on December 4, 2002, in the Senatsaal at the Humboldt-Universität, Berlin, Germany, as part of a yearlong lecture series on secularization in the faculties of philosophy and theology by the kind invitation of Professor Christina von Braun of the Institut für Kulturwissenschaft; on November 14, 2002, as part of an especially gratifying two-day seminar conducted with Professor Fred Moten in the Department of English, Michigan State University, East Lansing, by the kind invitation of Professors Scott Juengel and Scott Michaelsen and the chair, Patrick O'Donnell; at two University of California campuses, on May 4, 2002, at Davis, as a public lecture presented on behalf of the Department of African and African American Studies as part of their series of events during the annual Black Family Week celebration organized by John Ortiz-Hutson, and on April 18, 2002, in the Department of English at Berkeley—its thesis was the guide of a lecture there—given by way of the invitation of Professors Saidiya Hartman and Steven Goldsmith; on March 10, 2002, at the University of Pittsburgh at a conference on Du Bois and Henry Adams organized by Professors Ronald A. T. Judy and Paul Bové; and on June 3, 1999, at the Humboldt-Universität as part of the inaugural W. E. B. Du Bois Week organized by the Institut für Amerikanistik by invitation of the chair, the late Professor Gunther Lenz, during which the generous collegiality of Professor Sieglinde Lemke, then of the John F. Kennedy Institute of the Freie Universität, was much appreciated. Perhaps the earliest presentation occurred on February 10, 1999, as the opening of a lecture in a series on work in progress presented by current members of the School of Social Science of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey. I was supported there by fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Ford Foundation.

William Gaboury, labor historian, offered the first and only course that I followed as a student that was focused entirely on the work and itinerary of W. E. B. Du Bois, in a beautiful setting perched among the tall fulsome pines on the slopes of the low green hills of southern Oregon one

rainy autumn more than a generation and a half ago. In this sense, he was my first *professor* of matters Du Boisian. I doubt that he could ever have imagined what he helped so graciously to set in motion—a kind of reinauguration—in the rhythm of my step and the course that my path has so far taken. He was also a consummate host, of the essence, in his generosity of spirit. This notation is offered in his memory.

2

Certain motifs of part I were presented under the title “W. E. B. Du Bois and ‘The Spirit of Modern Europe’” for The Future of Utopia: A Conference in Honor of Fredric Jameson, organized by Alberto Moreiras in the Literature Program at Duke University, April 23–24, 2003. I warmly thank Professor Moreiras, a friend and former colleague, for the invitation. A portion of the opening section of part I, in its present form, was presented at An International Conference: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Question of Another World, II, which was held on June 6–8, 2007, at the Renaissance Center, located in Shinagawa, Tokyo, under the auspices of the School of Global Studies, both of Tama University. (On the latter, please note “Toward a New Parallax: Or, Japan in Another Traversal of the Trans-Pacific,” special issue of *CR: The New Centennial Review* 12, no. 1 [Spring 2012].)

For many years, first as a colleague and then as a friend, Fredric Jameson’s affirmation of my work on Du Bois has been unstinting. Yet this is not to say that he would endorse all of its gestures. Nor would I wish it to be so. I thus dedicate part I of this study to him, with respect to his superb example in the practice of thought, recognizable in the catholicity of his reception of discourse, artistic practice, and cultural form, but above all with respect to his hospitality.

3

Under the title “‘The Riddle of the Sphinx’: *John Brown* and ‘The Spirit of Modern Europe,’” some parts of part II were presented on February 11, 2005, to the Department of English, Michigan State University, East Lansing. And on March 4, 2006, a section of it was presented as part of a lecture given for the Tohoku Association for American Studies as part of their annual winter public lecture series held at Tohoku University, where

I held a Fulbright appointment. I also thank Keiko Toyama and Dr. David Satterwhite for supporting the latter lecture event, especially given that it was at Tohoku University and in Sendai.

For an entire academic year, from September 2005 to July 2006, Professor Koji Takenaka resolutely, and rather kindly, acknowledged, translating when absolutely necessary, my densely convoluted discourse given in the form of lectures for our seminar on Du Bois's sense of modernity—defined across the two terms respectively by our reading of the essay named in my title and of Du Bois's magnum opus of his maturity, *Black Reconstruction*. What may not have been evident at the time to the other members of the seminar, which I here wish to acknowledge, is the extent to which his careful formulation of questions assisted me greatly in proceeding a step further in my attempts to understand Du Bois's thought. In addition, it was an invitation, given at his initiative, to speak in that March 2006 lecture series that led me to elaborate the present form of the statement proposed in the *essay* at hand. And on the occasion, even with my late-arriving and rather long text, it was he who suffered through the difficulty of translating my prose for a Japanese general audience drawn from the community of Sendai, Japan. Although it came to the form of a general public presentation somewhat slowly—arriving for him only once he became emeritus—I thus dedicate part II of this study to him, in gratitude and respect.

4

Although it was published first, my book *Toward an African Future—Of the Limit of World* issued in 2013 unfolded in tandem with the preparation of the present study (see Chandler 2021). While they are diverse in elaboration, in my own conception, the books are of a common theoretical locution.

5

Portions of “A Notation: The Practice of W. E. B. Du Bois as a Problem for Thought—Amidst the Turn of the Centuries” were previously published in *CR: The New Centennial Review* 6 (3) (2006): 29–55. Portions of part I: “‘Beyond This Narrow Now’: Elaborations of the Example in the Thought of W. E. B. Du Bois—At the Limit of World,” were previously published in *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 2 (1) (2010): np.

Three decades and three years ago, I was first gifted with the friendship of Ken Wissoker. If there is a tender touch in this book, it has come by way of his first gesture, as editor, from then, until now. Also, I thank Ryan Kendall, for the care that she has brought to this project throughout; so too for the exact attention brought to it by Ellen Goldlust and Jessica Ryan of Duke University Press. A member of the very first advanced seminar on W. E. B. Du Bois at Duke University, from the early years of the last decade of the last century, Lily Phillips has remained one of the most essential of my fellow scholars; here, she assisted me precisely in the preparation of the index for this study.

The logo for Duke University Press, featuring the word "DUKE" in a large, bold, sans-serif font, with the words "UNIVERSITY" and "PRESS" stacked below it in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font. The text is white and set against a dark gray background.The logo for Duke University Press, featuring the words "UNIVERSITY" and "PRESS" stacked vertically in a bold, sans-serif font. The text is white and set against a dark gray background.

NOTE ON CITATIONS

1

While I have taken scholastic reference to the original publication or to the unpublished manuscript of texts by W. E. B. Du Bois, in every case of his writings engaged in this study, with citations noted within the text, where possible or appropriate, I have also without exception also consulted the versions of all published texts included in the thirty-seven volumes of the Complete Published Works of W. E. B. Du Bois, published from 1973 to 1986 by the Kraus-Thomson Organization and edited and introduced by the late Herbert Aptheker, as well as the six volumes of Du Bois's texts published from 1973 to 1985 by the University of Massachusetts Press, also edited and introduced by Aptheker, which include three volumes of selected correspondence and three of selections of other texts, including previously unpublished texts and documents. The bibliographical details of those texts edited by Aptheker, if cited herein, are listed in the reference list at the end of this study.

2

The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches is cited herein from the first edition of its original publication (Du Bois 1903l). A full-text version of the second edition (Du Bois 1903m), which has no major changes from the first, is available in electronic form through the University of North Carolina's Documenting the American South project, available as an open access online text at <https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/dubois/dubois.html>. I consider that presentation of the book (in its second edition, June 1903) an accurate and reliable work of scholarship. The pagination is the same in the first and second editions. In-text citations are given below in parentheses with the relevant page number(s), the chapter number, and the paragraph number(s) within the chapter. For example, (Du Bois 1903f, 213, chap. 11,

para. 13) indicates page 213, chapter 11, paragraph 13, with pagination based on the first and second editions of the book, each issued in 1903.

3

When quoting or referencing *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899), published under the authorship of Du Bois, with an additional text by Isabel Eaton (the report of a study on African American women domestic workers), I cite it by the abbreviation PN and the relevant page number. My citation refers to the original edition of the text, that is the first published edition (Du Bois and Eaton 1899). It is the first edition that is the decisive basis of my references. Hence, if the reader consults the first edition of this text, a citation by page number given in this study, such as (PN 385), will *also* enable the reader to easily recognize the appropriate section of Du Bois's book to which I am making reference. As the most singular example here, in part two of this book such in-text citations should lead the reader to chapter eighteen, "A Final Word," specifically to a page number within "The Meaning of All This," the important brief opening section in that chapter of Du Bois study. In general, thus, an attentive reader will note the location of that specific citation in a chapter that addresses in larger frame the theme named by that specific citation. This matters; for other subsequent editions of *The Philadelphia Negro*, notably those issued posthumously, of which there are several, may be abridged and may thus not yield a reliable match with that first published edition; several of these also leave aside Du Bois's own original and important preface.

4

When quoting or referencing passages from *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, originally published in 1940, I have cited the 1975 version published as part of the Complete Published Works of W. E. B. Du Bois series (Du Bois 1975d). While the 1975 edition is not a facsimile of the 1940 edition, the pagination follows exactly that of the first edition. Since the pagination varies somewhat among other editions of this text, in a manner similar to my references to the *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, as I indicated above, my citation to the 1975

edition of *The Dusk of Dawn* should enable the reader to easily locate within Du Bois's text the context of my discussion or references.

5

Four early essays by Du Bois—"The Afro-American" (1894a[?]), "The Conservation of Races" (1897b), "The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind" (1900a), and "The Development of a People" (1904)—are always cited by an abbreviated title and the page in the original or first publication of the text and paragraph number, with the paragraph enumeration determined according to the original publication or manuscript. For example, (CR 5, 1–3) refers to the original publication, issued in 1897, of "The Conservation of Races," page 5, paragraphs 1–3. Since these four essays are also included in *The Problem of the Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: The Essential Early Essays* (Du Bois 2015h) and the paragraph numbering is included there, readers with that collection at hand may find the relevant text simply by reference to essay title (noting the abbreviations that I use for in-text citations below) and paragraph number. That collection includes complete versions of the essays as originally published or as extant in Du Bois's unpublished papers, edited and annotated, according to contemporary scholarship.

6

Finally, I occasionally refer to material that may be found only among the W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312) (as part of series 3, subseries C) at the Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, housed in the W. E. B. Du Bois Library, or in the microfilm version of those papers (Du Bois 1980f). These papers have been digitized under the University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries online repository Credo and are now available as open access material at <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/collection/mums312>. Additional bibliographic detail for some notable specific citations from among these papers may be found in the notes or in the reference list at the end of this study. The original papers were compiled and edited by Herbert Aptheker, whereas the microfilm edition was supervised by Robert C. McDonnell.

D U B O I S

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AN OPENING—
AT THE LIMIT OF THOUGHT,
A PREFACE

.....

In the considerations that follow, I have been guided by two interrelated concerns.

The first is scholastic: to produce a more patient understanding of the early writings of W. E. B. Du Bois than has yet become common—even still—in engagements of his earliest initiatives in thought.

The second is theoretical: to pose a general problematization in contemporary discourse of the character and status of the problematic of matters Negro or African American for thought—the latter of which has heretofore, perhaps, been too easily engaged as congenitally specific, only partial, provincial—by way of a paleonymic engagement with the itinerary of thought in writing by Du Bois.

In turn, there are three primary questions according to which I have carried out this study.

The first is, Who or what is W. E. B. Du Bois as a problem for thought, for knowledge? My answer, in brief, as given in the introduction to this study, “A Notation: The Practice of W. E. B. Du Bois as a Problem for Thought—Amidst the Turn of the Centuries,” is that he is above all a thinker-writer, the producer of formulations of problems for knowledge, notably with regard to matters African American—but not only. For his problematization concerns matters of the human in general. The approach that I have proposed herein is to mark out the analytical dimension for an approach to his thought in its itinerary: autobiographical and historiographical. The opening section of part I of this study—under the nominal generic term “Apologias”—in a manner is in continuity with my work on this theme in Du Bois’s writing that I have offered elsewhere, proposing an elaboration of his distinct approach to his formulation of that problematic under the practical-theoretical heading of autobiography.

The second question that I have addressed herein is, Who or what are the matters African American for W. E. B. Du Bois? In a word, my judgment is that, for him, the ensemble of matters that may be configured under that heading are an originary example of the general problematization of

modern historicity—for thought. In order to organize a somewhat more deep-seated resource for Du Bois’s intellectual formation (other than the prescriptive and externalized basis for assessment that is common in such study), so as to enable a more patient understanding of the first stages of the itinerary of his thought as a matter for him of its achieved declarations, our own judgment notwithstanding at such a juncture, I have retrieved two exemplary early formulations of this thinking. The first is the essay “The Afro-American,” most likely prepared sometime late in 1894 or early in 1895 and published for the first time in 2010. I consider this essay as the heart of part I of this study. The second exemplary formulation that I consider is given in the essay “The Development of a People,” a text that was produced as the basis for an ongoing lecture by Du Bois during the winter of 1903–4. It was issued for publication in early 1904 (Du Bois 1904). In an essential sense, the elaboration of these two texts and the ensemble of discussions by Du Bois that I consider directly entailed may be most profoundly situated as in common with the problematization of which *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, gathered and prepared for publication in the period from September 1902 to April 1903, is the quintessential production. Accordingly, I have sought to remark this internal textual and epistemological context throughout my considerations in part I of this study.

The third question that is addressed in this study formulates the domain of problem that provides the guiding subtext, if you will, for my work in this volume. How does Du Bois understand the relation of matters African American to modern historicity, most specifically, but not only, that configured under the heading “America”? One of two principal aspects of Du Bois’s perspective is considered in my discussion of “The Development of a People” in part I of this study. There, I elaborate Du Bois’s presumptive theorization of matters African American as fundamentally of and about historical possibility—the possibility of that historicity announced as forms and practices of social being with regard to such matters as the articulation of illimitable possibility in historical being. In part II of the study, I address the long-obscure essay “The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind,” first presented as the presidential address at the third annual meeting of the American Negro Academy in late December 1899, in which Du Bois may be understood to have first presented his formulation “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” As I consider this text, issued by Du Bois to address a specific occasion, to nonetheless mark the incipit of one of his principal theoretical offerings to contemporary thought, given extensive annotation across the whole of his long itinerary,

I have proposed and sought to exemplify in part II of my study the interest of an elaboration of this early enunciation by him.

Perhaps it is apposite to note here that despite and apart from any expectation or anticipation on the part of thinkers and scholars of our own moment, Du Bois does not so much nominalize, produce, or himself elaborate any narrative of the production of the idea and concept of race. This remains even though such a concern is at stake in his problematization of the idea and concept of race in the essay “The Conservation of Races” from early March 1897. Too, this is notwithstanding that in his thought the question of the self-understanding of the enslaving and the enslaved—of self and the other—in modern systems of enslavement in the United States of America (before, during, and after the formal inauguration of a political entity under that name, and throughout the Americas and the Caribbean) is throughout a standing problematization, already from 1894, as it were (in “The Afro-American,” for example).

Du Bois gives us instead a thought of “the problem of the color line.” For him, it is understood on a scale of reference that is at once epochal (all of modernity in whatever guise we might choose to construe it) and planetary (worldwide or global, as one may be wont to nominalize the references) in its implications. Likewise, its depth of determination is such that it is historically constitutive, implicating the initiatives of the Renaissance (and various subsequent instances of resurgence in knowledge and understanding across the planet and over the centuries of the modern period), the openings toward at once modern European imperialism (and its aftermath), modern colonialism (not only European), and the tendentious emergence of capitalism, in distinctive part by way of its inception in, through, and in relation to forms of sustained coerced labor, including the sexualization and engendering thereof, in which formal (ostensibly legalized) systems of modern enslavement, across the modern period, from 1441–42 to 1883, are perhaps the most poignant nodal articulation. It is essential that we understand Du Bois’s thought of “the problem of the color line” as the conception of a constitutive production, tendentiously global in its bearing, and thus not in any manner the underside or alternative side of the entirety of modern historicity, in its material, as well as ideological, being.

The decisive implication for Du Bois’s understanding of modern historicity, including the thought of “the problem of the color line,” is that we can recognize thereby the way in which it is not only the case that matters African American may be historicized by recognizing them in the context of modern history and thought on the whole but that our understanding of

modern historicity, under whatever dominant theoretical or ideological heading, is thereby in itself powerfully historicized (put in relative frame and thus rearticulated in its pertinence, in general).

If I may be allowed to extend in catachresis the deployment of a metaphor once given by the late writer Toni Morrison, when she remarked in conversation on the expression of an idea of a “melting pot,” in which it was proposed that African Americans might be included, “We are the pot.” We might then say with Du Bois, in our own extension of the turn that Morrison gives to the staid usage of that metaphor, matters African American, if thought on the track of the global-level “problem of the color line,” allows one to recognize in just what way the whole of the world is “African” American; that is to say—if we may go by way of this lineage of the metaphor—we are at once the example and the thing itself by our historicity: *we* are the melting pot.

In a subsequent volume of study on the thought of Du Bois and the discourse of the Negro, a kind of companion to the present study, for it is of the same solicitation from which “*Beyond This Narrow Now*” issues, I address directly this question of the status of discourses of knowledge, notably on the concept of race (Chandler, forthcoming). There I consider Du Bois’s critical reformulation of the concept of the human in terms of the concept of race as the inherited epistemic formulation of difference for him at the turn to the twentieth century. While each of these studies indicates something of the manner of my engagement with Du Bois’s conceptualization of ipseity with regard to matters Negro or African American as always at least and never only double in its presumed references for social and historical being, that which we know famously under the heading of “double-consciousness,” that problematization—the thought of “double-consciousness”—is of such massive reference in his discourses and implicates such a fundamental, excessive, and large domain of contemporary thought, from the Enlightenment era to now, and relates to a planet-wide topography, wherever modern enslavement and modern colonialism may be indexed, as to demand an engagement on its own terms, in a study devoted solely to its terms of question.

As already formulated as at stake here, in “*Beyond This Narrow Now*,” we can recognize that for Du Bois anything that might be understood under the heading African American is not given all in one go; rather, it is always more than one, notably always still in fact yet to come. And then too, in a related manner, *à partir de* the thought of Du Bois, that is to say by way of and in relation to, but not simply reducible to, his early thought, I propose in the companion study (Chandler, forthcoming) that one might

develop a distinctive conceptualization of historicity as it is of or related to all matters African American. Therein Du Bois may be understood to propose a thought of the multiple and the heterogeneous (of both self and other, the self as always itself other—in which the conjunction *and* [which paradoxically still operates in a philosophical manner as copula] may be emphasized rather than the nonconjunctive conjunction *or*—as resolutely other than a supposed simple singular or singularity), always of the future that is plural, in which any past is thus likewise rendered plural.

This is at once a very simple thought and one that imposes considerable difficulty for contemporary forms of critical reflection and practical theoretical projection. With regard to *istoria*, of time, place, and the ways of making existence (otherwise than a simple habitation), the horizon of reference for any decision or judgment is a matter only and always of peoples, multiple, heterogeneous, with regard to both any future, and hence any futural claims to any understanding of the past, even for any reference than might be taken as an example. It is thus recognizable that the most abiding register of temporality, or all that we may think under the term *historicity*, for Du Bois is the question of the future. The study at hand, however, is simply on the threshold of such a formulation. Most properly, it is simply put at stake here as a theoretical question that must be explored in subsequent reflection.

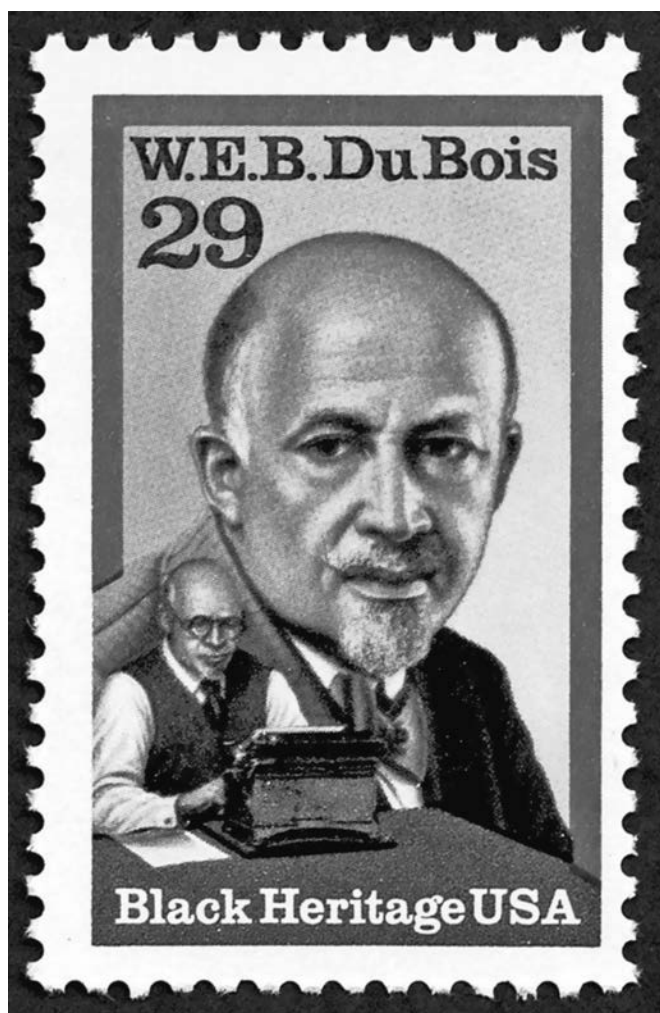
Too, emphasis ought to be given to the political force of Du Bois's itinerary and expression in thought. His practice here ought not to be thought of as contemplative. It is activist. Du Bois seeks to intervene immediately and directly in matters that issue in the everyday social life of African Americans, indeed of all concerned with heightened conscience and hopefully enlightened persons. Yet he wishes to do so on the basis of the deepest and most far-reaching understanding and knowledge that his time, his historical time, might allow him to bring to bear. For Du Bois, at the turn to the twentieth century, this knowledge is science, including philosophy as science, of which a nascent sociology would be the most forward looking, the harbinger, of the possibilities of a new science of the human. However, here, too, it is instructive to understand that Du Bois, while committed to impartiality in judgment, or in the formal determination of truth, nonetheless could not abide a simple neutrality in assuming the instituting rationale for study or in assessing its practical value. On the latter, Du Bois's concern was to use knowledge to effect the best outcomes for the future, perhaps a distinctive sense within the nascent human sciences or forms of thought of human sociality and historicity. For Du Bois, a thought on the bias, as it were, in all truth posed the general question of humanity—the humanity of the future.

As this matter of futurity might well be considered the guiding thread of my effort herein, perhaps it is acceptable if I refer the matter to the spaces of metaphorization, elaboration, and reflection that may find their way to exposure or into relief within the work of this study at hand—unceasing—perhaps seeking to accede to the horizons of *atopia* or of possible passages of a cosmic imagination, something other than cosmopolitan (even if as apparition its outlines are remarked only in miniatures) that as such might articulate within the text of the following study itself.

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xxii • AN OPENING



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W. E. B. Du Bois postage stamp. U.S. Postal Service Black Heritage Series, issued January 31, 1992, Atlanta. Source: Smithsonian Institution, https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_1993.2015.229.

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A NOTATION

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*William Joseph Gaboury,
am memoriam*

The Practice of W. E. B. Du Bois as a Problem for Thought—Amidst the Turn of the Centuries

PREAMBLE

In a ceremony at Clark Atlanta University two generations past, on January 31, 1992, just in time for the advent of Black History Month that year, the U.S. Postal Service unveiled a mellow gold-and-orange-toned stamp, with black, blue, green, and brown accents, commemorating the life and work of W. E. B. Du Bois. The stamp was part of the Black Heritage series, which the service had inaugurated in 1978.

The face of the stamp is dominated by a bust-like portrait of Du Bois in suit and bow tie, dressed in his usual dapper and inimitable fashion. This portrait was probably drawn from photographs of the late 1920s or early 1930s, when Du Bois entered his sixties. The handsomeness of Du Bois's high, full, and rounded forehead, which is matched by a distinguished gray mustache and goatee, is elegantly captured in the lines of this image by the illustrator Higgins Bond. Even the famous sternness or moral rectitude of the Good Doctor, as he is still widely known, especially among African Americans, is revealed in the sense of repose that seems to mark Du Bois's expression. Yet his face remains, for the most part, inscrutable. Perhaps one can imagine a hint of a sense of loss or regret, even a slight longing or desire, registered in the shaded lines that mark his countenance. However, the most sustained sense of Du Bois's expression here is the instance of an

almost passive thoughtfulness. This is a memorial representation of Du Bois as a political figure—the one who was the advance architect of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the principal figure in the development of the global Pan-African movement, and a champion of a new global humanity, and known as such around the world. Here he is posed in a paternal guise, appearing perhaps even as a monumental persona or as an icon—a historic character—who has been affirmed in our time as one of the titans of the social, political, and intellectual life of the twentieth century, not only in the Americas and the Caribbean, but in Europe, Asia, and Africa and thus throughout the world.

Inset within this relatively large portrait, however, to its left and toward the bottom of the stamp face, is a second, much smaller one. It is so small, in fact, that its detail might be hard to fully detect at first glance. In contrast to the magisterial repose of the larger portrait image, which tends to deflect close comprehension, this smaller one, once one's attention is drawn to it, seems to invite further attention, giving rise to an almost visceral sense of the warmth, clutter, and clatter of daily life. In this second portrait, a portrait within a portrait, Du Bois is shown from the waist up, in a vest, straight tie, and shirt sleeves, without a suit coat. He is seated. His hands are at a typewriter, and his face is matter-of-fact in its composure, but his eyes are directed to a sheet of paper in the machine, as if in concentration, perhaps intensely so. Another sheet of paper lies beside the machine. Du Bois is writing.

The hierarchy of this double portrait produced in the late twentieth century remains representative of the mainstream understanding of Du Bois almost two generations later, at the end of the second decade of this still new twenty-first century. Such perspective—then and now—is one in which Du Bois as a memorialized political figure that is larger than life, whether as an aloof genius (or its opposite, a kind of political villain), or as a paternal figure (or its opposite, as a militant outcast and exile), is privileged in our recollections and projections of him over and above Du Bois as a committed intellectual, laboring at his task and practicing his craft, the task of thinking and the craft of writing.¹

I. PROBLEMATIZATION I

Thus, amidst the generations in our time, whether in the United States or throughout the world, we still have yet to fully understand the extent to which Du Bois was first and last, preeminently I might say, a thinker.

More precisely, Du Bois was a thinker whose practice was writing.

It is the image of Du Bois as a thinker-writer, as a thinker who writes, that we should come to consider most compelling in our recollection and representation of him in our time. We should recall Du Bois as a thinker who thinks as writing, who thinks in writing, as a thinker who writes: in the sense that thinking is his way, his very path of existence and his vocation, and writing is his discipline, his definitive practice, his craft and artistry, or his *métier*.

It is this way and practice, as ground and reference for all of his other activity, for example, as a social and political activist and scholar, that can and must come to form the basis for our understanding of Du Bois within the history of modern thought in general; in the social, intellectual, and political life of both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and these still early moments of the twenty-first century; and in the life course of the contemporary centuries to come.

His first commitment, that to which he belonged in the primary instance, was to the practical doing of thinking, the practical doing of thought. It is an understanding of this way and this practice in all its complexity and specificity that is most necessary in order for us to come to understand, in turn, and in what way, W. E. B. Du Bois remains our contemporary.

Born on the February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, just after the end of the American Civil War, Du Bois died on August 22, 1963, in Accra, Ghana, on the eve of the first great civil rights march on Washington. He began publishing at the age of fifteen, serving as the local correspondent for an African American newspaper. His last published texts were prepared at the age of ninety-five, three days before he died. He published in every major genre of literature, including poetry, drama, fiction (including five novels and numerous short stories), biography, and, above all, the essay. Du Bois, it must be said, was one of the great essayists of the twentieth century; his most famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, first published in 1903, is a collection of some of his earliest essays. He also practiced in other forms, such as full-scale historical narrative and journalism. And throughout his long professional life, he published within the social sciences, producing over a dozen full-length studies, editing more, publishing several dozen scholarly essays, and maintaining multiple well-followed newspaper columns for several decades. This remarkable output is as voluminous as it is varied. From the early 1960s through the mid-1980s, Herbert Aptheker curated and edited thirty-seven volumes as *The Complete Published Works of W. E. B. Du Bois*, as well as a volume of

his previously unpublished papers and, too, several volumes of Du Bois's selected correspondence. The main literary papers, correspondence, and other documents of Du Bois are housed at the W. E. B. Du Bois Library (named in 1994) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst; they run to more than 100,000 items. And there is a significant body of documents at Fisk University, in addition to other smaller collections throughout the world. While the vast majority of these documents are correspondence, referring to both the published and unpublished works, complete and fragmentary, and following a calibration once proffered by Aptheker, we can estimate that Du Bois wrote an average of six pages of publishable text each day for well over half a century. If, essentially, one includes the massive correspondence, the sense of the daily volume of writing increases in a somewhat dramatic fashion.²

It is this archive of writing that stands at the root of the contemporary worldwide resurgence in engagement with the work of Du Bois. In 2003 the centenary of the publication of his most famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, simply widened and extended, in its own rather dramatic fashion, the scope of this reconsideration. Thus, Du Bois's work—already a perennial concern since the first edition of that most famous of his writings in 1903, especially among the two intellectual generations of the end of the twentieth century—is in fact the object of a newfound attention in the twenty-first century and is now becoming a common object of new general scholarly labor that is being elaborated with considerable sophistication and acute theoretical learning.

Yet it remains that after all these years, for the most part, this work continues an approach to Du Bois's writing and other practices that is predominantly contextualist in orientation; that is, one begins with premises that are organized according to a *thetic* or *telic* structure that takes its definitive shape according to terms that are outside of Du Bois's own discourse, that is, outside of the declared organization of his own enunciations, statements, and texts.

Even if such a practice is an affirmative one—such as the ongoing and ubiquitous and perennial practice of quoting Du Bois in order to use his authority to throw perspective on a contemporary debate—not to speak of those same kinds of gestures that move from a primarily negative prejudice, the critical disposition essentially starts from some contemporary author's own commitments, whether political or scholarly, and assertively places the discourse of Du Bois under that heading, and in this way it thus often has quite limited grounding in the movement of Du

Bois's thought. Nothing is more common today in the reengagement with Du Bois that is afoot around the globe. Thus, although this reengagement has been underway now for more than two generations, it remains that the overwhelmingly dominant, the primary or the heading, characterization of Du Bois in this work has been to adduce him as a political figure, one that can be used and abused for contemporary purposes.

The written texts of Du Bois, at the level of their most specific concept metaphors, statements, and elaborations of thought, have, for the most part, only in the past decade and a half or so become the object of our full and most patient attention. And this situation holds a fortiori with regard to his *discourse*, the course of thought and terms of art that gather around those forms of statement, linguistic gesture, and graphical presentation, issued within, as, or in relation to his own declarations of intent and value.

Yet the limit of our own inhabitation is not in and of itself the decisive form of our problematic.

Rather, the decisive matter is whether or not, and if so how, Du Bois's own commitments and practice, at the level of the locution and the metaphor (his operation of the *trope* in general), may be allowed within our practice to place in question, in turn, the forms and premises that organize the terms of our own judgments of his discourse.

His understanding of his own time and practice must be allowed in turn to question our understanding of our own time, most precisely to the extent that the latter indelibly informs our judgment of the former. We, too, are given in discourse, just as, and to the same extent that we may find access to the words, the texts, the discourse, that is to say, the writing of Du Bois.

Our own scholarly and interpretive practice must account for this necessity.

If nothing else, my suggestion in this study is that a new reading or rereading of the writing of Du Bois and another kind of attention to his discourse in general, by way of its solicitation of our own, should or must be undertaken and sustained in our contemporary moment. Not only should this be so for the generations of scholars, thinkers, and activists just emerging but also for those generations at the apogee of their wisdom and understanding, not only within the Americas and the Caribbean but globally, not only in Europe or Africa but also in Asia. For Du Bois was truly, in a metaphorical sense, a citizen of the worldwide horizon in general. And he was an intellectual, a thinker and writer, whose concern was the whole of what we can call *our* world. His ultimate concern was the possibility of another world, not one that existed in the past and not the

present in the future, but another world, one that has not yet been and remains yet to come.

I propose that in order to understand this Du Bois, we must *think* with him, allowing his questions to become our own.

This includes both its limits and its possibilities. This is to say that we must first acknowledge *his problematic*, the problematizations that set his itinerary adrift or the questions that set his practice afoot. And, in so doing, we should not accept Du Bois's manner of inhabitation of those terms in any simple sense. However, it is only in thinking by way of the form that his questions took for him, that is, by moving with them and thus *through* them, that one can mark or remark their limit. It is paradoxically only on the cusp of this fold, at such a juncture in thought, that we might find or recognize the form, perhaps, of those paths or passages that lead beyond such exposed limits in a thought such as his and into the domains that can sustain our inhabitation in thought in the future, or even the future of the future, one that is yet to come.

This approach requires that we understand something of Du Bois's thought on its own terms, that we think first in terms of the problematic and movement of thought that is specific to it, that we contextualize it internally, so to speak. Such an understanding would radicalize and extend our capacity to understand in what senses Du Bois's practice as thought was political in its very being and in its most mundane implication, this large and fundamental sense of all that we might think under the heading of the political as indeed, perhaps, rendering a critical (that is self-questioning) the passage of sense and understanding for his formal labor and activity of organization. This critical sense, the self-reflexive and self-questioning dimension of his thought, was a fundament for his activity in general.

Such an approach requires that we must accept his thought first as the responsibility of our present. This means, above all, that we approach his thought as the contemporary of our time and, perhaps, as the contemporary of our future. We have only just begun such an approach.

This is *our problematic*.

II. PROBLEMATIZATION II

We can think of a problematic, or problematization, in the sense that I propose it here, as the ensemble of questions that are given to a thinker as a task by the conditions of time and situation, by the historicity of his or

her emergence as an intellectual. We might specify this idea a bit more by suggesting that what compels our attention here is not simply history as an organization of external condition that constitutes a demand or obligation for a thinker. Rather, what we want to understand is a movement of thought and social existence in which a certain order of life becomes the object of sustained attention and preoccupation, of reflection and reelaboration, as thought and discourse, as practice, in the terms and circumstance of a practical theoretical engagement.

Thus, what should interest us is formed as a certain relationship between what is announced at the level of history and social condition in general and the movement of critical engagement that takes shape as a form of inhabitation: as the work and thought of a thinker (an intellectual, a scholar, an artist, a teacher, an activist).

A problematic, or, better, problematization, is thus the organization of social or historical condition as a relation that is announced in or as thought. In the terms of traditional formulations of the matter: a problematic or problematization is thus a *relationship* of thought and context.

Yet, to specify a bit more our own theoretical sense: context is thus also always plural, configured in the movement of thought and not simply and purely given, beforehand.

Our own practice, then, can be announced only as itself *of* (both from and about) this movement.

Historicity, here, that which situates both Du Bois and us (whoever we are), would thus have the shape of a possible future of a future and a future past as much as it would have the character of a given past.³

The character or mode of appearance of a problematic or problematization at the level of the constituted, or the mark in general, is always a figure of relation, perhaps even an agonistic relation. As a mark in the form of a sign or symbol, specifically in a linguistic form (although this is not its only or even always its most important form), it appears in the rhetorical organization of the interrogative: What (or when)? Or why? Or, even, how? The organization of a question for thought or a difficulty for a practice, and even of existence in general, is the very movement of problematization. This movement can be understood as the very character or texture of thought. This movement can be understood by a historian of thought as both an elaboration and an inhabitation. And yet what is also at stake is the potential practice of a kind of *desedimentation* of both the given (to stake the metaphor we might say, perhaps, as *ground*) and the possible. It is

thus the dynamic, and perhaps agonistic, dimension of the process of the production of the very historicity of a practice as thought.

A. If we turn to the question of Du Bois as an intellectual, as a thinker, as one who tries to understand and come to terms with the social conditions of his time and place in the most fundamental manner possible, then in a general sense a certain order and organization of questions may be understood to announce themselves.

(1) Du Bois's problematic, in the sense that I have just proposed, acquires its incipit within a historical situation: the devolution of the modern institution of slavery in the Atlantic basin, involving Europe, Africa, and the Americas (North and South) and the Caribbean. In terms that are relevant for Du Bois's thoughtful relation to the historicity of his present, the events of this process produce, as effects, as the very condition of the historicity most specific to him, a radical displacement of his inhabitation, in every sense, from any supposed simple or pure ground of habitual reference in a supposed origin.

This condition would be the threshold of a historicity that might most specifically be attributed to a group called African American.

(2) At the level of an inhabitation of thought, how might one go about understanding this situation? (a) Certainly, one must try to understand the whole of the various so-called contexts, at their most general level, that might situate this specific historicity: this would include not only a certain history and possibility of "America" but that of the modern West in general and then also the history and present of the modern world in a global sense. (b) Yet one must also undertake a certain critical reflection upon the conditions and means of such an understanding. This reflection would be about possibility and impossibility: a certain consideration of the ground of chance and necessity (or law), in the context of knowledge, of truth or science, especially as logic; and a certain consideration of the ground of freedom and responsibility (or duty), in the context of ethics and morals, of human "will." All that is named under the heading of religion (or theology) would be at stake here as well. How can one know, for example, the truth, or the right? And if one might know truth or right, what is the chance, as possibility or opportunity, for realizing it in its proper fashion?

(3) For Du Bois, the relation between this historical situation and his own possibilities in thought took on a fundamental character and distinct organization.

(a) This was first and foremost an abiding concern with the question of the general conditions of possibility for the construction or reconstruc-

tion of *ideals* for social life. Thus, we can underscore that the most general and singular concern of the work of Du Bois across the entire itinerary of his thought was the construction or reconstruction of what he called “ideals of life,” those headings of value and distinction that would orient a collective social life, the terms that would assist in the organization and sustenance of a collectivity. While such terms would give the social and historical space for individuals to realize themselves, they would, above all, be operative at the level of the group (humans in general, civilizations, “races” or cultures, nations, and states, or a political entity as such). This general concern yielded a certain practice of principle in Du Bois’s thought: an affirmation indeed of the possibility and authority of truth and law as a guide in the organization of life but, equally, a resolute and unfungible affirmation of *freedom or chance* in human doing. In fact, the latter might be understood as the root possibility of the former in Du Bois’s terms. There is a principle of freedom that operates as the organizing premise of the most fundamental dimension of Du Bois’s thought. And this principle is rendered and maintained as a theme—that is, reflexively and critically—in a manner that is distinctive to his discourse. At the level of his critical reflection, it is something other than simply one theme among others. It is the most fundamental path of organization in his thought. In a practical sense, this organization of principle might be understood to stand at the root of Du Bois’s *affirmation of democracy* in all aspects of collective social life and an *affirmation of universal opportunity* for the production and realization of ideals, especially in the form of education, as an illimitable horizon for human existence in general. In this sense, education might be understood as a formalized practice of the transformation of the self, at the level of either the individual or the social group, in relation to an ideal.

(b) Second, Du Bois’s affirmative concern with *possibility* sustained an abiding critique of all practices and institutions, historically or in the present, that would foreclose such chance or freedom in the realization of human faculty, capacity, or ability. This certainly took shape as a critique of all peremptory modern proscriptive distinctions among humans, whether of birth or race, sex or gender, social class, learning or education, occupation or employment, general wealth, religion, political belief, nationality, or forms of enculturation in general.

Above all, however, Du Bois was concerned with a certain idiom and practice of such proscription. It is the form of distinction that he came to place in a critical sense under the analytical heading of the concept-metaphor “the problem of the color line.”

With regard to the U.S. context, especially in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, Du Bois elaborated the metaphor of *the veil* to account for the operations of this practice.

We might describe “the problem of the color line” in Du Bois’s sense in a summary fashion as an agonistically derived and hierarchically ordered mobile articulation of the differences and relations among groups of humans situated on a dimension of generality that we would today, in the early twenty-first century, tend to colloquialize as *global*. Its operative premise is that distinction can be rendered *effective*. This is the threshold of its operative mode whether or not its promulgation is immediately understood or inhabited at the level of the subject as a sense of an oppositional or categorical difference. And yet the logic of opposition remains the form of its philosophical emergence and destiny. In a worldwide sense, “the problem of the color line” is produced in *modern* history as a basic and fundamental aspect of new historical relations among groups of people. In this history the institution of Atlantic slavery and its relation to modern forms of imperialism, including its devolution in and as the practices of colonialism, would be a central reference. This is to say, forms of labor subordination and exploitation are fundamental to the history in which “the problem of the color line” in Du Bois’s sense is produced.

Yet this is an idiom and practice of proscription that is not *simply* one historical form of hierarchy among others. The paradoxical character of the specificity at issue here—a paradox because this specificity is given in the peculiar relation of this idiom of proscription to ideas of the general and the universal—can be named on two levels. In one instance, it is uniquely connected to the history of modern systems of knowledge, as science and philosophy, and of authority, as law and political right, as they were elaborated in Europe and the Americas. While Du Bois does not elaborate an account of the production of “the problem of the color line” in thought, in the formal discourses of thought—especially by way of what can be summarized under the heading of the relation of philosophy to the idea of sovereignty, as such—and we may surmise that perhaps he was circumscribed by his own ambivalent inhabitation of the legacies of eighteenth-century critical thought, which could pertain especially to his epistemic inhabitation in a general sense of the promise or hope of the human sciences or to his preeminent focus on the practical task of producing an intervention in the general field of political and social subordination and exploitation, it remains that an elaboration along these lines can be proposed on the basis of fundamental premises in his work.

This is a task that I have undertaken both here and elsewhere.⁴ In another instance, this form of proscription is constitutively concomitant with the threshold production and articulation of a common worldwide, or global, horizon of value and meaning in the understanding of the ground of the relations among groups of humans. It announces the form in which the question of the human as a kind of whole becomes at issue for thought as science, that is, in the terms of the devolution of human knowledge and understanding. It is produced in the warp and woof of the historicity that makes the practical questions of such relations general or situated as an issue of the whole as an absolute; and here the whole is not just that of groups, of nations, cultures, or states, for example, in their individuality or differences, but of their status in terms of any sense of an ultimate whole *as a practical issue*. On both levels, while formed by way of genealogies that brook no absolute break with its pasts and configured in a diversity of elaborations, it has a unique standing as *a specifically modern* ensemble of practices and institutions of proscription. While Du Bois referenced this problematic by the colloquial name of “the color line,” common at the turn of the twentieth century, he elaborated an understanding of his historical present, an interpretation of modern global history as a whole, under the critical heading of this term in a manner that was distinctive to his thought and according to a protocol of attention that made possible an immediate and acute analytical productivity at the time of its first enunciation. And some of his most poignant and consummate historiographical and political contributions that were given relatively late in his itinerary took their root in this epistemological soil. It can be shown that the theoretical possibility exposed in that productivity retains considerable bearing for any effort to understand our own historical present and future.

B. Two clarifications are in order at this juncture of our sketch of Du Bois’s problematic.

The first is epistemological with implications for scholarship of his work; the second is scholastic with an epistemological bearing for our contemporary interpretation of his thought.

This is to emphasize as a threshold notation that it is of fundamental epistemological importance for the contemporary interpretation of the work of Du Bois that his complicated negotiation with the concept of race as the nominalization of the fundamental ground, often supposed as ontological, for a historical positivity that he would seek to affirm, for example, a group that might be called Negro or African American, should not be simply subordinated to or amalgamated with his epistemological

nominalization of the term “problem of the color line” that he proposed in order to bring into analytical relief a dimension of modern historicity that he wished to make the object of a fundamental critique.⁵

What he ambivalently names under the heading of race in the inaugural moments of his itinerary he would affirm and never disavow, even as he questioned any premise that would ground its determination in physical, natural, or biological character: the possibility of an original announcement of a Negro or African American inhabitation of world (even if woven of heterogeneous strands, a form of intermixture) and, beyond such an example, the originary capacity of any group that might contribute to a sense of the full inhabitation of the chance or freedom of human existence. Certainly, this movement of his thought carries within it all that is at stake as the core concern of later, more formalized disciplines of the humanistic and social sciences, and their putative aftermath, during the past century, which have been conceptually and theoretically placed under the heading of a concept of culture or a concept of historicity.

What he named under the heading of the problem of the color line he sought to radically challenge, disrupt, and transform such that it would eventually be worn away or rendered meaningless by a revolution of values and social organization or fade away in the midst of historical change as surely as “the morning mists fade before the rising sun.”⁶ In this sense the critical thought of the problem of the color line proposes the terms of an epistemic desedimentation of historicity, not only of the past, but also of the present, in such a manner that one can remark the limits of such historicity as yet also outlining the thresholds by which one could reimagine possibility. It is in this sense that a continual desedimentation of the past is of fundamental necessity in practical thought. In this sense, a certain thinking of “the problem of the color line” might allow a different sense of world, a different sense of horizon, to arise. It would be one that is different from what has been given in the present. This is the scene of a fundamental epistemological contribution by Du Bois that has yet to be fully elaborated as a theoretical intervention in modern thought as critical discourse.

In such a world, another one, different from those that have yet existed, and specifically one in which “the problem of the color line” has been rendered obsolete, groups such as the African American, *whose originarity necessarily remains at stake in every instance of its promulgation* and thus always in a sense yet to come, might be exemplary for human existence: not exemplary as the final or absolute example but, rather, as exemplary of the

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historicity of our time and of the possibility of the making and remaking of ideals in, or as, the matter of existence in general.

Second, however, it must be remarked that one of the astonishing facts about the current resurgence in the reading and study of Du Bois's works is the absence of any true scholastic account of his formulation and deployment of the thought of a global "problem of the color line."⁷ While it remains that his most famous words are "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," this oft-quoted statement has been understood or used primarily for its apparently prosaic truth or as if it were merely apocryphal (see Du Bois 1900a, 2015g). Thus, the phrase has primarily been used over the decades, if taken up at all, as a slogan or idiom. It has not been taken up so much as the name of a fundamental motif in Du Bois's thought or as a problem for contemporary thought in general: one that would fundamentally be epistemic even as it is irreducibly political. (Part II of this book examines at length the place of this phrase in Du Bois's thought and itinerary.)

In terms of the discussion of Du Bois's discourse itself, due, perhaps, to this same limited effort to think with him on this line, it has often been deduced or implied that a global perspective arose more or less suddenly for him as an effect of his participation in the Exposition Universelle, held at Paris, and the first international conference called by the name "Pan-African," held in London during the months of June and July in 1900.⁸ And then others have operated this logic with reference to many other dates in his later career, with some mentioning the 1920s as a time when such a perspective developed, with others proposing that such an event occurred as late as 1945, when Du Bois was in his late seventies. This kind of premise and such logic have governed much of the interpretation of Du Bois's thought with regard to modernity as a whole or concerning the global in general, no matter what period of his itinerary has been under discussion. Yet such a premise does not bear up under scholastic scrutiny, and the theorization and interpretations deduced by way of it are profoundly misleading for any attempt to judge the implication of the itinerary of Du Bois's practice for contemporary thought. Thus, it should be understood as both a scholastic paradox and a political conundrum, certainly definitive in the American and Anglo-European academic discourse, but perhaps decisive in other geo-epistemic domains by way of the dissemination of such discussion, that most people—including many Du Bois scholars—know the famous line "the problem of the twentieth

century . . .” from the reprinting of his 1901 essay “The Freedmen’s Bureau” as the second chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Du Bois 1901b, 1903g), with virtually no idea of the fundamental level of sedimentation that it has within his thought: (a) that the global perspective adumbrated in that chapter was developed initially from Du Bois’s attempt to understand the specific African American situation; (b) that it bespeaks a whole conception situated at a global level that Du Bois had begun to formulate during the half dozen years before the publication of his most famous book; and (c) that it remained an epistemological formulation that he would elaborate on many registers across his entire career, serving to formulate the theoretical horizon for the most ambitious works of the later stages of his career, from *Black Reconstruction*, in 1935, including both *Color and Democracy* and *The World and Africa* from the signal era at the end of World War II, to the time of the *Black Flame* trilogy, the latter of which was written and published from 1955 to 1961 (Du Bois 1935, 1976 [1935], 1945, 1975b, 1947, 1976d, 1957, 1976c, 1959, 1976b, 1961b, 1976e).

For this reason, an ongoing annotation of the paradoxes engendered by this approach remarks the persisting pertinence of a clarification of the issue at hand (see also Chandler 2021, 12–16). So, on the one hand, those who know of the line just quoted from the second chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* usually have a quite limited sense of its global framing in Du Bois’s thought; or, if they do gesture toward such a frame, they have little or no grip on the depth of the conception involved. But, on the other hand, those who rhetorically grasp this line as a way to link Du Bois’s thought to a global context in a general sense tend to do so by using it as a kind of weapon, under the authority of his name, against what they mistakenly think of or opportunistically characterize as a kind of parochialism in the discourse of African Americans in the United States, or the apparition of the supposed dominance of such a topic in discussions of the question of the African Diaspora or the problem of race in a global context.⁹ Yet the pertinence of such announced interventions might at best be found in their rendering legible matters of position and authority in our contemporary discursive and institutional scene. For beyond any matter of polemics, it remains that the most troublesome aspect of readings of Du Bois that would conscript his discourse primarily for affirming our own ideas about the truth of modern global history is that it makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to access and to judge, first on the terms of Du Bois’s own declarations, what he thought he was saying.

If one undertakes such an examination, it renders a quite legible track that shows that Du Bois was first led to this global frame precisely by trying to think the African American situation in the United States in the most fundamental and general manner possible. That he was, in this sense, first solicited by the specific ground of his own emergence articulates a general protocol of a commitment to thinking immanence that one disavows at one's own epistemic peril. That he sought to situate such immanence in relation to a passage of thought to the most general itself solicits and radicalizes this thought of the specific and the immanent. In an empirical sense, this meant that he was led to a global frame precisely *by way of* this preoccupation with the situation of African Americans in the United States and *not despite* it. Yet, in a theoretical sense, Du Bois was *simultaneously* insisting that the African American situation could only be understood as part of a global horizon and that global modernity could only be understood if one recognized the constitutive status for the making of modern world history as a whole of the historical process by which this group was announced in history.¹⁰ The African American situation was a global one for Du Bois. And, *in this way*, at a ground level of historicity, shall we say, it was an exemplary example of a global problematic.¹¹

Let me also annotate the scholastic question that indicates profoundly what is at issue. What if the apparently most local and parochial chapters of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, if situated, for example, in relation to the labor of thought presented in the essay "The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind" (which first appeared in print in October 1900), can be rendered as profoundly marked by a global perspective (Du Bois 1900a, 2015g; Chandler 2021)? Yet what if it is also the case that it therefore becomes clear that the means to the development of such a perspective for Du Bois, that of a certain sense of global modernity, was through and through by way of his concern with the only apparently parochial or relatively local situation of the African American in the United States? I suggest that this double remarking can come into profound relief by such a juxtaposition. Yet it remains that up to now there is no contemporary approach to Du Bois's work that has accomplished such an interpretive positioning. The project at hand is a part of such an undertaking.

It can therefore come as a jolt to a scholar approaching Du Bois's work from this perspective to discover that "The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind," which was first presented in public in December 1899 as the presidential address at the third annual meeting of the American

Negro Academy, has received at most extremely limited citation in the contemporary literature and in an essential sense remains unread in our time. Yet it is one of Du Bois's most important essays: for it is in fact the first place where he actually enunciates his most famous statement—"the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line"—according to an achieved principle of formulation and clarified epistemological frame. This essay is easily as important as "The Conservation of Races," an essay that has become perennial on both sides of the Atlantic over the course of the past three or so intellectual generations. "The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind" is now available in an annotated scholarly edition of his early essays (Du Bois 2015g). Thus, it is only an apparent paradox that Du Bois's essays on the African American situation in the United States from the time just after the completion of his doctoral study in 1895 to the years immediately following the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* in 1903, and especially the chapters of the latter text that in a superficial reading would appear most particularistic, for example, those on the Freedmen's Bureau or on the relations of "Black" and "White" Americans (as one might call them) in the South, acquire their most powerful legibility and theoretical importance, then or now, only when seen as the very path for Du Bois's development of an interpretation of modernity in general, certainly of America as a distinctive scene of its devolution, but also of a global or worldwide historical conjuncture understood from the trajectory of human history as a whole. For, taken as a whole, singular enunciation, even as it is threaded with multiple motivations, claims, and levels of utterance, Du Bois's discourse at the turn of the twentieth century bespeaks a powerful sense of the way that the question of the African American is a question about the possibilities of a global modernity in general. Such an understanding should play a large role in getting rid of an often unstated but widely held sense that the study of African Americans in the United States is a parochial or naively nationalistic discussion and so forth. It can also go far in showing that in fact the problem of the Negro in America was long understood within the African American intellectual community in the United States as a fundamental part of the question of colonialism and its aftermath, that the differentiation of the two discourses, one concerned with "African American" matters and another concerned with "the colonial" in general, in contemporary academic discussions in the Americas and in Europe, but especially in the United States, is an instituted one of recent and superficial lineage. We can underscore that Du Bois, for example, from the

very inception of his itinerary had announced a conception of a thought of the African American in which the premise and implication of this common historicity were the very terms of enunciation.

In the context of contemporary discussions about the aftermath of colonialism, or postcolonial discourse of one kind or another, or debates about globalization, Du Bois's early negotiation of the epistemological paradoxes involved in conceptualizing the modern history of imperialism, slavery, and colonialism in a way that accounts for the worldwide provenance of the problematic and does not simply reproduce a self-congratulatory narrative of the making of the West, along with his prophetic thematization of *the way in which* the question of historical difference within a global horizon of reference at whatever level of generality (for which we have no good names, including those common today—such as ethnicity, race, nationality, culture, or even social class) among groups of people would come to dominate future discussions of politics and authority in general on a planetary scale in the twentieth century and beyond, bears renewed and somewhat paradoxical force. Thus, the current discussion of Du Bois must be rearticulated such that it may become possible to thoroughly think through the implications for contemporary thought of his understanding of the African American situation as part of a worldwide problematic, whether we call it modernity or postmodernity, the persistence of colonialism or postcolonialism, a conflict of civilizations, or simply globalization or *mondialisation*, or something else altogether. Du Bois's thought of the future may indeed remain profound for our time.

FORMULATION

With this sketch in mind, a summary statement of just what an imperative to read Du Bois anew might mean can be formulated as two conjoined subsidiary demands.

On the one hand, it means that *a new sense of the whole* of Du Bois's itinerary itself must be adduced. At the scholastic level alone, this prerequisite is a daunting task for most scholars: its scale leads most to give up, to pull their research up short, or to turn elsewhere. Yet this recalibration of the positions of Du Bois in the history of thought—of intellectual and political practice—by way of a new sense of the whole of his work is a necessary task for critical thought in our time. There is no existing horizon of theoretical context that can become commensurate with the problematization that

is at stake within this itinerary. All of the concepts by which we would comprehend an entire historicity remain necessarily and fundamentally in question in our time. All of the concepts of contextualization by which we once thought that we could appropriate, annex, or append the thought of Du Bois to a given or already accepted theoretical sense of horizon (especially those governed by the epistemic determinations of a formal discipline of knowledge) are at issue in the attempt to think through the problematization of Du Bois. Why? If it can be gathered in a word, it is because there is no absolutely sovereign figure of authority or example of historicity and historical becoming in the thought and practice of Du Bois. This remains despite or beyond his persistent gesture—across his entire itinerary—of affirming a resolute form of leadership, even in the face of the chance or risk of the greatest form of cost. Within this very torsion, precisely with regard to our historical present, his path shows in a fashion that is both paradoxical and yet exemplary what is at stake for the contemporary practitioner of thought who does not presume the absolute singularity or paramount status of what can be called in the self-referential terms of philosophy the transcendental historicity of the figure of modern Europe and the concomitant presumption of the simplicity of a putatively European-derived America. And such reserve also pertains to any other claim to such exemplarity. In a generalization of this negative formulation: there is no singular example of the passage beyond limit. Or, put in other terms, affirmatively, according to his discourse, the possible example of the passage beyond a given historical form was illimitable. All this can be proposed only by way of a critical practice in which the whole of Du Bois's thought and the whole of context are not assumed; rather, it must be developed by a theoretical sense in which both, in relation, appear only as the terms of a question. If produced with a desedimentative practice in which the sense of whole is taken as always itself immanently at stake, Du Bois's itinerary exhibits a profound thinking inhabitation of the historicity in which the situation of a figure such as himself—American, African American, Negro, Caribbean, European, European American, African—was possible. Across the distended organization of temporality in which it is announced and along the multiple paths, passages, and fault lines therein, it gives a legible form to the possibilities of thought in our time. As such, it marks, or makes possible the remarking of, two sides (at least and never only) of the limits of our historicity. It remains a solicitation to think the yet impossible future. If a critical or desedimentative practice would sustain the possibilities for the practice of a certain freedom on the order of existence

that has been yielded by way of its dispositional practice, this work of Du Bois cannot be apprehended simply as a finished or finally accomplished whole. It must be inhabited as a practice—as a practical theoretical projection or elaboration—in which the whole or the general is always at stake in the instance. Never simply given, this whole or possible limit (or delimitation) takes shape only as the form of another problematization. The sense of limit, as resolution or impasse, is only the form of another organization of problem. The whole of Du Bois's itinerary, if there will have ever been such, is its dynamic, never simply given, ensemblic organization of practical theoretical problem for thought. This difficulty that we have just remarked—in the form of the solicitation that it sets afoot, that is to say, this questionable status of the relation of thought and historicity—remains exemplary of a fundamental problem of our time, of our historicities. That problem is that all concepts by which a whole process might be comprehended remains, for us in our time, as it were, at issue.

On the other hand, this imperative also means that such a sense of the whole must be sustainable by way of a consideration of his discourse, of his texts and the practice of this thought, of the infrastructural figure, step, or gesture, that is, according to the organization of the microscopic, so to speak. A *radical sense of the partial* must be developed. In one register of this imperative, the relation of Du Bois's thought to all forms of contextualization must remain in question. This is to say that only in this manner can critical discourse keep open the question of Du Bois's thought. It is in this way that the critical discourse can sustain the relation to his thought as a form of question. In such an engagement, limit is only one face of a more general structure. The other is possibility. The appearance of this relation (or, Du Bois's thought according to this general structure) is as an opacity: that which remains withdrawn within its promulgation. This is certainly the idiomatic code of its historicity. Yet it is more. For in another register of this difficulty of thinking with the partial, it poses the question of the methods and the techniques, or technologies, by which we might engage Du Bois's practice. One could remain open to the question in his discourse by addressing it at the microlevel modes of its organization and the infrastructures operating in his practice. In the discursive sense, these would be the orders of the concept-metaphor and the rhetorical gesture. In the social and political sense, Du Bois's practice always takes the form of position(s), forms of political relation. Du Bois's discourse must be engaged on the level of the *seme*, the *mark*, "*l'énonciation*."¹² The critical discourse as a form of political practice (and it cannot fail to be one, for an apolitical posture is

also a politics) must itself inhabit the *movement* of thought, the *gesture*, the *vocative*. In all cases, a desedimentative practice must maintain an openness to the forms of the here and now of Du Bois's practice as relation. This latter is to say that such critical or desedimentative practice, the work of our own efforts, must distantiate the *instance* of a practice such as that sustained across the itinerary of Du Bois by recognizing the way in which it is not yet or is still at stake in that within it which is still yet to come, as a form of interlocation, as provocation, as elaboration. The forms of its beyond might yet be available thereby—as the form of a kind of reinscription.

The pertinence of the contributions from his itinerary have a distinctive bearing for how we inhabit our future: such bearing for our own historicity is something other than that of serving simply as one example among many others. The paradoxes attendant to the relation of any such partiality to a putative whole (which is most spectacularly proposed in the grand projections of transcendental philosophy) are what grant this distinction. Any gesture that would propose to disrupt a thought that posits a claim of the absolute or the absolutely singular could only sustain such by way of the apparition of its own claim to essence. Du Bois's practice puts such paradoxes at stake at every step, turn, and conjuncture of its itinerary. In this sense, it solicits the whole of modern thought on a global level from the middle of the eighteenth century through the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, and perhaps beyond. It is thus the case that a certain tarrying with his announced partiality can bring into relief how it always also places at stake any thought of a putative whole. Partiality here is simultaneously formal and historical. There, at the site or seam of such apparent parochiality, what is at stake in the *here and now* of a historical present—Du Bois's, in this instance—gives itself to a practice that would propose to sustain the illimitable chance of becoming in the future that is yet to come.

Further, it is thus the case that a certain labor of scholastic and theoretical inhabitation of Du Bois's writings—at the level of the *instance*, the *seme*, the *step*, the *reflex*, the *mark* on the bias—would yield a kind of paleonymic production. And there partiality would grant the future as much by way of its opacity as its lucidity or apparent clairvoyance. The labor of critical thought in this sense (our own practice) would always carry the imperative of judgment. (And here a certain ambivalence can hold a conceptual edge—still on the bias, such as that of a *deba bocho*—the leading cut of which, with a certain attunement in the sharpening, could match that of the finest scalpel. It would be fundamentally distinct from impartiality.) In such practice, we would be required to respect the way in which that which becomes

legible for us in Du Bois's thought is given by way of this partiality: it is the very path for the announcement of the universal or the cosmic, whatever is such; it is otherwise than the opposite of such. Partiality must be understood as capable of proposing another passage beyond limit.

However, in the engagement with Du Bois, it has been all too common that a certain order of critical judgment (which amounts to a form of prejudgment) happens most often, analytically speaking, prior to any sustained resting with the dimension of limit in his practice. Certainly, no matter its depth or its superficiality, a judgment must be rendered operable in the critical work. Yet, if it would be otherwise than dogmatic, the attributes of Du Bois's practice—theme, topic, element, position, method—must be adduced according to their infrastructural organization and microlevel concatenation. But it is in such rendering that the limit of the seemingly perennial preemptive forms of engagement with Du Bois's work show itself, in turn: an apparent nominalization (parts and pieces of Du Bois's discourse, usually presented as a heterogeneous agglomeration of changing positions and declarations) in fact always proceeds from the basis of a fundamental theoretical declaration that was reached prior to any critical inhabitation of Du Bois's discourse. Whether to affirm or to denounce, Du Bois's discourse, especially at the level of its most specific mark, is usually submitted to a kind of blinding lucidity.

Yet what matters most in our own engagement with Du Bois's thought as given is the capacity of our interpretation, or thoughtful inhabitation, of his itinerary to sustain the sense of the opacity and limit of that itinerary even as our practice attempt to recognize the fecundity of his discourse within the terms of its own practical and theoretical vocation and projection. For this apparitional limit is also the encoded forms of a thought of possibility. It is only in the traversal of Du Bois's discourse in its nodal specificity that such an order of recognition can be announced and sustained in a critical and desedimentative work.

The order of attention that can carry both imperatives—that of an immanent sense of whole and that of judgment with regard to any sense of the partial—in thinking with Du Bois is the enigmatic order of the example. Du Bois is everywhere concerned with the character, status, and implication of the example. By way of a cut or break on the bias, a certain declension produced in the form of a judgment as an act, the figure of an example can be adduced. It is partial and ineluctably limited. Yet in it *also* is a certain deposition, disposed perhaps as those concatenations that might have once been called system or the general forms of order. Yet,

too, it is radically otherwise than such. The latter can be organized only by way of a passage (never only one) beyond or in the remains of the always distantiated dispersal that is another name for possibility in general. Form, which is a kind of dispersal as much as apparent deposition, if there is such, may be usefully described as dendritic. On this order of attention, the example within such critical practice, then, is always a certain immanent thought of whole, of becoming, and of possibility. In this sense, then, the example exposes at once both the circumstance and the possible. Thus, it is the guiding problematization of part I of this study.

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Working under the heading of what he formulated as an autobiographical example of a concept, Du Bois himself remarked this order of problematic in 1940, in *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (Du Bois 1940, 53; 1975d, 53). A septuagenarian who would remain strong and present on the scene of thought and activity for nearly a quarter century more, he wrote at that time:

Little indeed did I do, or could I conceivably have done, to make this problem or loose it. Crucified on the vast wheel of time, I flew round and round with the Zeitgeist, waving my pen and lifting faint voices to explain, expound and exhort; to see, foresee and prophesy, to the few who could or would listen. Thus very evidently to me and to others I did little to create my day or greatly change it; but I did exemplify it and thus for all time my life is significant for all lives of men. (Du Bois 1975d, 3–4)

What might such exemplarity mean today? Certainly, it remains in part because of the precocity, depth, and persistence with which Du Bois wrote about the monumental historical events of the past five hundred years that constitute and shape our epoch in a general social and historical sense, events that have given shape to the modern world, especially the conjoined history of colonial slavery in the modern era *and* its aftermath.

But not only this.

It is also because our futural capacity to think the historicity of our existence, in the form of its present and its future, in a theoretical and philosophical sense, our capacity to discover paths where there is no way in the world of the future (“to make a way out of no way,” in that African American phrase from those who have gone before), to gather ourselves in coming upon the question of a horizon of possibility that remains in the

present enigmatically yet to come, is at stake that we we must search out those examples in our intellectual heritage of figures who were willing *to place themselves at stake* at the limit of given forms of historical possibility *in the name of the future here and now*. Failure in this sense is of the order of necessity. It is only an apparent paradox that it is also of the order of freedom. As such, there will always only have been examples. I would propose that the figure of Du Bois, his thought, gives us such an example.

It is thus at the juncture, those crossroads of the past and the future, the known and the unknown, that one will most often find the figure of Du Bois. We can nominalize it somewhat: the thinker who questions (reflects on our ethics, morals, and ideals), the scholar who inquires (seeks understanding of our historical and social conditions), and the writer (who, in exercising his craft, resolutely affirms the freedom of being in the practice of the imagination, always given in the form of a writing, in general, the practice of which is his very habitation in thought). This is also the Du Bois whose entire mode of being is thus a political activity. We might recognize thus, across the flow of time and effort, not only the young, hopeful, and effervescent Du Bois of the *fin de siècle*, or the imperious and indefatigable intellect of the *renaissance years* between the world wars, but, beyond all, the Grand Old Man, gray, mustached, and gaunt with age, yet still beckoning energetically to us to hasten our steps and get on with the responsibility of grappling in thought and critical reflection with the implacable matters of existence in our time. It is this commitment to the work of thinking, to that within thought that opens onto the infinite and bequeaths to us an infinite task, an infinite practice, that renders legible within Du Bois's practice an exemplary inhabitation of our common horizons, even if the problematic that he still shares with us, one which we still share with him, exceeds horizon, as such.

Yet the example means still more.

For the broad order of problem that announces matters African American in general within or as historicity, in general, as given within his own thought, situates Du Bois's own itinerary as simply an example of a more general order of our epoch—of the centuries, not only of the past, but also those centuries yet to come. Therein, too, the exemplary status is not simply of limit—for example, “the problem of the color line”—but also exemplary for us of how we might put at stake existence as possibility, of the terms of a generous future that may remain such, as futures, even within or as supposed necessity. Herein I have followed it under the heading of the historiographical dimension of practice as it shows forth in some of Du

Bois's earliest formulations. The example of Du Bois himself, even when annotated in autobiographical mode, is an articulation of the historiographical example, of all that may for a time be thought under the heading of the African American example in general. Whereas what may appear as the autobiographical takes the apparition of the un fungible, the singular, and perhaps the irreversible terms of the historial, that which is rendered legible within the order of attention that operates as the practice of the historiographical may be shown also as a name for possibility. The example on this order of attention brings into relief possible terms of address to the futures of historicity. This sense of radical hope, perhaps an "unhopeful hope," is also given within this practice of the example in the thought of Du Bois. Given across the threshold of one turn of the century, it remains that it is still becoming such for those centuries—both future and future past, thereby—yet to come. It is under this heading, of possible delimitations, on the track of two paths of the example, that I have sought herein to offer the question of the delimitations, which may yet be configured for us, of the practice of W. E. B. Du Bois, as a problem for thought, within our time.

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NOTES

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A NOTATION

- 1 In the margin of the sheet issue of these stamps, this hierarchy is replicated, with Du Bois described first as a “Civil Rights advocate” and a “founder of the NAACP” and only then, after the fact so to speak, as a “noted writer, historian, scholar, educator, and sociologist.”
- 2 The scale of the curatorial work carried out by the late Dr. Herbert Aptheker over the course of some forty years, but especially after 1961, can be glimpsed from his annotated bibliography of Du Bois’s writings (Aptheker 1973a), in which one should especially note his brief introduction, as well as the volume collecting his introductions to Du Bois’s major books (Aptheker 1989a), which still seems to me to provide the best introduction to the sense of Du Bois’s writing as an intellectual practice whose very form is a political work. Likewise, I have also annotated the work of Dr. Aptheker above in the Note on Citations for this study.
- 3 Hortense Spillers, more than two and a half decades ago, in a superb and incisive intervention that remains yet to be truly thought and fully engaged, “*The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Post-Date*” (an essay of 1994), an essay which took the passing of the quarter-century mark after the publication of Harold Cruse’s classic statement (see Cruse 1967) as its own occasion, called for an assumption of general theoretical work as the task of the African American intellectual. The recollection now stands as the closing chapter of Spillers’s pivotal collection of essays *Black, White, and in Color: Essays in American Literature and Culture* (Spillers 2003b, 2003a). If this is so, then perhaps it is not too much today to call for a renewed engagement with earlier projects and texts in the African Americanist domain or field that took their form prior to full-scale institutionalization of such practices in the 1960s and 1970s. The idea here, then, is that such legacies must be reengaged as or at the level of the philosophical in the general sense.
- 4 It should be remarked that the status of forms of proscription that we conceptualize today in relation to supposed difference of sex and usually construe in relation to a concept of gender as a titular heading should be understood to show forth another unique relation to this epistemic horizon. What is common to both is that in the domain of philosophy as science, they each announce a radical form of ontological problematic, even if ontology does not itself remain radical for thought. And yet it should almost go without saying that neither uniqueness precludes its articulation in the same existential circumstance or on the same epistemic plane as the other. Their differential uniqueness has to do with the historical form of their emergence as a problematization

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of existence in the order of thought; it does not have to do with any supposed ontological status nor with supposed absolute epistemic priority. Yet if one were to insist on posing such a question, we indeed should recognize the priority of formulation as question in general what has been so poorly named under the idea of difference of sex (and all of the concomitant articulations that cluster according to its *historial* problematization) for a *philosophical* organization of the general question of historical difference.

- 5 It was in part through my ongoing dialogue with Professor Koji Takenaka, both during our yearlong seminar at Tohoku University on Du Bois's idea of the color line and modernity and then, in particular, by way of the provocation of his questions that followed my presentation at the international conference, "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Question of Another World," held at Tohoku University (Sendai, Japan), June 15–17, 2006, that I have come to realize just how crucial it is to clarify this distinction in Du Bois's thought. I thank him for his exemplary collegiality and form of interlocation. It should almost go without saying that Du Bois did not naively inhabit the term *race*; nor did he uncritically maintain it as a nomination for that aspect of existence that he sought to adduce under the heading of ideals and to affirm as an immanent movement beyond the given.
- 6 Du Bois wrote in "The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind," on the eve of the year 1900, that "if the third millennium of Jesus Christ dawns as we devoutly believe it will upon a brown and yellow world out of whose advancing civilization the color line has faded as mists before the sun," then "its consummation" as a realization of opportunity would depend on the actions of his auditors, that is, the assembled members of the American Negro Academy (Du Bois 1900a, 2015g). The quotation is from paragraph 11.
- 7 This line of my own research on Du Bois was given renewed stimulation in the spring of 1999 by way of the kind invitation (via personal correspondence) of the late Theodore Cross, then publisher of *Black Issues in Higher Education*, to consider commenting on Du Bois's most famous phrase "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," on the occasion of the turn to the twenty-first century. It served as a provocation for a still ongoing reflection. While I had certainly formulated the question of the twentieth century as but a "phase" of a larger and global problematic as early as 1991, it seemed to me that a sound-bite restatement of this thought was not so useful or appropriate (Chandler 1996, 265–66n2). And such was all that I thought that I could manage at the time. I was chagrined to realize that the deep scholastic work on this fundamental motif had not yet been properly attempted by anyone, including me. Only now, a few years on, in the wake of my efforts at a certain necessary scholastic labor, do I feel that I can begin to contribute to an answer to Mr. Cross's solicitation. In part II of this study, I pursue such an account.
- 8 And, of course, others have proposed the thought, based on Du Bois's own autobiographical statements, that such a global perspective was born from his experience in Europe as a student from 1892 to 1894. However, even this formulation is too simple. For Du Bois's apprehension of his experience in Europe was grounded in his ongoing

and complicated critical engagement with the situation of the African American in the United States. I briefly explore one aspect of this question in the opening stages of part I. The Pan-African Conference of 1900 was organized by Henry Sylvester Williams, a Trinidadian-born London-based barrister and founding member and leader of the “African Association of London,” which should perhaps be considered as inspired in part by the American Negro Academy in the United States. Indeed, Williams was in correspondence with African American leaders in the United States in formulating his association. As I note in part II of this study, Alexander Crummell met with Williams during the elder clergyman’s visit to London in the summer and autumn of 1897 (Moss 1981, 53–54). See also Clarence Contee’s early work on the history of the 1900 Pan-African Conference in London (Contee 1969a, 1969b, 1973).

- 9 Some of the writing of Paul Gilroy provides generalizable examples of both points. See in particular his discussion of the famous line as it appears in the second chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, the chapter on the Freedmen’s Bureau, in his widely read text from the early 1990s (Gilroy 1993, 127).
- 10 In both senses Du Bois can be understood retrospectively as the trailblazer. However, in our time, it is especially apposite to remark the latter. His work, in its persistence and scope, along with what I understand as a deep grasp of the philosophical sense, or more properly the persisting metaphysical order, of the problem of historicity that is often without recognition in the later literature, remains a high benchmark. The key texts include his major historical studies, from the doctoral dissertation from 1896, to his global account of the Negro from 1915, to his massive study of the meaning of Reconstruction in the United States from 1935, to his prescient and profound critique in 1945 of the gathering horizon according to which a post–World War II global order was being instituted as well as his biographical and fictional narratives, for example, *John Brown* (1909), *Dark Princess* (1928), and *The Black Flame: A Trilogy* (1957–61) (Du Bois 1896, 1973h, 1909, 1973d, 1915b, 1975e, 1928, 1974a, 1935, 1976d, 1945, 1975b, 1947, 1976e, 1957, 1976b, 1959, 1976a, 1961, 1976c). In this sense, Du Bois’s work can still be understood not only as a resource, whether affirmed or neglected, but as an interrogation in an epistemological sense of the work of recent scholars who have also proposed the decisive status of the processes of Atlantic slavery in a global history of modernity (Hall 1980; Rodney 1982; Robinson 2000b [1983]; Blackburn 1988, 1997a; Holt 1992). Such point holds a fortiori for those scholars who address this question of slavery at the level of historicity itself in a somewhat indirect manner (Hardt and Negri 2000). And his definitive work preceded, and in part informed, the two classic interventions from the 1930s and 1940s concerning the role of slavery in the making of both the horizon for democratic revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in the making of capitalism generally as a historical form: C. L. R. James’s *The Black Jacobins*, first published in 1938, and Eric Williams’s *Capitalism and Slavery*, first issued in 1944 (see James 1938; Williams 1944). This precedence remains pertinent despite or beyond the disputation of the well-known open secret of James’s claim that the Williams thesis was derived from his guidance of the author (James

1972). The reinauguration of this problematic that has ensued across the past three decades, stemming in part from debates in the revisionist historiography of slavery in the U.S. context, especially a renewed concern with the differential forms of the immediate aftermath of the legal abolition of slavery throughout the Americas and the Caribbean, on the one hand, and the interwoven debates on the feasibility of slavery as an economic institution in tandem with a discussion of the role of accumulation in the rise of slavery as it is related to capital formation in the modern era and thus, in part, to the modern world economic system, on the other, and then, too, its relation to a whole set of debates within the context of scholarship in economic history in Britain, can now be understood in summation, at least in an initial sense (Solow and Engerman 1987; Darity 1988; Holt 1990; Solow 1991; Blackburn 1997b; Klein 1999).

- 11 The idea of *example* here is anything but the thought of a pure idea. It should go without saying then that *exemplarity*, then, may issue from multiple sites and situations, each with their revelatory and limiting capacities for thought, none of which are absolutely given. It is the responsibility of critical discourse to accept the task of thinking such a dynamic concept of limit as possibility.
- 12 The term *l'enonciation* references Michel Foucault's discussion in the second chapter, "The Enunciative Function," of part 3, "The Statement and the Archive," of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, which I cite here only in the English translation (Foucault 1972, 77–131, esp. 88–105; but see also Foucault 1969, 116–38). Although I wish to emphasize here that I seek to call attention to the general sense of the political character, nonneutral, of the "enunciative function," in some contrast to Foucault's disposition in his text (which I cited here), I have also elsewhere annotated the distinction that I intend. For to "enunciate" at all is to already do so on the bias; it is a political action, remarking distributions and arrangements of force, and thus forms and relations of empowerment; practices that adduce an example are always the practice of power. Elsewhere it is the poetic practice of Phillis Wheatley—both then, in the eighteenth century, and now, in the twenty-first—that I have cited as a theoretical example (Chandler 2014c, 190n9).

PART I. "BEYOND THIS NARROW NOW"

- 1 This opening paragraph also stands at the head of *Toward an African Future—Of the Limit of World* (Chandler 2021). For that essay is of the same locution and premise as the writing offered in this study; it is another kind of elaboration of what is offered here.
- 2 It was my hearing of Cecil Taylor and Elvin Jones in a duo performance of Taylor's compositions with drums, piano, voice, and dance at the Blue Note in New York City on August 29 and 30, 1999, that set in motion the thought offered in part I of this study. Later, Fred Moten, by example, helped to bring new language here: if my reading is apposite, we can place in parallax relation with what has been said so far his formulation of what is at stake: "the differentially repeating plane that intersects and animates the comparativist sphere" (Moten 2008, 1746).