ON THE READING OF RIDDLES

Rethinking Du Boisian "Double Consciousness"

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ALMOST A century ago W.E.B. Du Bois posited the claim that African
Americans had internalized a set of powerful, mutually incompatible ideals.
The conundrum resulting from this internalization, he believed, threatened to
sabotage the struggle for full democratic rights and economic equality with-
in the United States. "One ever feels his twoness," wrote Du Bois, "—an
American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconcilable strivings..."
(Du Bois [1969]: 45).This and other equally dramatic assertions were set forth
in a pair of essays publicly presented within months of each other in 1897:
"The Strivings of the Negro People" (Du Bois [1897]: 194-8),[1] destined to
become the initial and most memorable chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*
some six years later, and "The Conservation of Races," second in a series of
occasional papers issued by the newly formed American Negro Academy (Du
Bois [1970a]: 250–62). Du Bois' lyrical plaint of "two souls dwelling in one"

has been endlessly echoed over the years by sympathetic commentators, but in ret-rospect it seems that Du Bois himself was never altogether forthcoming as to what, exactly, those conjoined, inhospitable ideals were. In both *The Souls of Black Folk* and "Conservation of Races" he spoke of "Negro strivings" and "Negro ideals" which, even in his most analytically grounded passages, he failed to define. Typically such notions were embedded within an ambiguous mass of dualistic references—"twoness," "second sight," "double consciousness," "double aims," and the like—which, in a confused brew of allegory and concept often seemed to point to the same meaning.[2]

In contrast to a commonly accepted notion that in these works Du Bois set forth a broadly defined issue of "cultural conflict" (in the sense that African Americans, considered to be immersed in their own culture as well as that of the dominant North American population, were being forced to choose between the two), I argue instead that it was a question of *two* vaguely articulated but distinct sets of conflicted ideals which emerged from these 1897 essays, each erected upon a different foundation of the German idealist philosophical tradition. The first, invoking the phenomenology of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and subsequent-ly incorporated into *The Souls of Black Folk*, described attempts to satisfy (narrow-ly defined) American and Negro existential ideals at the same time, with a negat-ed black self-consciousness—or "double consciousness," as Du Bois would have it—resulting from the failure to do so. In "Conservation of the Races," on the other hand, a more conventionally *implied* but unstated "double consciousness" on the part of blacks was linked to a supposed clash between (essentially undefined) Negro ideals and corresponding (but similarly undefined) American ones. The sub-stantive, underlying premise, however, was that African Americans were torn by a desire to become full citizens within U.S. society, yet retain their distinctiveness as a group. In this instance the framework within and against which Du Bois strug-gled derived from Johann Gottfried Herder's philosophy of history, having to do with the supposed impossibility of two or more national ideals to coexist beneath the sway of a single governing apparatus. In both instances, the clash of incompat-ibilities, according to Du Bois, took the form of a tortuous conundrum experi-enced by blacks. This dilemma, in the first formulation at least, was taken as a *gen-uine* one, to be resolved through long-term education; but the second manifesta-tion Du Bois considered to be merely *imaginary*, one whose solution was to be found in rethinking the entire issue from a fresh perspective.

Both problematics invoked issues of conflicting social identity: "being a Negro and an American at the same time." In *The Souls of Black Folk* opposing ideals were ascribed to blacks in general, but the examples of discord drew primarily upon the experiences of the educated black middle class. The dilemma expressed in "Conservation," however, acquired a vaguer attribution: the "Negro who has given earnest thought to the situation of his people in America..." (Presumably this, too, was a reference to the "thinking Negro" of the educated black petite bourgeoisie.)

While both of Du Bois' notions tended to evoke a vague sense of "culture" in one way or another, in neither case was the agony which he depicted the result of a broad-based "cultural conflict" of the sort referred to above. Sheathed in the language of large-scale cultural difference, the first antagonism actually sprang from a narrow range of ideals. But the second one also manifested itself within an unstated context: the political implications posed by the existence of autonomous black social and cultural institutions. In either case, rather than *celebrating* an authentic "dual consciousness" as a tool for achieving enriched cultural or political syntheses, or as a platform for generating multiple levels of understanding—in other words, as a potential solution in whole or in part—Du Bois treated the question of "twoness" chiefly as a (real or imaginary) problem, even as he affirmed the desirability of preserving certain of its (unspecified) forms.[3] Elsewhere (Allen 1990–2) I have elaborated in some detail upon how the subject of "twoness" was handled in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Here, for the most part, however, our concern will involve a close reading of "Conservation of the Races" framed against the backdrop of Du Bois' companion work.

SAVING SOULS: "DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS" AS NEGATION

In *The Souls of Black Folk* "double consciousness" was defined as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Dubois [1969]: 45). This is not how the term was generally understood by prominent 19th-century Western writers, however, even as they imparted their own specific meanings to it. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, employed "double consciousness" in a multitude of ways: to signify a felt tensions between the individual and society as well as between the oppositional pulls of fate and liberty (or necessity and freedom), and in a more elevated sense, to signify the division between the mortal and immortal selves of the individual. More descriptively, he also spoke of the "double consciousness" of dreams (Emerson [1966]: 161), as well as instances when "the man and the poet show like a double consciousness" (Emerson [1972]: 155).[4]

In the case of the individual versus society, Emerson believed that society's very functioning required the squandering of individual creativity, the subordination of one's activities to dreary routinization; on the other side, the true flowering of individual creativity necessitated one's withdrawal from societal structures—a course which, if followed by all of its members, would soon lead to a collapse. Thus condemned, spirit forever found itself at odds with understanding. "The worst feature of this double consciousness," wrote Emerson,

> is that the two lives, of the understanding and the soul, which we lead, show very little relation to each other; never meet and measure each other: one prevails now, all buzz and din; and the other prevails then, all infinite and par-

adise; and, with the progress of life, the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves. (Emerson [1903]: 353–4)

As for the contradiction between freedom and necessity, the path to salvation was not the evasion of "double consciousness," but rather its embrace: "A man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and public nature…" (Emerson [1904]: 47). And, finally, in one of his many sermons Emerson also pointed out "the distinction of the outer and inner self" as yet another manifestation of self-reflective doubling: "that is, there are two selves, one which does or approves that which the other does not and approves not; or within this erring passionate mortal self, sits a supreme calm immortal mind, whose powers I do not know, but it is stronger than I am…" (Emerson [1938]: 200).

For his part, Arnold Rampersad notes that in 1893 the psychologist Oswald Kupe wrote of "the phenomenon of double consciousness of the divided self…characterized by the existence of a more or less complete separation of two aggregates of conscious process…oftentimes of entirely opposite character" (Rampersad: 74). Without specifically alluding to the term, other 19th-century Western thinkers expanded upon the concept as well. For example, William James (as Rampersad also observed) spoke of the existence of "*simultaneously* existing consciousness," a state James considered to be beyond the pale of the normal "brain-condition"—a malady (James: 399). And, finally, how was it possible to ignore the immortal lament of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Faust that "Two souls, alas! reside within my breast, and each is eager for a separation"?

One readily perceives that Du Bois' own use of the term, "double consciousness," could not easily avoid the battery of connotations commonly associated with it, notwithstanding the fact that his specific definition was of an altogether different nature. For what Du Bois strictly meant by the phrase was the *absence* of true self-consciousness on the part of black Americans, the inability to recognize one's black self other than through the mediated veil of the unacknowledging white gaze. In this instance, Du Bois' frame of reference can be traced ultimately to Hegel's phenomenology, where true self-consciousness—supposedly lacking in the Negro—was dependent upon the mutual recognition of human beings by one another (see Adell). This *negation* of self-consciousness Du Bois ascribed to the twinned collapse of specified "double ideals ," of which he offered four examples: the "double-aimed struggle of the black artisan" to "escape white contempt" on the one hand, and on the other "to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde"; secondly, the dilemma of the "Negro minister or doctor…tempted toward quackery and demagogy" on the one side, and on the other (due to having internalized the criticism of whites) by "ideals that made him ashamed of his lowly tasks"; thirdly, the dilemma of the "would-be black *savant*…confronted by the paradox" that although whites possessed the knowledge needed by his people, the knowledge capable of teaching whites (presumably regarding the practice of

human values) was an unknown quantity to him; and finally the black artist who, altogether incapable of expressing a sense of beauty other than the one revealed through the "soul-beauty" of his own race, a race which his larger potential audience despised (Du Bois [1969]: 46–7).

In addition to the dubiousness of attributing such values to African Americans in general, Du Bois' "warring ideals" were inconsistently framed. While all four examples spoke either to the necessity or difficulty of coming to terms with "white ideals" in order to leverage approving recognition from the white community, the nature of the counter-ideals is not always clear. Several of the diametric couples, for example, offered little more than the *appearance* of the polar oppositions which Du Bois believed he was depicted.[5] It seems to me that only two pairs of the corresponding couples depicted above can be deemed "authentic." The first consists of obligation and desire—"the *felt obligation* of 'upper-class' blacks to serve the needs of their corresponding 'lowest classes'; and a *desire for positive recognition* from whites regarding the value of this sacrifice" (Allen [1992]: 268)—the best portrayal of which can be found in the dilemma of Du Bois' black artisan. A second dialectic revolved around the question of aesthetic values: the impossibility of devising cultural criteria universally applicable—or palatable—to both white and black America. Seeking the largest audience possible, Du Bois' African-American artist was placed in the dilemma of projecting "the soul-beauty of a race" which most of that audience despised, yet "he could not articulate the message of another people" (Du Bois [1969]: 47). The stress surrounding the lack of respect accorded African-American accomplishments led ultimately to an internalizing on the part of blacks of stereotypical Negroid images commonly held by whites. The result, in Du Bois' estimation, was an eclipse of black self-consciousness. The solution he proposed was education: for the black common folk, in order to lift them out of their state of general ignorance; and for white folk generally, that they might come to a fuller realization of African-American humanity.

As noted earlier, a problem with both Du Boisian "double ideals" and "double consciousness" was that they were too narrowly defined. In the case of the first, a dilemma purportedly faced by the "Talented Tenth"—but probably more attributable to Du Bois himself—was transformed into "universal" paradigm of African-American double aims, with negated self-consciousness the infelicitous outcome. However, the refusal on the part of whites to recognize the value of self-sacrifice on the part of educated blacks belonged to a much larger tendency of white Americans to deny black humanity *tout court*.[6] This refusal posed difficulties for most African Americans not just in everyday interpersonal relations with whites, but also in the former's being subjected to social structures of domination and inequity for which the myth of black sub-humanity served as legitimation. In this larger context, hesitancy and self-doubt were problems which tended to afflict all black folk to one degree or another, of whatever class derivation.

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Nonetheless, another way out of the purported dilemma was already prefigured by Du Bois' mentor, William James. One possesses, according to James, "as many social selves as there are individuals" to grant one the favor of recognition, and it is one's image in the eyes of one's own "set" which "exalts or condemns" as she or he "conforms or not to certain requirements that may not be made of one in another walk of life" (James: 294–5). Stated otherwise (and quite apart from the material implications attending the issue), it was not necessary to the healthy psychological edification of the black individual that African-American self-recognition be tied absolutely to recognition by whites; for there was also always the *mutual recognition* which black folk bestowed upon one another, an acknowledgement which, under prevailing conditions, served as a bulwark against the possibility of absolute black self-deprecation. Hence the dilemma which Du Bois considered to be authentic, "universal," and resolvable primarily through longterm education is shown to be narrowly based and subject to multiple solutions.

CONSERVING RACES: IMPLIED "DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS"

In contrast to Du Bois' equating of "double consciousness" as negated self-consciousness in *Souls of Black Folk*, in "Conservation of Races" he portrays, *but without identifying as such*, a notion more in keeping with that of his intellectual contemporaries—an erupting of fractious interplay between competing social identities within a given individual:

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> Here, then, is the dilemma, and it is a puzzling one, I admit. No Negro who has given earnest thought to the situation of his people in American has failed, at some time in life, to find himself at these cross-roads; has failed to ask himself at some time: What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? If I strive as a Negro, am I not perpetuating that very cleft that threatens and separates Black and White American? Is not my only possible practical aim the subduction of all that is Negro in me to the American? Does my black mood place upon me any more obligation to assert my nationality than German, or Irish, or Italian blood would? (Du Bois [1970a]: 256–7).

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In this, the first of Du Bois' 1897 formulations made public, the source of African-American emotional (and consequent political) turmoil was attributed to a paralyzing hesitancy surrounding the riddle: "Am I an American or am I a Negro?"—an apparent conflict of social identity. "If I strive as a Negro," asked Du Bois, "am I not perpetuating that very cleft that threatens and separates Black and White America?" Unfortunately, however, Du Bois was never sufficiently explicit regarding what it actually meant to "strive as Negro." As in the case of his semiarticulated "ideals" in *The Souls of Black Folk,* his failure to do so has led numerous readers to erroneously equate his unarticulated, national-racial ones in

"Conservation of the Races" with notions of "cultural conflict." But the most visible, late 19th-century manifestation of "striving as a Negro" could only have been found in the existence and continued growth of black voluntary organizations—including the American Negro Academy before which Du Bois first presented his "Conservation of the Races" paper in March 1897. It was the seemingly contradictory attempt to preserve black institutions (and, by extension, African-American nationality) while at the same time pressing for full inclusion as American citizens that lies at the heart of the "incessant self-questioning" and "hesitation" which Du Bois described in "Conservation of Races."

Revealing an altogether different context than that expressed in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois opened his "Conservation" argument with the assertion that "if the Negro is ever to be a factor in the world's history," this goal must be accomplished by black hands, black heads, black hearts. From this it follows that the destiny of blacks "is *not* absorption by the white Americans[,]...is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals" (Du Bois [1970a]: 256).[7] In order to accomplish these ends, Du Bois averred,

> we need race organizations: Negro colleges, Negro newspapers, Negro business organizations, a Negro school of literature and art, and an intellectual clearing house, for all these products of the Negro mind, which we may call a Negro Academy. Not only is all this necessary for positive advance, it is absolutely imperative for negative defense (Du Bois [1970a]: 258).

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And here began the complications. For a number of Du Bois' colleagues, apparently, the national-identity implications of autonomous, African-American institutions invoked an inordinate sense of dread—a fear, first of all, that the strengthening or expansion of any such bodies would *imply* something other than a demand for full citizenship rights for blacks. Even worse, this autonomy might provide yet another rationale, if one were actually needed, for an additional stripping away of these rights. Or worse still, that such behaviors might afford just one more excuse for the physical expulsion of African Americans from the North American continent, or their annihilation if they remained.

This, of course, was neither the first nor last time that such an issue would arise in the lives of black Americans—and that of Dr. Du Bois as well. During the 1830s, for example, a handful of Northern free blacks led the charge against the continuance of all-black, or what they termed "complexional," organizations in order to undercut the efforts of white colonizationists who denied African-American citizenship claims. Taken to logically rigid extremes, this "commonsense" schema posed antithetical, mutually-exclusive possibilities for Afro-Americans: *either* the assimilation of blacks into the so-called mainstream of American life with full citizenship rights and a consequent dismantling of all-black organizations; *or* an

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African-American separation from U.S. society, that is to say, a realization of black political self-determination, with an implied merging of autonomous black institutions with an equally autonomous African-American national/civil identity.

But what were these institutions, after all, and how could organizations which had contributed so much to the material and spiritual well-being of the black community now be considered a threat to its existence? Towering above them all, of course, was the black Christian church, to which Du Bois later referred in *The Souls of Black Folk* as bearing the character of a *government* (Du Bois [1969]: 215). Such independent organizations—which also included sickness and burial societies, distinctly middle-class women's clubs operating under the aegis of the National Association of Colored Women, lodges run by Prince Hall Freemasons, Elks, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, and other semiclandestine male associations (along with their respective female auxiliaries such as, for example, the Order of the Eastern Star), fledgling business groups, and, shortly to come, Greek-letter college sororities and fraternities—were largely the result, at least at the onset, of black exclusion from similar institutions among the dominant population. Moreover, the exclusion of salutary news stories about blacks in the dominant press had led to the formation of hundreds of black-owned, black-oriented newspapers. (Negro colleges constituted a special case: nominally run by blacks, they remained under the financial suzerainty of the Rockefeller and Peabody funds, for the most part.) Because many such groups fulfilled vital social and economic needs within black communities, it is likely that those who depended upon their services would have expressed the least ambivalence towards their existence. What should be remembered as well is that the existence of black institutions had *not* posed any particular dilemma for hard-shelled assimilationists such as Frederick Douglass, who though willing to support them as a temporary expedient, generally denied the need for their existence. Nor was it a conundrum experienced by the more economically nationalist-oriented such as Booker T. Washington, who, in the belief that the rights of citizenship for blacks would eventually flow from their economic indispensability, elaborated a long-term strategy which, in part, was predicated on the existence and support of independent, black economic institutions. However, the situation did create an untenable paradox for a handful of educated African Americans committed to achieving full American civil identity, but who also, by the century's end, had come to a double revelation: that for reasons of sheer survival the existence of autonomous, mass-based black institutions would likely prove of *long-term* necessity; and that there was actually something in black culture worth preserving—an admission that bucked against the assimilationist proclivities of most college-bred blacks of the era.

HERDERIAN CONCEPTS OF NATIONALISM AND CULTURE

Du Bois, of course, owed a number of his earliest formulations to German thinkers of his own as well as preceding epochs: in the realm of historical economics, older

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contemporaries such as Adolph Wagner and Gustav von Schmoller, with both of whom he studied at the University of Berlin; in philosophy, it was both Hegel and Herder who exerted their respective influences, Hegel with regard to the phenomenology of consciousness and the philosophy of history, and Herder with respect to cultural critique intertwined with the philosophy of history.[8] While Du Bois had many a source to draw upon in his elaboration of "twoness," a number of his basic concepts of culture—of national ideals, of cultural "gift," of cultural relativity, and of folk culture—most certainly were derived either directly or indirectly from Herder. In the case of the latter, it was likely that black intellectuals such as Edward Blyden and Alexander Crummell played an influential middle role (see Lynch: 60-1; Moses: 108).

Herder, Jefferson, and the Multi-National State

The sense of ominous, impending conflict underlying "Conservation of the Races" actually flowed from some of the earliest ideals of European nationalism where nationality was considered a category of Nature and the assembling of multiple nationalities beneath the folds of a single state apparatus deemed "unnatural" and subject to disastrous consequences. The sentiment was first expressed by Herder, one of the most influential proponents of romantic nationalism, in the late 18th-century (Herder [1969]: 324). Although Herder emphasized nationality and even used the term *race* in his thought, Herder was firmly opposed to the notion that innate, racial differences existed within humanity. For him, national distinctions were purely a matter of culture, and especially of language (Herder [1969]: 284). Elsewhere Herder darkly affirmed that "Where nature has separated nationalities by language, customs and character one must not attempt to change them into one unit by artifact and chemical operations" (in Ergang: 97). Ominous results awaited those who defied the natural order of things: "forced unions"—empires comprised of diverse peoples thrown together as the result of the actions of imperialist rulers—were but "lifeless monstrosities" formed of clay, "and, like all clay, they will dissolve or crumble to pieces" (Herder [1969]: 324).

Such thoughts carried over into the dominant ideals of the newly formed United States. For whites, the African-American presence commanded a two-fold fear of unnatural consequences. First of all, the acceptance of citizenship for blacks—implying a necessary *somatic* broadening of the definition of American national character—was unthinkable; Nature might tolerate the black presence only if Africa's descendants were held to the most ruthless forms of suppression. On the other hand, the prospect of miscegenation—with its attendant implications regarding the eventual disappearance of white (and, consequently, black) "biological identity" as such—posed equally horrendous a prospect. The consequence: European Americans and African Americans might inhabit the same country only under two possible conditions. Either one "race" would brutally dominate the other (which, though "tolerable" when blacks were the victims, nonetheless went

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against the grain of Enlightenment ideals of individual freedom), or an unchecked and barbarous state of miscegenation would occur (which ran contrary to dominant American moral and aesthetic ideals). Thus, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* Thomas Jefferson warned of deep perils in freeing the slaves without providing for their expulsion from the North American continent:

> Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature had made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race. (Jefferson: 186)

To these political objections, wrote Jefferson, "may be added others, which are physical and moral." These latter factors had not only to do with the color and hair texture of blacks which, in his estimation, debased prevailing standards of beauty. There were suppositions as well that Africa's descendants required less sleep than whites, experienced only transient griefs, were more sensual than reflective, inferior in reason and imagination, that males of the race possessed greater sexual drive, and that blacks in general were incapable of creating poetry—Phillis Wheatley's heroic efforts notwithstanding.

> Among the Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture. (Jefferson: 193)

It was logic such as Jefferson's, of course, which tied certain strains of abolitionism to plans for the colonization of American blacks outside North America in the era prior to 1865. Given this broader contextual overlay, the choice for many whites had become one of either the complete subjugation of blacks or their expulsion from the North American continent; for blacks the historical choice was often seen as existing between cultural and/or biological assimilation, on the one side, emigration on the other. This compelling *either/or* logic was so pervasive, having been repeated on faith for so long, that it continued to shape the outlook of black spokespersons well into the late 19th century (see, e.g., Turner [1971]: 74).

With abject failure of attempts at colonization or emigration arrived, in the aftermath of Reconstruction, the most judicious compromise to which American democracy was capable of rising: the imposition of a racially determined, spatial segregation upon white and black communities.[9] But with unabated talk of black repatriation in Congress and other quarters from the late 19th through the early 20th centuries, the threat of African-American expulsion from the U.S. appeared genuine enough. Du Bois for his part, however, had calculated by 1897 that "any

general migration of American Negroes to Africa is neither possible nor desirable; it is not possible, for the Negroes as a body do not wish to go, and the forcible expulsion of a nation of eight million would be simply impossible without civil war and an expenditure of not less than two and one-half billions of francs" (Du Bois [1985]: 47–48).[10] By the late 1930s, however, he had reevaluated his position: "We may be expelled from the United States as the Jew is being expelled from Germany" (Du Bois [1968]: 306; see also Du Bois [1985]: 155).

Borrowing a number of concepts traceable to Herder, Du Bois sought to demonstrate that an apparent conundrum—the supposed impossibility of white and black citizens peacefully pursuing their separate but intertwined racial ideals—was a false one. With an adjustment of the economic and political conditions of African Americans there was no reason why the pursuit of differing aims might not be successfully explored. But it was, after all, Herder's ideas on nationality which had given shape to the dilemma from which Du Bois was now attempting to extricate himself; and through the selective embrace and rejection of a number of Herder's precepts, Du Bois would offer a unique resolution. Du Bois had embraced the notion of cultural "gift"—an idea derived from Herder's writings on folk culture—as the foundation of "national character"; the latter theme itself was translated within the Du Boisian lexicon as "racial ideals." But he had also accomplished his aims by substituting racial formulations for Herder's own nationality paradigm—a solution which Herder, of course, would have rejected out of hand.

To be an "American" (in the way that inhabitants of the southern half of the North American continent have onesidedly appropriated the term all to themselves) signifies a double meaning: a *national identity* born of the imprint of socialization within "American" society; and a *civil identity*—natural citizen or denizen—based upon a specific relation to the "American" state. Rephrasing Herder's prohibition against the assignment of more than one nationality to a given state in these latter terms, one might say that for American civil identity as a whole there could exist but a single American nationality, a single national identity. Du Bois, however, parted company with this Herderian formulation on at least three counts: first, that American civil identity itself might properly accommodate the ideals of more than one (national) group; second, that the concept of nationality was to be reconfigured as that of *race*; and third, whereas both Herderian *national character* and Du Boisian *racial ideals* pointed towards the overall "way of life" of a people, Du Bois himself placed far more emphasis on the selective ideals of aesthetic, or "high" culture, as well as on the guiding role of an educated elite in their development.

Folk Culture Versus Artistic Culture

As Gene Bluestein has observed, Western tradition has carried within itself a fundamental opposition "between folk and formal art, the first conceived to be 'childlike,' primitive, and unaware of its techniques; the second defined as mature, civilized, and conscious of this craftsmanship" (Bluestein: intro). Whereas folk art was

the domain of the peasantry, formal art remained that of the talented, select few of the upper classes. It was Herder, of course, who discovered a way to reconcile these antithetical concepts: folk culture, or the "way of life" of the agrarian common people, was reconceived as the *foundation* of national character, elements of which an intellectual elite might develop further through more formal artistic expression. Still, the distinction between folk and formal culture, between collective crafts-manship and individual artistry, were never fully obliterated. "God acts upon Earth only by means of superior, chosen men" wrote Herder, a notion that coincided with Du Bois' own concept of a "Talented Tenth" for blacks (Herder [1966]: 230). Herder, on the other hand, was quick to maintain that art was a *national* treasure, not the private inheritance of a handful of individuals (Ergang: 209). And Du Bois, too, when dwelling upon the Negro spirituals, marvelled at the intrinsic beauty of a music which had required neither composers, arrangers, nor performers of pro-fessional stature for its execution. But although Du Bois had engaged the overall contours of Herder's bridging concept, he himself opted for a preeminence in the role assigned to the "Talented Tenth" of African Americans in the production of salutary "racial values," even as he acknowledged that the fluorescence of Afro-American folk culture owed nothing to black elites. For Herder "national charac-ter" was synonymous with *Lebensweise,* or "way of life" of a people. However, at the turn of the 19th century the employment of the English version of the concept was still in its infancy, and Du Bois, although surely aware of its use by 18th and 19th-century German writers, managed to avoid it as well—perhaps out of a con-cern for its Herderian links to "national identity," as well as a disdain for African-American popular culture other than that expressed, for the most part, in Negro spirituals and folktales.[11]

National Character Versus Racial Character

Some of the most prominent writers of the Enlightenment subscribed to the uni-versality of ancient Greek and Roman as well as contemporary French ideals (Ergang: 83). For Herder and other Romantics, however, universality resided in the contention that every nationality possessed its own unique national culture and language which contributed to world civilization (Ergang: 88). The underpinnings of national culture, moreover, were seen to be constituted by the "folk"—that is, the numerically predominant *peasantry* of a given country. "For every nation is one people," insisted Herder, "having its own national form, as well as its own language: the climate, it is true, stamps on each its mark, or spreads it over a slight veil, but not sufficient to destroy the original national character" (Herder [1968]: 7; [1966]: 166). In Herder's lexicon, *national character* was virtually synonymous with the "way of life" of the common folk: "thus every one bears the characters of his country and way of life on the most distant shores" (Herder [1968]: 10; 169). However, it is also true that Herder's descriptive renderings of *Lebensweise*—for non-European peoples, in any case—brushed all too near at times against the specter of the "noble

savage": the Native American of California, wrote Herder, "on the verge of the earth, in his barren country, and amid the vicissitudes of his climate, complains not of heat and cold, eludes the force of hunger, though with utmost difficulty, and enjoys happiness in his native land" (Herder [1968]: 9). Rough depictions aside, however, national character in Herderian terms was fundamentally "inexpressible," yet unique to each national group (Ergang: 87).

Herder, moreover, had advanced the claim that every national group was the repository of a singular character which furthered the development of humanity as a whole—or to employ Du Boisian terms, each nationality had a unique cultural "gift" to offer the world. This "gift," after coming into bloom, would rise to its highest possible summit, then, lapsing into senility, would wither and die, thereby making room for the contributions of other nationalities. No national culture was to be accorded greater significance than any other, and each had to be judged, not at the bar of any so-called "universal" standard, but from criteria extracted from the very culture in question. Maintaining a consistent pluralism in the face of a prevailing Eurocentric view of culture, Herder proclaimed to "Men of all the quarters of the globe, who have perished over the ages, you have not lived solely to manure the earth with your ashes, so that at the end of time your posterity should be made happy by European culture. The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature" (Herder, cited in R. Williams [1976]: 79; the trans. is somewhat different from that found in Herder [1966]: 224).

Herder's remarks bring to mind yet another way in which the initial chapter of *Souls* differs from "Conservation of the Races"—by way of the differing philosophies of history which inform them. Invoking the "Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian" in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois reiterated the "six world-historical peoples through whose histories the world-spirit achieves realization" according to Hegel's philosophy of history (Gooding-Williams [1991–2]: 525; Williamson: 404). Bypassing Hegel's contemptuous dismissal of peoples of African descent, but retaining his ideas bearing upon the unfolding of universal Spirit, Du Bois proclaimed the arrival of the Negro as the prophetic "seventh son," destined to bring forth a special contribution to world culture. In "Conservation of the Races," however, following the unpredictable but nonexclusive pattern of succession of national cultures envisioned by Herder, Du Bois treated the Negro merely as one "national" group among many whose turn upon the world stage had finally arrived.

Echoing Herder's cosmopolitan-nationalist sentiments, but swapping the concept of nation for the equally vague one of "race," even as he particularized the notion of cultural "gift," Du Bois avowed that black Americans, as a *race*, had a gift-message to offer to the world, a message no less distinguished than that of any other racial grouping. Yet all race groups were striving, "each in its own way, to develop for civilization its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help to guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life for which we all long,

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that one far off Divine event" (Du Bois [1970a]: 255). Extending yet another of Crummell's arguments, Du Bois proclaimed that the "history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races, and he who ignores or seeks to override the race idea in human history ignores and overrides the central thought of all history" (Du Bois [1970a]: 252).[12] The irony, of course, was that à propos the question of race, Du Bois had taken a step backward with respect to Herder, who had denied the very existence of such (see Herder [1969]: 284; [1968]: 7).

"Turning to real history," wrote Du Bois, "there can be no doubt, first, as to the widespread, nay universal, prevalence of the race ideal, and to its efficiency as the vastest and most ingenious invention for human progress" (Du Bois [1970a]: 253). Du Bois' sidestepping of Herder's views on race, however, enabled him to shift the debate from one bearing upon the impossibility of several *national* cultures coexisting beneath the same governing apparatus, to one asserting the possibilities of a harmonious interplay of differing *racial* cultures under the aforementioned political conditions. To have raised the issue of a distinct African-American nationality, as opposed to "race," would have been to breath life into the specter of black political separatism—the very issue Du Bois was attempting to neutralize in the first place. Second, had Du Bois chosen to apply the concept of "nationality" to black Americans, it would have been a terribly difficult task to surmount the prevailing sentiment that it was language, of all the traits, which embodied its outstanding characteristics: "Has a nationality anything more precious than the language of its fathers?," Herder had inquired. (Ergang: 105, 285). Following such logic, to have proposed, at the turn of the century, the existence of a black American national identity separate from that of white Americans would have required the claim that the language of the former was critically different from that of the latter—and contrary to the language-oriented national liberation struggles of the late 19th-century, one can be certain that neither Du Bois nor any other African-American intellectual of this epoch was quite prepared to embrace a concept of "Black English."

Unraveling the Riddle

Indirectly responding to each of the objections of Herder and Jefferson outlined above, Du Bois affirmed, without elaboration and without evidence that, "while it may have been true in the past that closed race groups made history, that here in conglomerate America *nous avons [changé] tout cela*—we have changed all that, and have no need of this ancient instrument of progress" (Du Bois [1970a]: 253).[13] For Du Bois, the destiny of African Americans was neither absorption by, nor the Africanization of, white Americans, a pledge by which he also sought to disarm white fears of miscegenation on the one side, and of "Negro domination" on the other ([1969]: 45). (He did confess, however, that the incorporation by the dominant culture of African-American "gifts"—the unique message which blacks had to give to the world—would result in an eventual "softening" of the Teutonic

whiteness of North American society.) Hence, there was no logical reason why whites and blacks alike, pursuing diverse but nonetheless intertwined ideals, could not co-exist peacefully beneath the same governing machinery.

What Du Bois wrought to make clear, above all, was that the dilemma of "being a Negro and an American at the same time"—by which he meant the institutional fortification of Afro-American "racial ideals" ("national ideals" by any other name) and the institutional fulfillment of U.S. citizenship pursued concurrently— was a false one: African-American "twoness" might be fully preserved, without incurring liability on either side. "Here, it seems to me," wrote Du Bois, "is reading of the riddle that puzzles so many of us. We are Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship, but by our political ideals, our language, our religion. Farther than that, our Americanism does not go" ([1970a]: 257–8).

The key to this novel exposition of "diversity without conflict" (of cultural pluralism, actually) was the notion of "gift," which Du Bois seems to have appropriated from Alexander Crummell: "I know no people coming to this land which can offer the rights the Negro has to offer to save this nation," noted the venerable reverend-scholar in the late 1880s (Crummell [1992a]: 242).

Anthropologists have long understood that "gifts," bearing magical qualities, "simultaneously acknowledge and create social relations," relations which may eventually be forged into bonds of equality. Demanding recognition of the giver and return from the receiver, "gifts," as Robert Paynter has noted, "are the media of politics among equals" (Paynter: 286). The "gifts" of culture proposed by Du Bois thus served a two-fold purpose: to elevate the status of blacks in the eyes of the world and at the same time serve as an offering to those who feared the clash of irreconcilable ideals inherent in the "gift" itself. American and African-American in the same creative breath, and if openly acknowledged and received as such, the presents of blacks held out the promise of linking two, seemingly irreconcilable worlds.

But just as Herder's concept of national character bore an elusive stamp, so too did Du Bois' elaboration of African-American racial ideals tend to remain in an inchoate state. Altogether absent from "Conservation of the Races," they do make a brief appearance in *The Souls of Black Folk*: "Will America be poorer if she replace her brutal dyspeptic blundering with light-hearted but determined Negro humility? or her coarse and cruel wit with loving jovial good humor? or her vulgar music with the soul of the Sorrow Songs?" inquired Du Bois in his opening chapter (Du Bois [1969]: 52). But it was not until the final pages of the book that he revealed the most important of the gifts which he had in mind: the Negro spiritual, uniquely American as well as African American, to be recognized and accepted by whites as an offering to American culture. Black folktales, though playing a secondary role, were acknowledged as well. Several decades later Du Bois elaborated upon the specifically African-American *joie de vivre* which he had previously acknowledged: "a certain spiritual joyousness; a sensuous, tropical love of life...;

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slow and dreamful conception of the universe, a drawling and slurring of speech, an intense sensitiveness to spiritual values..." More significantly, he was further prepared to extend the notion of a black cultural "gift" into other areas: to the economic independence of women (a development which, he points out, black women not only prefigured, but exerted a direct influence upon); to the (conflicted) role of the slave woman as "the medium through which the two great races were united in America"; the efforts of black women such as Harriet Tubman and Mammy Pleasants towards the extension of American democracy to blacks; and finally, to the rhythmic punctuations of black oratory, especially that of the ministry (Du Bois [1975]: 262, 268, 270–2, 308, 320).

THE PATH NOT TAKEN

It was W.E.B. Du Bois who, at the turn of the last century, first articulated the existence of a counter-pull of double aims experienced by a narrow strata of Afro-Americans, a dilemma which he attributed to blacks of all social classes. But this twist of consciousness was really not so much the worry of African-American proletarians, artisans, or agrarian workers, or of black men and women engaged in domestic service. Not even among black professionals was this supposedly "universal" dilemma the particular concern of assimilationists of biological or cultural persuasion, of political emigrationists seeking self-determination on other shores, or of entrepreneurial Negroes who, with one eye fixed on the balance sheet, accepted segregation out of sheer expedience. Rather, it was the concern of late 19th-century educated blacks who, first of all, possessed reflective capacity as well as the time to reflect; who refused to view the world through imposed categorical blinders; and who, constrained by the absence of possibilities for direct political struggle, yet repulsed by the brutishness of economic competition during the so-called Gilded Age, chose as their principal battleground the domain of culture. (Here one discovers rough parallels underlying the muted politics of both Du Bois and Herder, where societal problems were to be addressed through a cultural optic.)[14]

Du Bois' blueprint for cultural coexistence between whites and blacks was essentially of the same spirit as Booker T. Washington's program for economic coexistence—an indirect political response to the collapse of Reconstruction. While coming close to transferring to the *cultural* realm Washington's notion of "separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress," Du Bois, nonetheless, was unprepared to relinquish the terrain of political and civil rights.[15] For if, in Washington's eyes, the legitimation of African-American civil and political rights derived from a demonstration of their economic indispensability, W.E.B. Du Bois was not disposed to advance the claim that those same rights should derive from a demonstration of African-American cultural prowess. Rather, it was a question of blacks' affirming their American citizenship

and receiving all benefits to be derived therefrom, while at the same time maintaining an institutionalized African-American distinctiveness.

Contrary to present-day misreadings of Du Bois, this last, perceived dilemma was the underlying source of purported African-American agony described in his "Conservation of Races" essay. The issues of "brutal blundering versus determined humility," of "cruel wit versus good humor," or "vulgar versus sublime music" were hardly the stuff of which "two warring souls" were made. Moreover, even where Du Bois speaks of a refusal on the part of the Negro either to "Africanize America" or to "bleach his soul," this was not the same as defining a problematical "twoness" in which African Americans found themselves torn between the cultural practices of surviving Africanisms, on one hand, and those of Euro-Americanisms on the other.[16] The latter is an argument which, under the heavy influence of African writers of the postcolonial period, did not and could not emerge within an African-American context until the heady, late-1960's era of black cultural nationalism and the simultaneous and unprecedented entry of upwardly mobile blacks into bureaucratic corporate structures.[17]

In a somewhat different form, the debate surrounding the simultaneous pursuit of full civil equality and African-American institutional distinctiveness was to confront Du Bois once again in 1934; in the wake of a controversy surrounding his editorial support of autonomous economic institutions, a position which the NAACP hierarchy feared would contaminate the struggle against imposed segregation and for the securing of unconditional rights for blacks, Du Bois was led to resign the editorship of the *Crisis* magazine (see Du Bois [1968a]: 303–15; and [1985]: 143–57). The legacy of Du Bois' dilemma—the choice between liberty and community—bears heavily upon us today. By the mid-1960s, it is true, the narrow, legal pursuit of civil rights led to the securing of formal political and civil liberties for African Americans. But in the context of a continued denial of economic democracy to Americans as a whole, this victory also contributed, however inadvertently, to the subsequent collapse of autonomous institutions essential to the well-being of African-American communities. That issue, of course, remains unresolved to this day.

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NOTES

1 For a cogent discussion of differences existing between Du Bois' early published essays and their subsequent revision into chapters constituting *The Souls of Black Folk*, see Stepto: 52–91.

2 The dualist terminology employed by Du Bois in the latter work can be divided into three essential categories: "double consciousness," "double ideals" (and corresponding surrogate terms such as "double aims," "double strivings," "two souls," and the like), and "second sight." The topics of "double consciousness" and "double ideals" are addressed in the text above. "Second sight," on the other hand, referred to a magic practice first attributed to early 17th-century inhabitants of the Scottish Highland: "the ability literally to 'see' the future, through visual images of future events" (Stevenson [1988]: 126). That Du Bois intended the term to be taken at face value can be discounted, leaving one with the

task of deciphering an elusive trope. Previously I have suggested that Du Bois may have implied by the term "an expanded consciousness allowing one the ability to navigate two disparate cultures fluently...or from the perspective of one's own culture, the skill to perceive in another that which is opaque to its practitioners." The latter meaning is implicit in a remark made by Du Bois in 1926: while life "behind the veil" supposedly revealed no true self-consciousness for blacks, it also permitted them, in his words, to "see America in a way that white America cannot" (Du Bois [1970b]: 279). See also Allen (1990–2): 55–69, esp. 56.

3 As a counter-example, Estes-Hicks has pointed out that unlike Du Bois and others "who regarded their twoness as a painful burden," Jean Toomer "saw the heightening of consciousness cause by racial/social diversity as an exhilarating experience—the fortunate fate of modern man" (Estes-Hicks: 26).

4 For a discussion of Emerson's penchant for dualisms, see also Nicoloff: 44, 50–53, 59, 134.

5 What is one to do, for example, with ideals upholding "quackery and demagogy" which should have induced shame in their practitioners, pitted against counter-ideals which made one ashamed of one's "lowly tasks"? And under circumstances described by Du Bois, how might one be torn between two apparently different bodies of knowledge?

6 The issue finds a close parallel in our own time relative to "affirmative action" in employment practices, a policy now under extreme attack by right-wing ideologies aided by confused or malevolent Negroes. Steven A. Carter's puerile lamentations to the contrary, white opposition to "affirmative action," so-called, is but a special case of white opposition to blacks in general: prior to the existence of "affirmative-action" guidelines, it would seem that African Americans who managed to obtain employment through an occasional outbreak of fair employment practices tended to face at least as many difficulties from white coworkers as those who later entered through the "affirmative action" door.

7 African-American art historian Judith Wilson observes that "To this day, many commentators on the work of African-American artists remain tangled in the inherent contradictions of this nationalist-oriented program, struggling to separate some fixed set of 'Negro ideals' from an 'Anglo Saxon culture' they have conceptualized in equally ahistoric, essentialist terms and expecting a 'stalwart originality' to result from a pursuit of such Sisyphusian efforts" (Wilson: 32).

8 Although (as Adell has shown) the very first chapter of Souls is largely framed by Hegel's phenomenology and (as Williamson and Gooding-Williams have also demonstrated) by his philosophy of history as well, Du Bois' eclecticism would seem to preclude our assigning him to a single philosophical tradition, whether Emersonian, Jamesian, Hegelian, Herderian, or any other. For treatments of Du Bois' philosophical leanings and/or Germanic influences, see Broderick: 367–71; B.W. Bell: 16–24; Adell: chap. 13; Gooding-Williams (1987): 99–114 and (1991–2): 517–42; and R.C. Williams (1983): 11–19. Zamir (1995) arrived too late to include in this discussion.

9 In the case of segregation, of course, there is no question that an ideal such as this could not have been so readily and globally imposed had it not coincided with the need of Southern landowners and merchants for a firm control over black agrarian labor.

10 The cultural invention of the "sterile mulatto" and self-delusion concerning the "inability of blacks to survive outside the institution of slavery," indirectly expressed the fears of white Americans concerning the impossibility of peaceful African–European coexistence.

11 Culture as a "way of life" was first formulated in the English language by anthropologist Edward Tylor in 1871: "Culture or civilization, taken in its wide, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." See also R. Williams (1976): 76–82.

12 See also Crummell ([1992a]: 203; and [July]: 108). If, in their efforts to erect an oppositional worldview to 19th-century white racial dominance, a Du Bois, a Crummell, or a Blyden were guilty of "racism"—and it is necessary to be perfectly clear on this issue in the face of recent effusions from a handful of writers of African descent—then it was, in the more meaningful terminology of Sartre (1949), an "antiracist racism" with which they should be charged. To argue otherwise, to de-historicize and decontextualize the issue is, in effect, to place the counter-racialism of African Americans on the same plane as that of white institutionalized racism wielded at the former's expense. Appiah's (1992) categorization of 19th-century African-American thinkers as "extrinsic" or "intrinsic racists"—a dubious distinction, in any case—only further muddles the water. Although he is absolutely correct in challenging the scientific validity of "race," alas, neither Appiah's negative preachings to blacks on the subject nor his erudite, scientific denials of the existence of "race" exert much practical effect upon its existence as institutionalized social reality. To my mind, a greater emphasis on the elimination of racism rather than "race" would come closer to achieving the "raceless" world that many utopians have envisioned (cf. Gordon [1995a] and [1995e]).

13 Du Bois went on to state that the counter-assertion, "of which the Negro people are especially found, can not be established by a careful consideration of history." Significantly, while agreeing with Du Bois' general direction, Alexander Crummell's reading of the past supported neither conclusion: "…singular as it may seem, there is no fixed law of history by which to determine the probabilities of the race problem in the United States. We can find nowhere such invariability of result as to set a principle or determine what may be called an historical axiom" (Crummell [1992b]: 181).

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14 Ergang has noted that in the late 18th century, "the political condition of Germany, as a whole and also in many of the states, was so wretched that the better minds turned with disgust from the consideration of political matters to literature, aesthetics, and philosophy, and the people in general, after experiencing the futility of inveighing against the political conditions of the time, settled down to contemptuous indifference to public affairs" (Ergang: 241).

15 Du Bois, e.g., posed the question: "What should be the attitude of Negroes toward the educational qualification for voters? What should be out attitude toward separate schools? How should we meet discrimination on railways and hotels? Such questions need not so much specific answer for each part as a general expression of policy, and nobody should be better fitted to announce such a policy than a representative honest Negro Academy" (Du Bois [1970a]: 260).

16 Rather, this position represented a tactical maneuver on Du Bois' part, where he reassured his white readers that rather than miscegenate, African Americans sought to preserve their distinctive (cultural and, presumably, biological) traits; on the other hand, such racial conversation would not lead to the "Africanization" of American society. In other words, two nationalities and two national idealism might comfortably function beneath the umbrella of a unitary state apparatus (see Du Bois [1969]: 45).

17 Mercifully, from the early 19th century to the present this peculiar manifestation of cultural schizophrenia among educated African Americans has tended to diminish, for three reasons: the gradual decline in threats of forced expulsion of blacks from the U.S. on the part of whites; successive stages of incorporation of black American popular culture into the "mainstream," so-called, as well as the progressive acculturation of masses of black Americans to the dominant culture, thus rendering the choice between cultural identities progressively less draconian; and the developing sophistication of the African-American intelligentsia in their recognizing that, in order to eliminate categorical difference, it is sometimes necessary to foment a heightened sense of creative difference for the purpose of demonstrating a sense of qualitative sameness.

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