THE MIXED-RACE W.E.B. DU BOIS:

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY INSIGHTS

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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"The Mixed-Race W.E.B. Du Bois: Historical and Contemporary Insights" unites two conversations in African American philosophy and philosophy of race: a philosophical interest in the scholarship of W.E.B. Du Bois and an engagement with mixed race, or multiraciality in the United States. The aims are thus twofold. Firstly, to present a new interpretation of Du Bois as a mixed-race figure. Secondly, to illustrate the ways in which this reading of Du Bois can offer resources to better respond to questions of ethical/moral obligation for mixed/multiracial people in the 21st century.

The two aspects of my dissertation aim to address two different problems. The first problem is what appears to be an incomplete reading of Du Bois. Contemporary philosophical work on Du Bois seems to 1) focus narrowly on Du Bois's early work and ignore the nuances and complexities of his later work and 2) rarely take into consideration Du Bois's multiracial background. The second problem is both a problem in the literature about mixed race and in the concrete navigation of mixed race as a socio-political location. The majority of the work about mixed race since the 1990s made substantial gains in the fight for mixed race as a standalone identity. One of the problems with this, however, is that the literature and activism concerning mixed-race identities

focuses so much on personal choice and recognition that it often fails to aid multiracial people in their negotiation of racial binaries and political obligations.

In the context of these problems, I argue that Du Bois worked throughout his corpus to define blackness and projects of racial/social justice in such a way that acknowledges elements of multiracial identity and experience, while also providing a guide for responsible mixed-race politics in which multiracial people act in solidarity with oppressed populations, in response to white supremacy. This Du Boisian strategy, along with its historical foundation, helps address a gap in the literature about black/white mixed race since the 1990s, and also has the potential to offer much-needed normative guidance for contemporary mixed-race people.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I: INTRODUCTION

My dissertation project, "The Mixed-Race W.E.B. Du Bois: Historical and Contemporary Insights" seeks to unite two active conversations in African American philosophy and philosophy of race: a renewed philosophical interest in the scholarship of W.E.B. Du Bois and a deeper engagement with mixed race, or multiraciality in the United States. The past fifteen years have seen a remarkable surge of interest and new projects regarding Du Bois and mixed race, though the two are rarely connected and philosophy seems to have had a late start in both. The aim of my dissertation, then, is twofold. Firstly, to present a new interpretation of Du Bois as a mixed-race figure, based on primary texts. The second aim is to illustrate the ways in which this reading of Du Bois can offer resources to better respond to questions of ethical/moral obligation, in terms of their racial identities, for mixed/multi-racial people in the 21st century.

The two aspects of my dissertation thus aim to address two different problems. The first problem is what appears to be an incomplete reading of Du Bois. Contemporary philosophical work on Du Bois seems to 1) focus narrowly on Du Bois's early work—especially his 1897 speech "The Conservation of Race" and 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*—and ignore the nuances and complexities of his later work, to the detriment of their analysis and arguments, and 2) rarely, if ever, take into consideration Du Bois's multiracial background, despite his many references to it throughout his work.

This second problem is both a problem in the literature about mixed race and in the concrete, that is, lived, navigation of mixed race as a socio-political location. Despite the recent return of conversation about mixed race to widespread popular consciousness, the U.S. context is no stranger to mixed race – especially in relation to black/white

mixed-race individuals. There is a long history of black literature about "passing" and 20th century racist pseudo-science and social science that tried to describe and prescribe to mixed-race people, their identities, their relation to the state, and their relation to extant monoracial communities. Within this long history, then, the majority of the work about mixed race in the 1990s and early 2000s focused on providing arguments for mixed-race/multiracial identities as "third" racial spaces between/beyond racial poles and in need of state and interpersonal recognition. With this strategy, mixed race movements of this time made substantial gains in the fight for the salience of mixed race as a standalone identity. One of the problems with this, however, is that the literature and activism concerning mixed-race identities focuses so much on personal choice and recognition that it often fails to aid multiracial people in their negotiation of racial binaries and political obligations. Even if multiracial identities are affirmed, what does that mean for how (and with whom) multiracial people should act in the face of racialized oppression? More importantly, though, the emphasis on personal choice operates to the detriment of community ties in such a way as to not only undermine an engagement with social justice, but in fact aid injustice. White supremacy in the U.S. has long relied on a concept of individualism that dissolves obligation in order to remove the foundation for political (counter)action in oppressed communities. I argue that, without a conception of mixed race that clearly offers normative guidance, a standalone mixed-race identity can become an easy opt-out from political action and can therefore be mobilized for white supremacist aims. For instance, if a mixed-race person chose to identify with mixed race as a standalone identity, with no ties to extant communities, such an identity could be a way for that person to exempt themselves from the inherited landscape of racial justice.

This kind of exemption in favor of individual choice can benefit white supremacy by introducing a fissure between mono- and multiracial African Americans, not only breaking apart a solidarity that has been an effective strategy in black communities for decades, but also depoliticizing people who are still experiencing the effects of white supremacy, but might be less likely and less able to work against those effects.

In the context of these problems, I argue that Du Bois was in a liminal racial position and worked to define blackness and projects of racial/social justice in such a way that acknowledges key elements of multiracial identity and experience, while also providing a guide for a responsible mixed-race politics in which multiracial people act in solidarity with oppressed populations, in response to white supremacy. I will illustrate this through a thorough engagement with the full temporal (and literary) scope of Du Bois's work. This Du Boisian strategy, along with its historical foundation, helps address a gap in the conversations and literature about black/white mixed race in the last twenty years or more, and also has the potential to offer much-needed normative guidance for contemporary mixed-race people.

In this project, I will focus specifically on black/white multiraciality (as opposed to other racial mixtures). I focus on black and white mixed race because of the long-standing structure of these two races as diametric, co-constitutive opposites. The terrain of mixed-race identity between whiteness and blackness, is fraught in ways that are distinct from other multiracial spaces, although it may be influential for them. In past and some present understandings of mixed race for mixed black/white individuals, mixed race is still conceived of under the larger "black" racial category. This understanding motivates the naming of my focus as more properly multiracial or mixed-race blackness,

which is juxtaposed with a conception of mixed race as an identity not reducible, or explicitly related to, blackness, even for black/white mixed-race individuals. In this context, then, while I will explore the ways in which mixed race can act as a unique racial space that stands in relation to whiteness and blackness, I am particularly interested in moments in which multiracial figures articulate identities and solidarities of multiracial blackness, that is, instances in which mixed-race people throw their lot in with current racial structures, while also disrupting those structures. I argue that Du Bois's work, when interpreted in this light, provides insight into such a movement.

A further note on terminology: I will use mixed-race and multiracial interchangeably throughout this text. The term "mixed race" primarily comes out of the U.K. literature, and "multiracial" comes out of U.S. scholarship. Some scholars have disavowed the use of mixed race in favor of multiracial to avoid the possible connotation of mixed blood and biological race. I take the reification of biological concepts of race to be a specter that haunts all of racial discourse and think it is possible to be clear about what we mean and don't mean by this concept, so have chosen to use both terms to increase comprehension and relatability, since both terms are used in common parlance (with mixed race potentially being more common). I also, at times, use outdated terms such as "Negro" and "colored," but only do so in the context of analyzing Du Bois's texts, which use this terminology in a different historical context. Along these lines, I also capitalize all uses of Negro to conform with Du Bois's usage, while I do not capitalize black or white generally to avoid reifying these categories and distinctions.

To accomplish this project, I begin Chapter 1 with an overview of the academic literature about mixed race since the 1990s. Because this literature spans several decades

and multiple disciplines, I focus on select texts which are exemplary of the common themes or theoretical tasks within those texts. These common tasks include: collecting and articulating shared experiences among multiracial persons in order to articulate a standalone identity, advocating for a new racial category on the U.S. Census, exploring the meaning and utility of race as a concept in light of mixed-race complications, discussing new forms of passing in a contemporary context, and envisioning a possible foundation for a responsible mixed-race politics. Exploring the literature in these various areas helps articulate the preoccupation with individual choice that generates racial spaces that are nearly politically exempt, which then motivates my turn to the work of W.E.B. Du Bois.

Chapter 2 takes up a central issue in philosophical literature on Du Bois – his conception of race - starting with the Kwame Anthony Appiah and Lucius Outlaw debate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which vaulted Du Bois back into the contemporary philosophical sphere. In the first part of the chapter, I provide an overview of this initial debate and subsequent philosophical engagements with Du Bois's concept of race, which most commonly defend Du Bois from Appiah's claims that his conception collapses into biological race. Through tracing the various interventions into this debate, I am able to establish my interpretation of Du Bois's conception of race, which is non-biological, non-essentialist, normative (as opposed to descriptive), and deeply influenced by his political project to counter white supremacy. The second part of the chapter situates my reading of Du Bois's conception of race in the context of concern around mixed-race at the time. Here, I discuss what mixed race meant at the time and the role it played in Du Bois's

address to the American Negro Academy in 1897, "On the Conservation of Races," whence most scholars source Du Bois's definition of race.

Having articulated the ways in which Du Bois's conception of race was informed by a concern for mixed race, I turn in Chapter 3 to a larger exploration of the various ways in which mixed race appears in Du Bois's work throughout his lifetime. I begin with the clearest example of mixed race in his work, which I find in "The Concept of Race" chapter of *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*. I then move chronologically through Du Bois's corpus – starting with *Souls of Black Folk,* then two fiction interludes in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, and finally concluding with *Mansart Builds a School*, volume two of *The Black Flame* trilogy. In each of these works, I mine for the presence of mixed-race characters and themes and draw them together to envision a consistent conceptual interest in multiracial people, the positions they hold in the racial landscape, and the possibilities generated therein. From this, I argue that mixed race was not a passing concern for Du Bois, but rather a fundamental and persistent element of his conceptual framework and theoretical/political strategy.

Chapters 4 and 5 extend from these insights and analyze how these instances of mixed race impact Du Bois's conception of race and his political project. Du Bois's multi-genre writing career spanning almost one-hundred years makes it difficult to discuss and make claims about his work as a whole. To do this, I start Chapter 4 with a presentation of my reading strategy and the elements of continuity throughout Du Bois's work that allow me to make claims about his project, overall. The elements of continuity I'm most concerned with here are his focus on the conditions of life for black people

(initially in the U.S. context, but then more globally) in the context of white supremacy, and his use of rhetoric to elevate and affirm black humanity, while also initiating a process of moral education to correct the sympathies and actions of white folks and realign them to the cause of justice. With this continuity established, I look back to *Dusk of Dawn*'s "The Concept of Race" to revisit the influence of mixed race on Du Bois's conception of race.

The strong influence of politics on his conception of race necessitates a discussion of Du Bois's political project, which I take up in the fifth and final chapter. Here, I begin with a definition of white supremacy, generally, and an overview of the particular context of the Jim Crow U.S. in order to establish the forces within which Du Bois is defining his politics. I then provide an analysis of the political strategy of black uplift in this white supremacist context, and the role of group leadership in Du Bois's version of this strategy. A discussion of group leadership then leads into a reconsideration of Du Bois's early Talented Tenth articulation of this uplift strategy, since it has the clearest connection to mixed-race communities (as many of the Talented Tenth were, in fact, multiracial). By grounding the Talented Tenth in reading of Du Bois as more democratic than elitist, I am able to establish a political vision in Du Bois's work in which everyone has a key role to play – including those of mixed-race. To articulate the role of multiracial people in Du Bois's political project of uplift, I finally reincorporate the fictional mixed-race figures in *Darkwater* and *The Black Flame*.

After this exploration of Du Bois's corpus and the surrounding context, I return in the conclusion to my initial concern about mixed race in the 21st century and try to apply insights from Du Bois to this contemporary struggle for a responsible mixed-race politic.

What I ultimately conclude is 1) that we can and sometimes should read Du Bois as a mixed-race figure, for whom mixed race figures significantly in his thought and 2) that reading Du Bois in this way can offer greater historical depth to mixed-race identity, as well as a normative strategy for obligation in the face of white supremacy. Even if Du Bois is one among many such figures, offering one among many strategies, mining the past for figures who have been in similar positions and thought critically about how to move forward in a meaningful, responsible way can lead to a deeper dialogue about mixed-race identity and more guidance for those of us who are trying to navigate the fissures we've inherited.

II: CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF MIXED RACE

Wider Terrain

In investigations of historical ideas of mixed race, specifically pertaining to W.E.B. Du Bois, it is important to begin with what is now meant by mixed race. In this chapter, I consider recent philosophical and theoretical studies of mixed race, from the Civil Rights era to the present.

The study of mixed race comes into the academy alongside larger social and political forces trying to respond to the "biracial baby boom" ongoing since the late 1960s (DaCosta, 7). In additional to the many of civil rights advances in the 1960s, the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court decision to invalidate any remaining anti-miscegenation laws created the conditions for the marked and steadily rising number of interracial marriages, families, and multiracial children. This population has increased so dramatically that "by 2003, a Sunday *New York Times* article declared the arrival of 'Generation E.A.' (ethnically ambiguous)" and mixed race is often still touted as the fastest growing population in the United States (Jones, web).

Of course, interracial unions and multiracial people have existed in the United States since (before) it's very beginning, but the *Loving* decision, along with some other shifts in the socio-political landscape, created the conditions for a mixed-race community. To understand that shift, we need to keep in mind that these young interracial families of the biracial baby boom came to consciousness in a moment when civil right victories – and the sense of "equality" and "social justice" underpinning them – became commonplace operating assumptions.[1] They were also living through a shift from 1970s affirmation and authenticity discourses to the growth of identity-politics discourse in the

1980s, and the power that discourse bestows on self-conscious, organized identity groups, as well as the notion of choice and individual rights. In the post-1960s U.S., then, not having a group wasn't an option (Sundstrom, *Responsibility*, 45).

In the wake of these two developments, it became increasingly common for these mixed racial families to develop a sense of themselves and their struggles as something apart from the dominant monoracial discourses around them. This sense of social uniqueness and the drive toward relevance resulted in an increase in the publication and internet-facilitated community-building around interracial relationships and rearing multiracial children. It also supported budding advocacy groups for multiracial people (and their families). As a result, this rising population of multiracial people and their families began to explore a third racial space between black and white (or other racial binaries).

The most notable implication of this rising community awareness was a successful legal push in the 1990s to change the U.S. Census to recognize multiracial people (and presumably their families). As a result of the change in the 2000 census to a "Choose One or More" racial categories (as opposed to the former "Choose One" or the alternative of adding a multiracial category to the races counted on the census), the government can now track the number of self-identified multiracial people, as well as the constitutive racial categories contributing within. It is this new information, then, that is referenced when people assert that the multiracial population is the fastest growing racial population in the United States (Jones, web). This is partially due to the fact that more people were born of interracial unions than ever before, and in part due to the fact that there was more social support for multiracial identities as recognizable standalone

identities, which made it more likely for people born from interracial unions to identify as multiracial (as opposed to a monoracial category).

It is in this context – generally of the rising population, more specifically of the push for legal recognition – that academics from a variety of disciplines have taken up the problem and promise of mixed-race people, their effect on racial categorization, their history, their identity formation, and their responsibility in the context of racism and white supremacy. In this chapter, I move through issues of individual and communal mixed-race identity to moral and political issues of responsibility, which is of primary importance to the larger dissertation project.

Census Debates: The Politics

In 1993, the House Subcommittee on Census, Statistics, and Postal-Personnel held hearings regarding the 2000 Census racial categories. This was largely motivated by the fact that neither the racial categories themselves, nor the option to choose one and only one category had changed since 1977, despite significant new demographic and ethnic formations (DaCosta, 1). Even though the biracial baby boom began in the 1960s, support groups within the multiracial population didn't really get off the ground until the late 1980s. By the 1993 Census hearings, there were at least "60 social support multiracial organizations in existence" the largest of which were the American Multiethnic Association and Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), which presented central testimony for the category change (DaCosta, 3). As noted by many, "the leaders and participants of multiracial advocacy groups were overwhelmingly white women married to black men. The most famous of these women is Susan Graham, founder of Project RACE…who led the fight for the multiracial category on the census,

and even had her young son testify before Congress" (Joseph, Ralina L., xvi), These white mothers were particularly motivated by the difficulty of racial identification for multiracial children moving through the public school system (Graham, 186).

The original request put forth by multiracial advocates was for a revision of "OMB [Office of Management and Budget] [Statistical] Directive 15 in such a way as to include the counting of people who are of more than one of the categories presently in use" (Fernandez, 191). This initial proposal was for a multiracial category with subcategories for the person to select salient racial constitutive identities. This option, it was argued, "(1) counts people accurately according to their actual identity; (2) provides statistical continuity by accounting for the racial/ethnic component(s) which may be relevant for various government studies and programs; and (3) avoids unnecessary and unwarranted government influence and interference in the very sensitive and private matter of personal identity"(Fernandez, 195). Since racial categorization by the state came about through "federal requirements to comply with antidiscrimination laws stemming from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s" (Spencer, R., 1). this option also attempts to preserve classifications used in the maintenance of such policies. Despite this attempt to compromise and safeguard civil right policy, this initiative to provide a multiracial option was also supported by the Conservative Right in an effort to promote color-blind policy that would render toothless and unenforceable the civil rights policies they found disagreeable, especially affirmative action.[2]

In the end, the OMB decided in 1997 to officially change the race choice on the 2000 census to the "Choose One or More" option. This would leave the standard racial categories intact but allow multiracial people to select salient categories for their

identification. This option has the benefit of maintaining the classifications necessary for the current structure of civil rights policy, but it caused an upset in the multiracial community because it collapsed what was supposed to be a standalone mixed-race identity back into extant monoracial categories. Largely supported by the political organizing and media attention around the push for the census change, multiracial groups gained significant steam by 1997, as did their self-conception as racially unique and deserving of a standalone racial category. This self-conception and group formation were significantly enabled by some central theoretical texts which paved the way the proliferation of Critical Mixed Race Studies more broadly.

Census Debates: Supporting Theory

There are a few pivotal pieces of scholarship that helped form the multiracial movement. Paul Spickard's 1989 *Mixed Blood*, F. James Davis's 1991 *Who Is Black?,* Maria P.P. Root's 1992 anthology *Racially Mixed People in America,* and Naomi Zack's 1993 *Race and Mixed Race*. Each of these texts present the wave of early 1990s scholarship that is largely written by people with mixed racial backgrounds, names mixed-race/multiracial as an identity and group, and either explores some common themes of mixed race experience or articulates how it figures into the extant racial landscape (especially its impact on monoracial categories). For the purposes of this project, I will narrow my focus to Root's anthologies, *Racially Mixed People in America* and *The Multiracial Experience*, and Zack's *Race and Mixed Race*.

Both of Root's volumes explore multiracial identities and experiences and exemplify a certain strategy for carving out a mixed-race space. The first, *Racially Mixed People in America,* is an interdisciplinary collection of essays exploring the

psychological, sociological, and theoretical aspects of the growing multiracial population in America. As such, this book helps articulate some of the patterns of experience and strategies employed by racially mixed people in America. Root's second volume, *The Multiracial Experience* is a collection of essays that details the experiences, problems, and possibilities of mixed-race people in America. Although the second volume is more narrative in style than the first, both works help define a landscape of multiracial experience. In fact, Root's *Racially Mixed People in America* introduced and standardized the use of both multiracial (from U.S. based scholarship) and mixed-race (from U.K. scholarship) to refer to these groups and identities (Joseph, 9). Taken together, these two collections help lay the groundwork for conceptualizing mixed race experience as informed by, and distinct from, monoracial experiences of race, identity, and community. Themes such as liminality, in-between-ness, invisibility, possibility, incommensurability, and contradiction, become commonplace in these volumes, as do the dynamic and shifting practices of racial performance and a need to respond to the lack of "traditional" racial communities. These narratives and essays typically focus on how people of multiracial descent identify themselves – how they respond to the frequent and shared question of "What are you?" – and how they form community. The embodied question of belonging and the problem of navigating ontological dualities come to the fore as these pieces begin to construct a shared base of experience – even if only found in the ever-shifting nature of underdetermined identities - such that there could be something called a mixed-race person and a way to see, know, and share experiences with other mixed-race people.

Root's volumes also typify an early project to make mixed race its own cultural space, without much attention paid to the political or material consequences of this space, or the responsibilities of people in this unique position. This project to create an almost a-political mixed-race space is perfectly captured by Root's "Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People":

The Bill of Rights:

I have the right:

-not to justify my existence in this world

-not to keep the races separate within me

-not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical ambiguity

-not to justify my ethnic legitimacy

I have the right:

-to identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify

-to identify myself differently than how my parents identify me

-to identify myself differently than my brothers and sisters

-to identify myself differently in different situations

I have the right:

-to create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial

-to change my identity over my lifetime - and more than once

-to have loyalties and identify with more than one group of people

-to freely choose whom I befriend and love (Root, web).

The first piece of its kind at the time, Root's "Bill of Rights" is aimed solely for people with mixed backgrounds and not only affirms the uniqueness of that racial and psychological space, but guards against others' encroachment upon it. Root places the emphasis on individual choice related to identity and places that choice pointedly outside of or beyond larger cultural settings or communities. The experience of shifting identities, loyalties, and communities in different times and situations is not an uncommon experience for people with multiracial backgrounds. Root turns this common experience from a descriptive claim into a normative one, thereby establishing and protecting individual identity choice, but also thwarting many of the common ways racial identity is tied to community affiliation and recognition. By promoting individual choice, fluidity of identity and category, and racial harmony within the multiracial person/family, Root ultimately shifts closer to a post-racial vision in which we've transcended standard categorization and overcome the racism stuck in cycle with it.

The other volume of focus from this early period is Naomi Zack's 1993 *Race & Mixed Race*. Still the only systematic book-length work on mixed race in philosophy, *Race and Mixed Race* sets the precedent for philosophical thought on the subject. Revisited in the later "The Fluid Symbol of Mixed Race" published in 2010, Zack argues against a biological notion of race and asserts that "broad public recognition of mixed-race, particularly black and white mixed race, would contribute to an undoing of rigid and racist, socially constructed racial categories" (Zack, 141). Zack in *Race and Mixed Race*, advocates strongly for the recognition of mixed race as a standalone racial category. Zack argues that if people with "pure" racial backgrounds deserve racial identities, then mixed-race people do, too. Additionally, our ability (or inability, because of limited concepts

and experience to recognize mixed race within the purity schema of blackness and whiteness also has the potential to expose the faulty biological assumptions fueling race and there undermine the entire system of false classification. Mixed-race, in a way, could lead to an elimination of racial categorization as we know it.

As Zack reflects in "The Fluid Symbol of Mixed Race" almost twenty years later, however, neither a widespread adoption of mixed-race identity by black/white multiracial people, nor a widespread dismissal of the incorrect biological notion of race have come to pass. Instead, after the change to the 2000 census, "only 2.4% of respondents designated themselves as members of 'two or more races,'" (Zack, *Fluid Symbol*, 896) which is an undoubtedly low approximation of the number of multiracial people born even since 1967. Zack, in fact, seems to lament the continued pressure and assumption of hypodescent (black/white mixed-race children always take on the race of the "lower status" [i.e. black] parent) and black identity.

In 1994, both Root and Zack – along with Spickard and Davis – laid the groundwork and vocabulary for identifying, seeing, and thinking about multiracial people in the contemporary context. Over a decade before, however, Joel Williamson's *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* provided an outlined history of the mixed-race (black/white) population in America. Williamson starts this project in the 1970s in an effort to understand why mixed-race people and communities chose to become black, and he re-released this book in paperback in 1995 – at the peak of interest in mixed race during the Census debates. Williamson points out that there was such a thing as mixed-race history until 1930, when the category was dissolved and reabsorbed into an expanded black category.[3] Williamson's project is perhaps the best example of a

historical reclamation of multiracial African American history. Given that Williamson is writing during the same time Root is collecting these various contemporary narratives about mixed-race people, it also represents the important impulse to contextualize those contemporary struggles and to ground them more thoroughly in the history-laden nature of race in the United States.[4] This shift toward a deeper history also helps stabilize the growing sense of community for multiracials, since, as we've seen elsewhere, shared history has played such a critical role in racial group formation and identity politics. This is especially true considering that this community has to rely on a foregrounding of difference instead of sameness as its foundation; for example, variation in experience, contextual definitions of self in relation to shifting categories and community and other patterns of 'uniqueness' are often the common pattern through which mixed-race people relate to each other's experiences.

These four major pieces define some basic boundaries of the conversation about mixed race in academia. The Root volumes typify a strategy of collecting and broadcasting different narratives of mixed race, thus revealing some shared patterns of experience and articulating a space of community around those patterns. The Williamson piece explores an analogous (or continuous) space in a previous historical period, thus offering contemporary mixed-race efforts an anchor in the wider, deeper narrative of black and white mixed race in the United States. And Zack's work begins to explore some of the philosophical implications of both of these moves – what they expose about the nature of race and what a strategy for them might do to help ameliorate current racial struggles.[5]

Overall, these early works attempt to reflect the dawning consciousness of a varied group back onto itself, and to give it more tools for its own advocacy. In doing so, they rely on revised themes of either struggle, fracture, and in-betweenness or fluidity, possibility, and harmony, depending on the lens. They endeavor to expose the cracks in U.S. racial thinking, history, and politics up to the point that has both produced the multiracial community and rendered it struggling to be heard. Most importantly, though, they gave these fledgling groups a language to describe their experience, as well as access to others' narratives and experience to garner weight and legitimacy to the radical instability that became a quintessential mixed-race experience. What follows is a brief account of the rest of the academic terrain considering mixed race that has built up since the 1990s.

Post-Census Media

After this moment, especially from 1998-2008, scholarship continued to explore these same issues, as well as ones prompted by widespread media relevance. In this period, questions about how to describe the history of multiracial people, the system of racial categories they're born into, and what to do about that become even more critical for a movement coming into awareness.

The first group of texts endeavor to track instances of mixed-race folks in the media and other places in pop culture. The approach is represented by projects such as Catherine Squires's *Dispatches from the Color Line: The Press and Multiracial America*, which offers a study of the role of the media in framing and engaging multiracial people.[6] Squires utilizes different popular culture case studies of mixed-race folks in the media to support a central claim that "Multiracial identities need not be a starting point on the

journey to ‘one America, one race’ but rather the beginning of a rigorous debate, a contentious discussion, an often painful hearing of memories and histories buried under the very scrim of official national identity and history” (Squires, 202). Though her focus is on contemporary mass news and media, Squires engages many of the themes found in Root, Williamson, and Zack’s volumes and offers a critical interrogation of the historical and current context in which multiracial identities are used to “explain race in American” and/or offer a solution to the “race problem.” As with other academic works on mixed-race written in in the early-mid 2000s,[7] Squires also focuses on the controversy surrounding the 2000 census racial categories and the racial identity of Barack Obama as representative of current conversation about mixed-race and the stakes this conversation has in broader discussions of race, categories, visibility, and policy in the United States. Squires’s work provides a helpful survey of the contentious, messy issues provoked by multiraciality in America.

Categories

Since the mid-1990s, the larger question about whether or not (or how) racial categories should be maintained in the context of mixed race has been taken up notably by Rainer Spencer, John Michael Spencer, and Naomi Zack.[8]

Rainer Spencer’s 1999 *Spurious Issues: Race and Multiracial Identity Politics* is engaging in the long-ranging debate about the usefulness of racial categories, and how best to understand them. He critiques both biological essentialism and social constructivism, and ultimately maintains that racial categories (understood as fully contingent) are necessary for civil rights purposes. The policy change to “Choose one or More” categories for racial designation is the occasion for his reflections on mixed race

and the multiracial movement that pushed for the policy change. He provides a helpful survey of the arguments provided by multiracial movements, as well as the African American critics. Ultimately, his argument suggests that identity politics are not synonymous with antidiscrimination movements, and that in some cases the former can harm the latter.

In 2000, Michael Spencer's *The New Colored People* has a similar critical engagement with the nature of racial categories motivated by an attention to multiracial populations, and the extent to which they present a “new” category of racialized persons. His central claim coming out of this engagement is for the elimination of racial categories. This, he thinks, cannot be achieved by the addition of a 'multiracial' category, but by the growing understanding that increasing numbers of people defy racial categorization. John Michael Spencer, along with Zack and Rainer Spencer, helps develop a sense of the debate about the sociopolitical possibilities of a multriracial category and its relation to the project of elminativism or other anti-racist projects.

In her 2001 “American Mixed Race: Theoretical and Legal Issues”, Zack provides a similar examination of the 2000 US Census questions and data concerning race to draw conclusions about mixed race and our assumptions about the biological basis of racial categories. She discusses the lack of biological basis for race and concludes with a two-part diagnosis and prescription for recognizing mixed-race identity claims (argued for on the basis of their potential power to disrupt false biological notions of race).

Situated in line with *Race and Mixed Race* and “American Mixed Race,” Zack’s 2010 “The Fluid Symbol of Mixed Race” maintains the biological non-existence of racial categories and continues to argue for an acknowledgment of mixed race, especially

black/white mixed identities. Zack provides a compelling reconciliation of these two projects, especially as they relate to/affect the conversation about racial eliminitivism, which is an argument to discard the racial category completely, given its inconsistencies and pernicious effects. She then provides a summary of where her ideal for mixed-race identities currently stands given the history of mixed race as it relates to the construction of biological race. As illustrated in this piece, mixed race individuals have always represented ruptures in the racial politics of purity and ontology of races, such that their existence creates an opportunity to redefine (and often reify) those categories in relation to each other.

Focusing on the nature, utility, and possibility of racial categories is one of two main ways scholars try to provide guidance about ways forward in the face of the problem(s) of mixed race. In these projects, mixed race offers a rupture that allows us to reconceive categorization itself, its accuracy and motivations, and its pernicious effects on all racialized people. The thing to be done in the face of mixed race, then, is to recognize the ways in which race itself does not make sense and to rid ourselves of a harmful fiction. Given the salience of categorization during debates about the US census, it makes sense that this would be the dominant way of defining a problem and possibility of mixed race in the scholarly literature.

Passing

Just as we see an increase in scholarly work focused on how depictions and interpretations of multiracial people are being negotiated in the media and the legal and policy implications of/for this rising population, we also see new scholarly work about notions of “passing,” which works to re-describe and revise these practices in light of

these other societal and legal shifts. Passing as a member of another race became an important social issue and literary trope from 1880-1925 (Daniel, 91-107), as racial categories were in flux and the black population began to move more freely around the country. Because of the high number of interracial rape (especially on plantations), there was a significant mixed-race population that was in a position to pass for white and free themselves from the terrors and oppressions of white supremacy. As mixed-race individuals and identities come back into cultural conversations since the 1990s, so has a renewed preoccupation with the notion of passing. This is especially due to the ongoing struggle around the idea of "choice" for multiracial people and how they identify racially or choose to negotiate monoracial categories. In contemporary literature about mixed-race, passing becomes less about passing as white, but instead about passing as monoracial, especially passing as monoracially black (for black/white individuals). This might be the result of the strong push in the 1990s for mixed-race to be the primary identity for children produced from interracial relationships, such that the adoption of a straightforwardly "white" or "black" racial identity obscures or denies their "real" racial identity.

In the face of these shifts, we see more scholarly work trying to make sense of an increasingly salient strategy for mixed-race people to adopt monoracial (especially black) identities, as well as destigmatize the practice of passing more generally. Philosopher Adrian Piper's 1991 essay "Passing for White, Passing for Black" is one of the early examples of this work. Piper offers a first-person account of the myriad forms of negotiation necessitated by mixed-race existence and her essay is the first of its kind, because it frames mixed-race people's adoption of monoracial identities (in either

direction) as an act of passing for which there are reasons someone can give an account. Piper explains her family's long history of multiracial blackness and their insistence of adopting a steadfast black identity, which she also adopted, despite many instances in which that identity gets challenged or disrupted.[9]

Further theorizing of passing for Black was left largely untouched for another ten years, most likely due to the rise in a multiracial separatism in the 1990s (alongside the push for the Census change). But this work was taken back up in the early 2000s, largely in sociology. In 2005, sociologist Kerry Ann Rockquemore begins "Forced to Pass and Other Sins Against Authenticity," with the "identity commandment" of authenticity and the clear mandate that passing is a sin against this commandment. She furthermore situates herself as "a woman who is black by self-definition, white by phenotype, and biracial by parentage" and offers the article as an auto-ethnographic essay (Rockquemore, 17). Both of these methodological choices, I might add, are typical of writing about issues of mixed race. Through an examination of her lived experience, Rockquemore elucidates the difficulty of navigating a social structure struggling with monoracial and biologistic expectations regarding racial categorization, which make recognizing multiracial or disruptive racial identities extremely difficult. Given the larger cultural preference for fixed, essential, monoracial identities and the fact that this is not an identity space or lived experience Rockquemore has, she claims that, "In these uncomfortable circumstances, [I am] forced to pass" (Rockquemore, 18). Rockquemore places conversations about passing in the context of others' expectations of the black/white binary and the history of systematic racism and discrimination with someone's self-determined identity and affiliation. It is critical to her that we

acknowledge the socially constructed nature of race, since that is the context in which "passing gains the interpretive power to encompass its involuntary manifestations, its fluidity and movement in more than one direction, and its situational and contextual dependence" (Rockquemore, 31).

Five years later, in "Passing as Black: Racial Identity Work among Biracial Americans," Nikki Khanna and Cathryn Johnson interview black-white biracial adults to gather more information about when and how they pass or conceal parts of their racial backgrounds (Khanna, 380-97). Their central claim is that passing still exists today, though it is more common now for biracial folks to pass as black, than as white, as in the Jim Crow era. Passing, here, is discussed as a strategy of racial presentation that is a careful negotiation of personal choice and volition, and environmental constraints such as skin color, class, social associations, and geographical location. Khanna and Johnson also acknowledge that, in spaces in which passing (as monoracial) is not an available strategy, biracial people often downplay or accent different aspects of their backgrounds, which emphasizes the fluidity of these identities and social positions. At the end of the article, Khanna and Johnson acknowledge that passing as a strategy of identity negotiation is not restricted to multiracial, or even racial identities and they note other work on passing strategies for marginalized religious identities (such as Jews passing as Christian in Nazi Germany) even as they affirm that multiracial identities provide particularly fertile ground for studying this phenomenon further.[10]

Discussions of multiracial identities and passing tend to expose and illustrate the very nature of racial categories – their boundaries, relationships to each other, logics, restrictions, and affordances. A lot of the literature that takes up black/white biracial

people, in particular, highlights the purity logic of whiteness and the ever-shifting nature of blackness in relation to white purity and white economic exploitation.[11] This last point, economic exploitation, is one of the primary inheritances from slavery, when the one-drop rule determining black identity served to expand a slave labor force and affirm a sexual exploitation of black women's bodies by white slave-owners and laborers. Given the pernicious history and radically destabilized present (due to mixed-race identities), racial categories are rightly a central problem taken up by scholars of mixed race. This work often utilizes the instability exposed by mixed race to enforce the notion that race itself is a social construct with no biological reality or essential characteristics. What follows from that is a deep discussion over whether or not those categories should stand at all.

David Brunsma and Kerry Ann Rockquemore's article "What does 'Black' Mean? Exploring the Epistemological Stranglehold of Racial Categorization" takes up this question of the utility of racial categories. Brunsma and Rockquemore explore the extent to which the conversation about the change in racial categories on the 2000 Census challenged the accuracy and utility of racial categories more generally, and "black" in particular. Part of their argument hinges on the "statistical quagmire" of the "check all that apply" approach to the 2000 Census, which not only creates 63 possible racial categories to track, but resulted in a surprising 1.8 million black people selecting more than one racial category in their Census response (Brunsma, 101-21, 102).[12] They ultimately argue that "social, cultural and economic changes in post-Civil Rights America necessitate a re-evaluation of the validity of black as social construct and re-assessment of its' continued use in social science research" (Brunsma, 101). They claim that in social

science research, “black” can’t consistently denote or identify a set of shared experiences, a social location, social or economic opportunity, or as a socially imposed parameter of the self. Part of this is due to the achievements of the Civil Rights Era, and part of it is due to the rapidly increasing mixed-race population among black Americans (acknowledging, of course, that the two are also related). In any case, Brunsma and Rockquemore utilize the rise of multiracial identity to discuss a greater instability within the category of blackness itself, such that this category might no longer be useful in identifying subjects/groups in social science research.

Moral & Political Issues

Another way to navigate the problem of mixed race is to focus on the nature of racial politics, representation, and responsibility. Although many authors working on these issues are aware of the problematic nature of racial categories and might generally be in favor of their elimination, scholars offering insights at the level of political engagement don’t find eliminativism an immediate or viable option for confronting issues of power, domination, and violence in a white supremacist socio-political structure. These scholars are operating out of a concern about the ways in which race has become a way to identify structural harm and develop resistant communities and are interested in the ways in which mixed-race people and identities interact with these structures and communities. As representative of this strategy, I’ll turn to Ron Sundstrom’s “Responsible Multiracial Politics” from *The Browning of American and the Evasion of Social Justice.*

Before turning to Ron Sundstrom’s work, however, it is also important to discuss positions that are straightforwardly critical of the very existence of mixed race identities,

since all of the previous work discussed is affirms that there is at least phenomenological and sociological reality to mixed race (even as many of those scholars are skeptical of categorization generally). One of the strongest arguments against mixed race identities as standalone or politically/socially salient choices for this growing population in Lewis Gordon's "Race, Biraciality, and *Mixed Race* — In Theory" (Gordan, 52-71). Gordon attacks the foundation of a separate, coherent biracial identity space and argues that blackness itself does not contain an assumption of racial purity. As a result, blackness can and should still function as the primary racial signifier for people with black ancestry, since multiracicality is already built into blackness itself. Gordon argues that the preoccupation with racial categories not only draws attention away from an analysis of racism, which he finds to be more important, but also reinforced mixed-race identification as a practice of racist anti-blackness.

In "Responsible Multiracial Politics," written almost 10 years after Gordon's piece, Sundstrom is very clear about his desire to recognize and affirm "multiracial life" (Sundstrom, 110-111). He further claims that "the criticism that multiracial, or mixed race, is an impossible identity, or that multiracialism is simply a variant of racial passing available to the brown, is cruel, because it dismisses the particular experiences of multiracial persons and precludes any possibility of the existence and legitimacy of multiracial identity" (Sundstrom, 110). Sundstrom explains that "[t]he intention is to foster incredulity about the intentions of persons who dare claim multiracial identity, and to code multiracialism as simple racist betrayal" (Sundstrom, 110-111). Sundstrom recognizes the ways in which these critiques of mixed race are derived from a language and expectation of race loyalty and, put more generously, a deep concern about the ways

in which mixed race obscures, reaffirms, or directly participates in maintaining racist structures and institutions.[13] In the face of this, then, Sundstrom offers some initial thoughts about the nature of the relationship between mixed race and structures of racism, and offers the "affirming of our mothers" as a heuristic for multiracial persons' obligations to participate in anti-racist practices.[14] Sundstrom shifts from a more general anti-racist obligation to one housed in project of a familial reconciliation, in an attempt to recognize the unique position multiracial folks are in, to affect structures of race and racism. Sundstrom is one of the people thinking and writing about this in philosophy. The familial foundation for racial responsibility might be enough to motivate the desired solidarity in action, but it also might not be compelling enough for most multiracial people – we might need additional resources.

Sundstrom's effort to develop the conversation toward one in which multiracial identities exist and come with a set of obligations that take racism seriously is helpful because it attempts to shift beyond a retracing of categories and offer some initial thoughts on how multiracial folks might move through the world in a responsible way. Given that multiracial people exist in gaps between extant structures of race (and the obligations and habits bound up with that idea), the project Sundstrom is engaged in becomes crucial in the development of a salient identity that exists in solidarity with, not opposition to, minoritized communities fighting for rights and a change in material conditions.

This is the project I'm most interested in taking up in my work to re-appropriate Du Bois as a mixed race thinker, since I think such an engagement with Du Bois enhances understanding of what mixed race is and makes more visible various strategies

for living those identities in a "responsible" way. This project has become particularly salient in the aftermath of 1980s and 90s political movements for recognition of mixed race in the Census, accompanied by other mixed-race-positive cultural movements. As I have shown, in the wake of federal re-recognition of multiracial identities in the Census (after they disappeared by 1930) most of the conversation in multiracial theory has been trying to explore representations of mixed-race people in popular culture and various forms of media, or describe the mixed- race experience in such a way as to affirm a racial space separate from conventional racial spaces, with an almost libertarian approach to racial identity. Critics of these late 20th and early 21st century movements often claim that this view of multiracial identity for black/white individuals developed in opposition to blackness itself, in that it offered a space of identity separate from blackness. As a result, it failed to provide or communicate a role for multiracial people to play that didn't buy into white supremacist norms (color, class privilege, etc.), so that it ultimately reinforcing systems that harm black communities.

Within the void of political multiracial identity development since the 1990s, the movement in response to white supremacist conditions typified by #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) has politicized multiracial (black/white) identities in an even starker way. The inclusivity and grounding of the political movement in black lives (both at the center and the margin) heightens the anti-black critiques of a-political mixed-race identities. For multiracial folks, adopting a black identity has become an increasingly common way to signal a political affiliation with black communities and affirmation of black culture, especially in the face of systemic dehumanization and police violence against black people.

By drawing parallels between the strategic mobilization of multiracial African Americans as counter to white supremacy in post-Reconstruction America and racial politics in the age of #BLM, I will carve out a space in which multiracial identities can continue to undermine the existing biological racial paradigm and still offer political support to pro-black, anti-white-supremacist political movements. By grounding this work in Du Bois, I hope to provide an understanding of multiracial black identities that acknowledges some of the uniqueness of that identity experience, while also redescribing blackness in such a way that it can become a viable identity option with a political role in resisting white supremacist degradation of black lives.

Notes

[1] Civil rights increasingly became a discourse around racial authenticity, which became the context within which "question of racial hybridity would emerge two decades later" (DaCosta, 14).

[2] For example, "…in the mid-to-late 1990s, Newt Gingrich…aligned himself with a so-called multiracial cause, and supported such measures as the addition of a "multiracial" category on the 2000 U.S. Census…"(Joseph, xvii).

[3] Root provides a voice to the cultural and lived experience influenced and reflected by census categorization. Williamson shows how we got here in the first place. And Zack helps us understand some of the debates and possibilities of strategies moving forward. It may also be important that Williamson and Zack are focusing on black and white racial mixtures, while Root pays more attention to Asian and Latinx mixtures. Although, Zack is also more inclusive in this sense in her edited anthology, *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity (1995).*

[4] This impulse is also shared by Rainier Spencer in *Spurious Issues: Race and Multiracial Identity Politics in the United States*. Westview Press, 1999.

[5] In this case, "new people" offer us a way to reevaluate categories and strategies.

[6] Michele Elam also explores this space in *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* (2011).

[7] See also Spencer, Rainier. *Spurious Issues: Race and Multiracial Identity Politics in the United States*. Westview Press, 1999. and Naomi Zack, "American Mixed Race: Theoretical and Legal Issues," *Harvard BlackLetter Law Journal*, v. 17, Spring 2001, pp. 33-46.

[8] I don't include work by Kwame Anthony Appiah here because he is addressing the utility of racial categories on a metaphysical and moral level in a way that is not primarily motivated by a concern over the U.S. Census.

[9] Exposing similar patterns as the essays featured in Root's edited volumes, this piece helps thicken the contemporary debates about mixed race, as well as providing insights into some of the experiences, choices, and consequences of identifying as black from a space of mixed race (which, in further chapters, helps me navigate my claims about Du Bois's choice to do the same, despite the difference in era).

[10] Marcia Alesan Dawkins takes up this larger project more systematically in *Clearly Invisible: Racial Passing and the Color of Cultural Identity* (2012) where she provides a rhetorical analysis of the phenomenon of passing, arguing that it is a performance that nearly all people, and even institutions enact. While there are more compelling analyses of passing in other works, the aspect of this project that is novel and potentially useful is her discussion of the ways and reasons passing endures today. This might help situate other more contemporary work on passing as black and offer a better understanding of how this functions for multiracial people. Dawkins, Marcia Alesan. *Clearly Invisible: Racial Passing and the Color of Cultural Identity*. Baylor University Press, 2012.

[11] See also Zack, Naomi. "The Fluid Symbol of Mixed Race." *Hypatia* 25.4 (2010): 875-90. Web, and Davis, F. James. *Who Is Black?: One Nation's Definition*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991.

[12] They also note that this trend was highest in blacks under 17, 8% of whom chose more than one race, as opposed to 2% of black people 50 and older.

[13] Some of this has to do with a long history of strife about how lighter-skinned black people engaged with their skin and (often) economic privileges. There is also a strong concern that more people identifying as multiracial as a standalone racial identity with no further information about racial background (which races one is a mixture of) will hurt civil rights efforts to utilize statistics to show systematic disenfranchisement, lack of resources, or discrimination. See Rainer Spencer's *Spurious Issues* for a more thorough analysis of these concerns: (Spencer, 13-17) and (Spencer, 136-152) respectively.

[14] Sundstrom spells these out further in "Being and Being Mixed Race" (2001).

III: DU BOIS'S CONCEPTION OF RACE (IN CONTEXT)

Shifting beyond Chapter 1, then, we might ask why turn to W.E.B. Du Bois's philosophical work in relation to mixed race? One main reason is the increased profile of Du Bois in scholarship about race over the last 20-30 years, which provides us with rich sources through which to examine the impact of a mixed-race context on race and blackness at the turn of the 20th century. The reappearance of W.E.B. Du Bois's in today's philosophical dialogue is largely due to Kwame Anthony Appiah's 1985 article "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race."[15] In it, Appiah makes clear the ways in which Du Bois offers contemporary philosophers of race an important, though flawed, forbearer. Appiah's critique of Du Bois's flaws has spurred a cottage industry of journal articles and book chapters in response. In terms of his conception of race, Appiah set the precedent for what work of Du Bois's we look to – his 1897 speech "The Conservation of Races" – and, to a certain extent, what Du Bois is trying to do in this pivotal piece, namely provide a thorough set of criteria for racial identification that does not collapse into biological racialism. While Appiah's 1985 critique has taken many unique turns since then, Du Bois's conception of race still holds more to be explored.

This second chapter turns to Du Bois, focusing specifically on his conception of race. In what follows, I will provide an overview of the literature taking up Du Bois's conception of race, with particular emphasis on arguments for the role of constructivism in Du Bois's conception. First, I will briefly establish some foundational commitments in my reading of Du Bois. Then, I will reconstruct the dialogue in the secondary literature around Du Bois's conception of race, starting with Kwame Anthony Appiah and Lucius Outlaw and extending to incorporate more recent scholars. Through an engagement with

this literature, I piece together my reading of Du Bois's conception of race, as thoroughly constructivist[16] and responsive to political conditions and aims. With that background and interpretation established, I then turn to the wider context of racial categorization at the time and illustrate how a concern for mixed race informs the conception of race and blackness that Du Bois puts forth in (and beyond) "Conservation."

Grounding Commitments

Before I present an overview of the literature concerning this conception, it might be helpful to acknowledge my foundational commitments. Although his writings undergo some revision in this issue over his career, I read Du Bois as being relatively consistent in his conception of race. The consistent piece that is most important for my purposes is his emphasis on the cultural and constructed nature of race, as opposed to the scientific or biological. We get this view of race from Du Bois as early as his 1897 address "The Conservation of Races" and I will argue in subsequent chapters that these central elements are still present as late as *The Black Flame* trilogy in the late 1950s/early 1960s. In this social constructivist conception, Du Bois emphasizes the importance of shared history, experience, language, and habit in the formation of races.

At the same time, these shared foundational socio-cultural elements also occur in a context of white supremacy that places special import on "blood," and appearance. I argue that this context largely explains the pragmatic and rhetorical nature of Du Bois's references to black and Negro blood, when they appear. White supremacy as a fundamental and structuring set of beliefs, policies, and practices in some important ways 'creates' black people as the subhuman class of people in the United States. Du Bois utilizes a logic and language of black 'blood' to unite a potentially disparate population

of black Americans under a positive conception of blackness from within, as opposed to being defined from without by anti-black white supremacy.

I further argue that Du Bois's conception of race – the references to blood, and the larger political project for which it serves as the foundation – is crucially informed by the broader shift in racial categories from 1850-1910. With these larger shifts in mind, we can read Du Bois as working to create a new blackness that would combine free, slave, and mixed-race populations for purposes of an anti-racist political movement. In this context, Du Bois is interested in developing a notion of race that isn't reducible to white oppression or biology, one that can cope with the sense of defeat and create the conditions for striving and thriving for a new black community in the 20th century.

The Appiah/Outlaw Debate

As just mentioned, much of the literature around Du Bois's conception of race revolves around "The Conservation of Race," his 1897 address to the American Negro Academy. As Du Bois's title suggests, "Conservation" aims to provide an argument for the conservation of race, generally, and the Negro race, specifically. As I will discuss later, this places Du Bois's argument in direct contrast to other activist-intellectuals of the time whose solution to the problem of racism was to eliminate black people through assimilation and racial mixing. To make his argument for conserving races, Du Bois provides an overview of races in the abstract and the claim that the history of the world is a history of races. Du Bois also includes his now infamous definition of race as:

> A vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and

> involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life. (Du Bois, *Conservation*, 85)

This is the definition that Appiah systematically dismantles in his attempt to show that, despite Du Bois telling us at the outset of "Conservation" that race and racial difference is not biological, he fails to provide a conception of race that does not collapse back into 19th century racial science. In his article, Appiah takes apart each element of Du Bois's definition of race – blood, language, history, traditions, impulses, and strivings – and analyzes the extent to which each element can effective identify the members of racial groups, without relying on the assumption of a biological population.

Appiah discards language, impulses, and strivings from his analysis, since these are either clearly not shared among the entire population Du Bois is trying to pick out The "Romantic race," or cultures speaking Romance languages, for example, do not all speak the same language, nor are common impulses or strivings easy to access in empirical analysis. This leaves Appiah with blood, history, and traditions. Since blood clearly links to biology (similar to the hereditary interpretation of "family"), Appiah analyzes history and tradition to see if they can be the criteria to save Du Bois from scientific racialism.[17] Since common history and traditions rely on a race membership before they can be identified as common to the race, Appiah argues that Du Bois's use of history as defining criteria for race is circular and, as a result, "Whatever holds Du Bois' races together conceptually cannot be a common history; it is only because they are bound together that members of a race at different times can share a history at all" (Du Bois, *Conservation*, 27). Having gone through each criterion, Appiah concludes that "The

criterion Du Bois actually uses amounts to this: people are members of the same race if they share features in virtue of being descended largely from people of the same region" (Du Bois, *Conservation*, 29). This leaves Du Bois tied to the biological notion of race he sought to disavow, or else adrift and unable to provide a foundation for his claims about the importance of Negro striving and the provision of a unique spiritual message to the world.

Appiah, of course, has larger motivations informing his critique of Du Bois. As a racial anti-realist and eliminativist, Appiah believes (and is supported by the scientific literature) that races as we know them do not exist as identifiable biological populations, nor do they refer to cultural groups in the way ethnicities do. Moreover, because of the inaccuracy of talking about races and its pernicious effects in the form of racism, Appiah is among a group of race scholars who argue that we should cease to utilize "race" as a concept, term of analysis, label, or identity name, at all.[18] Appiah's analysis of "Conservation" can thereby be read as an attempt to establish the eliminativist position within the canon of African-American philosophy of race. Since Du Bois is one of the strongest proponents of racial conservation in the canon, Appiah's argument is, in part, an attempt to remove or reveal the foundations of contemporary philosophy of race and provoke a pressing conversation about the utility of race talk today.

The first response to Appiah's provocation is Lucius Outlaw's "'Conserve' Races?: In Defense of W.E.B. Du Bois" which he released in different iterations from 1992 until it's final publication in 1996 (Outlaw, 39-56). Outlaw's defense of Du Bois relies on two claims: 1) we should understand race as a *cluster concept* not reducible to any of its constitutive parts, and 2) race has important utility for racially oppressed

groups to identify their subordination and establish resources to combat it, and therefore should be kept.

In support of his cluster concept, Outlaw asserts that Appiah's analysis fails in part because he considers each part of Du Bois's definition of race in isolation, which is simply not how race functions. For this claim, Outlaw relies heavily on Michael Omi and Howard Winant's work on racial formation, especially their claim that "The meaning of 'race,' is socially determined and changes a as result of social struggle, and hence is irreducibly political" (Omi, 21). Outlaw takes this claim and builds on it to argue that "'Race,' then, would best be understood as a *cluster* concept which draws together under a single word references to biological, cultural, and geographical factors thought characteristics of a population" (Outlaw, 20). Not only does race "[refer] to heterogeneous complexes of socially normed biological and cultural characteristics," but Outlaw insists that "the biological features referred to when making racial distinctions are always *conscripted* into projects of cultural, political, and social construction. They are never simply given" (Outlaw, 21). Outlaw doesn't ignore the places in which Du Bois speaks of blood, family, or appearance; instead, he returns these references to their rightful place within socio-historical context, which imbues them with a dynamism unrecognized by Appiah.[19]

Perhaps even more important than his offer of the cluster concept, Outlaw's response to Appiah also points out that "Conservation" "is *not* simply – or even primarily – an effort devoted to definition and taxonomy. Rather, it is a decidedly *political* project…which is very much concerned with altering the negative valorizations of the Negro race" (Outlaw, 28). Outlaw grounds Du Bois's definition in the context of the

address, which sought (among other things) to address the real question of what African-Americans should do in the aftermath of Reconstruction and rise of white supremacy—Do they strive to offer a collective message to the world, or do they turn their efforts toward "self-obliteration" (Outlaw, 30)?[20] In the face of these questions and concerns over the very existence of black people in the United States, Outlaw writes:

> Du Bois seeks to mobilize and galvanize black folk (certainly the 'talented tenth' among them) into a scientifically informed, politically astute and effective force to combat oppressions that were rationalized with pernicious valorizations that had been inscribed in the notion of race. Crucial to this endeavor would be a sense of shared identity growing out of the recognition and appropriation of commonalities of a geographic race (history, language, culture more generally) (Outlaw, 29).

In the last stage of his argument, Outlaw thus reorients us to Du Bois's more sweeping and pragmatic goals of anti-racist political action and articulates the ways in which the definition of race he provides aims to establish a foundation that can go beyond mere description and serve as a generating force for his audience.

Beyond Appiah and Outlaw

Many of the responses that follow Outlaw take up his insights. Robert Gooding-Williams's 1996 article "Outlaw, Appiah, and Du Bois's 'The Conservation of Races'" (Gooding-Williams, *Philosophy*, 39-56) offers an even more thorough defense of Du Bois's definition as non-biological by emphasizing Du Bois's use of "generally" and

"always" within the description, which, in effect, says that common blood is only sometimes a marker of race (Gooding-Williams, *Philosophy,* 48) and places a much greater weight on Du Bois's description of the origin of spiritual differences as independent of biological differences. Through his analysis, Gooding-Williams further exonerates Du Bois's conception of race from Appiah's critique of biologism. Gooding-Williams, in fact, reinforces Outlaw's position that "The *point* of Du Bois's definition…is to offer an alternative to the scientific (physio-biological) definition of 'race' by providing a thoroughly historical and sociological definition… Du Bois's definition of 'race'…seems intended to represent race as a phenomenon that is in *essence* social, historical, and nonbiological" (Gooding-Williams, *Philosophy,* 49). Through an analysis of the section of "Conservation" which focuses on the origin of spiritual difference, Gooding-Williams makes the case that Du Bois,

> in effect…has attempted to adjust his definition of 'race' to his explanation of spiritual differences between races by intimating that, for the purposes of the historian and the sociologist, 'race' can be defined without reference to biological facts, and, therefore, without implicating the racial sciences' biological explanations of spiritual differences, which explanations he repudiates (Gooding-Williams, *Philosophy*, 49).

In addition to his support for a reading of Du Bois's conception of race as non-biological, Gooding-Williams also echoes Outlaw's emphasis on Du Bois's pragmatic use of race to galvanize a population for a political cause. Gooding-Williams reinforces

the role of rhetoric in Du Bois's word choice, which further explains Du Bois's use of some racial terms Appiah seems to consider inaccurate and misleading. In Gooding-Williams's words, "For Du Bois, the political mobilization of African Americans (in part, through the formation of the American Negro Academy) required the rhetorical mobilization of such signifiers as 'Negro' and 'race' because these signifiers were the signifiers in terms of which African Americans comprehended themselves as a subordinated group" (Gooding-Williams, *Philosophy*, 51). Clearly for Outlaw and Gooding-Williams, the specter of Appiah's anti-realism and eliminativism regarding race are primary motivating factors for their defense of Du Bois.

We see an even more explicit engagement of this political interpretation of Du Bois's conception of race in Paul Taylor's 2000 article "Appiah's Uncompleted Argument: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Reality of Race." Taylor articulates his worry directly:

> My concern derives from the concrete worry that Appiah's metaphysical sleight-of-hand obscures the need for a real debate about the merits of racialized and race-based practices and institutions. My sense is that once we quit kicking up the dust with arguments about the alleged non-existence of race, we'll be able to see how much work remains to be done on the ethics of racial identification (Taylor, 104).

Departing from Outlaw's *cluster concept* and Gooding-Williams's focus on spiritual difference, Taylor puts more stake in the role of "parallel individual histories,"

as opposed to "abstract group histories," in Du Bois's conception of race (Taylor, 108). Taylor suggests that: "Du Bois is arguing that certain persons comprise the group we know as the black race because, and to the extent that, they have parallel individual histories – that is, relevantly similar individual experiences of dealing with certain social and historical conditions" (Taylor, 108). Taylor thus takes it more seriously that Du Bois was trying to describe race in such a way that it would pick out the populations we typically think of as races (black, white, etc.), while managing to help identify oppressions based on this racialization and offer affected communities both hope for and a mission to change these conditions. In Taylor's view there is an inextricable link between identifying the groups we typically think of a races and identifying the oppression they've faced, such that you cannot rectify racial injustice without the use of race, nor identify race without attention to injustice.[21] Taylor has elsewhere argued that we should read Du Bois as a pragmatist, and he applies the same reading to his conception of race:

> Du Bois was a pragmatist, which means in part that we should interpret his argument in light of at least certain Deweyan convictions: that judgments, even metaphysical judgments, are hypotheses offered in the context of specific situations; that such hypotheses are to be assessed for the extent to which they facilitate human efforts to cope with these situations; and that judgment hypotheses are motivated by and laden with the same values and interests that distinguish situations, values that are sometimes political (Taylor, 111).

The active nature of Du Bois's conception of race as a definition that is also *doing* something and allowing for the possibility of certain forms of action, is evidence, for Taylor, of a pragmatism in Du Bois. Reading him as a pragmatist can allow us to evaluate his conception of race on the basis both in terms of its truth and its political efficacy, with acknowledgement that truth and political efficacy are inextricably linked (especially for Du Bois).

It is also not surprising that Taylor, given his interest and particular focus on the utility of race for identifying and ameliorating racial oppression, looks even more to Du Bois's formulation of race in his 1940 autobiography *Dusk of Dawn*, which is captured by his pithy phrase "'the black man is a person who must ride Jim Crow in Georgia" (Du Bois 1940, *Dusk*, 153). From this, Taylor extrapolated Du Bois's definition of blackness as having:

> the experience of being seen and treated in certain ways. And the notion of relevantly similar experiences derives its content from this experience and treatment – as well as from the forms of common life and political solidarity that have developed within the boundaries laid down by social institutions like Jim Crow (Taylor, 109).

While it is true that Du Bois's conception of race does stem in part from the experience of being seen or treated as black and subordinated as a result (what I will call a negative conception of race), we have textual reasons in 1897 and 1940 to read Du Bois as trying to provide a positive conception as well, wherein race (especially blackness)

transcends the experience of oppression. Chike Jeffers offers a compelling defense of this view in his 2013 article "The Cultural Theory of Race: Yet Another Look at Du Bois's 'The Conservation of Races.'"

Jeffers begins from the established consensus about the social construction of race, or the "unreality" of race in the biological or anthropological sense (Jeffers, 405). He then identifies the shift in dialogue to the question of why, if at all, we might continue to use the language of race if it's not a scientifically "real" category. As we've seen, each scholar we have encountered has had a particular interest in answering this question: for Appiah, talk of race is inaccurate and pernicious; for Outlaw, Gooding-Williams, and Taylor, we still need the language of race because it helps us see something real (experiences, oppression, cultures). Jeffers is firmly situated in the camp of the conservationists, but identifies among this group

> a noteworthy ambiguity in the philosophical claim that race is a social construction—namely, the ambiguity between a focus on politics and a focus on culture. Against the political focus that is dominant in contemporary social constructionist thought, Du Bois demands that we pay greater attention to race's cultural dimension (Jeffers, 404).

In his reading, Jeffers sees Du Bois as first rejecting a purely biological notion of race as a set of biologically-determined characteristics that have historically painted black populations in a degrading light, but not dismissing race out of hand as entirely unreal.[22] In fact, in the place of the biological conception, Jeffers argues we receive Du Bois's

political notion of race in which "the substance of race, the only basis for the division of humanity into distinct races, is the power dynamic separating people into dominant and subordinate groups" (Jeffers, 409). This is precisely the notion of race we read in Taylor's account – race as a category for oppression. Even though this aspect of Du Bois's conception has distinct political utility for addressing instances of oppression, Jeffers cautions us against reading this as Du Bois's sole, or even primary, definition of race. As someone who thinks race designates something more than the negative aspects of a racialized experience (i.e., domination and subordination), Jeffers leans heavily on other elements of Du Bois's definition that aren't reducible to symptoms of oppression (e.g., racism, segregation, etc.). Jeffers points to Du Bois's "talk of 'traditions' and 'ideals of life'" and claims that this aspect of his definition "evokes a different type of social and historical reality: the existence of distinct cultures" (Jeffers, 411). It is this distinct culture, then, that Du Bois is arguing should be intentionally preserved. Jeffers rightly acknowledges Du Bois's use of both political and cultural notions of race, that is, race is defined, in part, by historical and ongoing differences in power, and cultures have developed within these constraints whose meaning and value surpass the oppression they face. Jeffers articulates how Du Bois's overall definition brings these two elements together. It is worth quoting Jeffers's analysis at length, here. He writes:

> We can and should accept, in other words, a political account of the origin of race, according to which racial divisions as we know them today are the ideological and institutional products of modern European expansion, with its expropriation of non-European lands and subjugation of non-European peoples. On this view,

> the origin of something called the black race is to be located in the enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans and the colonization of Africa. But this political account of how people of various ethnicities first came to inhabit a racial identity known as "Negro," "African," or "black" is, I believe, compatible with the judgment that black identity subsequent to the point of origin is an identity partly shaped by the agency, creativity, and traditional cultures of those who came to inhabit it and, as such, it has distinctive cultural meaning and value which would be sadly lost were black people to try to fit as neatly as possible into the contours of a European-derived cultural framework (Jeffers, 419-420).

Jeffers's reading of Du Bois's conception of race thus accounts for his political project of uplift and equality, as well as the role of culture in both motivating and maintaining that project and offering an affirmation of the value added even beyond the fight for equality. This makes the most sense out of Du Bois's emphasis on "strivings" in his argument that the Negro race needs to conserve itself for the purposes of delivering its spiritual message to the world. Yes, the deliverance of that spiritual message is meant to bear out in material and political equality for black folks, but Jeffers argues it still has an added value beyond its instrumental utility. Overall, emphasizing the cultural and political aspects of race allows Jeffers to draw from Du Bois a possible value in maintaining race beyond an eradication of racism.

A Consolidated Conception

As mentioned at the outset, this conversation about Du Bois's conception of race (especially as offered in "Conservation") has dominated philosophical discussions of Du

Bois's work and acted as a foundation for contemporary scholars to stake their ground with regard to the relationship between race and biological science, the reality or unreality of race as a result, and whether or not racial categories and race talk should be preserved. My reading of Du Bois is also necessarily situated in this conversation. First, I take on the consensus view that racial categories themselves have no grounding in biology, or that there is no scientific way to identify the populations we would consider races. I further argue, with Outlaw, Gooding-Williams, Taylor, and Jeffers that Du Bois also adopted this consensus view and does not, contra Appiah, rely on the received notions of scientific race in the 19th century. Between the arguments provided by these scholars (and others), there is overwhelming compelling evidence to suggest that Du Bois was actively repudiating racist pseudo-science in "Conservation" and beyond, and that he is able to account for racial difference through socio-historical and cultural means that don't rely on biologically distinct groups.

Along with these same group of scholars, I also read Du Bois as a realist about race and firm believer that races (as sites of cultural production and value) should be maintained at least until the eradication of race-based oppression – but likely beyond, as well. On this view, Du Bois's definition of race is not merely (or even primarily) descriptive but is instead deeply normative and aligned with a political project that is responding to a set of historical conditions. I agree with Jeffers's assessment that acknowledging the political nature of Du Bois's definition is the most important part of Outlaw's initial response to Appiah (Jeffers, 407), and that responses to Appiah's critique are least successful when they engage through Appiahs' terms. For example, I think both Outlaw and Gooding-Williams are too tied to Appiah's logical analysis and ontological

project, which are not aligned with what Du Bois was trying to achieve in "Conservation" – namely a redescription of race (particularly blackness) that was directly counter to the racist pseudo-science of the time and trying to provide, at the very least, a conception of blackness that was coherent, affirming, and capable of mobilizing a racialized community in political action against their own oppression. When we see Du Bois's definition in this light, it makes most sense to follow Taylor and evaluate the success and fidelity of his conception as a pragmatist hypothesis that bears out in practice and experience, not an abstract logic puzzle evaluated independently of its goals in context.

Retrieving Context

While my reading takes on several of these earlier insights, I find that attention to context is lacking in several of these arguments. It's possible that there is less contextual emphasis in these articles because of the tone and area of concern set by Appiah, which is rooted squarely in contemporary times and concerns and uses Du Bois as a way to articulate and revive a conversation about categories. If we want to provide a thorough philosophical reading of Du Bois, though, context is critical. Taking up the insights of these other scholars and reading Du Bois as providing a pragmatist conception of race that is trying to redescribe the world in such a way as to promote particular forms of political action, we need to understand what questions and literature he was responding to, what the political project actually was, why he defines and phrases race in these particular ways. I argue that a deeper dive into the historical context reveals new dimensions of Du Bois's thought. We can look to work by Wilson Moses and Robert Bernasconi for examples of such dives and the discoveries they yield.

In his 1993 article titled “W.E.B. Du Bois's ‘The Conservation of Races’ and Its Context: Idealism, Conservatism and Hero Worship,” Wilson Moses, an intellectual historian, argues that Du Bois’s worship of Alexander Crummell and his alignment against Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington deeply informs his “Conservation” address. Moses points out that the American Negro Academy was convened by Alexander Crummell and others in the wake of Douglass’s death, as Booker T. Washington was on the rise as Douglass’s successor. Crummell, in particular, was strongly opposed to Douglass’s emphasis on individualism and his suggestion that the solution to the Negro problem was the dissolution of the black population through the process of race-mixing (Moses, 282). Washington, serving as heir-apparent to Douglass’s leadership, presented a continuation of the same laissez-faire individualism Crummell disagreed with Douglass about, as well as a more thorough and threatening anti-intellectualism. In response to these elements of Washington’s leadership and strategy for black communities, Crummell founded the American Negro Academy (ANA) and served as its first president. The ANA was designed to promote racial conservation (contra Douglass) through guided leadership by a vanguard of educated black elites (contra Washington) (Moses, 281). Du Bois respected and revered Crummell and was very familiar with Crummell’s stances, which closely aligned with his own at the time. It is not surprising, then, to see Du Bois articulate in “Conservation,” Crummell’s central tenets of a racialism cast in idealist spiritual terms, strong conservationism in service of racial collectivism and separatism (Moses, 277), and emphasis on intellectual leadership. Du Bois’s goal in “Conservation,” Moses argues, was “to establish his credentials as a race man in a gathering made up of race men and presided over by the venerable

Alexander Crummell. It was to repudiate the "individualistic . . . laissez-faire philosophy" of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, and to manifest support for the collectivist race aims that Crummell had expressed in his oratory earlier that day" (Moses, 289).

As well as the important connection to Crummell explored by Moses, Robert Bernasconi's "'Our Duty to Conserve': W.E.B. Du Bois's Philosophy of History in Context" places even more emphasis on the pressing questions and concerns at the time "Conservation" was given. The first of these concerns was motivated by "certain social Darwinists [who] had recently pressed the issue of the survival of the Negro race, as it was called, in North America" and, as Bernasconi argues "it was against them, as well as Frederick Douglass's pursuit of assimilation through amalgamation, that Du Bois wrote his essay" (Bernasconi, 520). The central question of black survival was cast by Du Bois as a question of whether black people in the United States had a "distinct mission" that would justify their continued racial identity, or if they should go the way of "self-obliteration" through race-mixing.[23] As Bernasconi explains, "It is with reference to this dichotomy, either a distinct mission or self-obliteration, that Du Bois framed his address. Du Bois was thus concerned in his essay not with conserving the language of race but with conserving African Americans as a race at a time when they were made to feel under threat by the white population and particularly by the science it promoted" (Bernasconi, 520). In place of white racial science, then, Du Bois offered a more historical and spiritual account of difference that did not fundamentally reject popular conceptions of race but cast it in terms of a philosophy of hope (Bernasconi, 520).

Not only does Bernasconi argue that Du Bois was moving conversations of race beyond racial science, but he further argues, along with Moses, that Du Bois was attempting to ingratiate himself with Crummell and his cause by attacking Frederick Douglass and resolving a central conflict between mixed and non-mixed African Americans. As Bernasconi points out, "It seems more likely—indeed, in keeping with the language of the day—that with the term self-obliteration Du Bois had in mind the impact of race mixing on the black population" (Bernasconi, 531). And this strategy was particularly linked to Douglass's legacy, because "Douglass not only foresaw a future for the United States in which race mixing prospered, but he also favored dividing those blacks who were racially pure from those who were mixed, so as to think of them as having a separate identity" (Bernasconi, 529). Du Bois was wise to attack Douglass on this front, not only because of Crummell's well-known history of insistence on conserving racial groups and racial organizations, but also because of Crummell's critique of mulatto superiority, Douglass's strategy of assimilation via race mixing, and mounting concern that mulattoes were potentially harmful to the longevity of the black race.[24] Bernasconi reminds us that "The tension between so-called mulattoes and racially pure Negroes was acute at this time" and further argues that "Du Bois in part wrote [*Conservation*] in an effort to transcend the physical differences between mixed-race and pure-race Negroes by having them both rally around the same ideals and, more decisively, by having them recognize the similarity of their experiences in a society that lumped them together simply as Negroes" (Bernasconi, 530).

I agree with Bernasconi's argument and would even make the stronger claim that a *central* purpose of Du Bois's "Conservation" address was to resolve this tension

between the racially mixed and racially pure Black Americans, under a larger banner of racial uplift in response to white supremacy. In order to make this stronger claim, however, I need to present more of the history of these two populations within black America and articulate why the turn of the 20th century was such a profound moment of tension and shift.

Mixed Histories

While many race scholars have provided summaries of Black history in the United States and some of those histories include mention of racial mixing and mixed-race figures within that history, Joel Williamson's 1980 monograph *New People* remains the authoritative text on the subject of mixed-race Black history in the United States. Like the other historical survey texts that follow it, including F. James Davis's *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition* and Kathleen Odell's *From Black to Biracial: Transforming Racial Identity among Americans*, Williamson narrates the history of mixed-race African Americans through distinct periods and geographies and traces the ways that "what begins in the colonial period as mulatto history and culture ends in the twentieth century as Negro history and culture."[25] My own aim is to firmly ground a reading of Du Bois's "Conservation" in this history and shift from mulattoness to blackness for a distinct population of mixed-race people in the South.

Even though "the upper South, clearly, was the heartland of mulattoness in America" because it supported more than half of the total recorded mulatto population in the nation, and 2/3 of the mulatto population in the South (Williamson, 25), this mixed race population were largely the product of early colonial liaisons between lower-class indentured white laborers and some of the first black slaves. As a result, even though the

mixed-race population was much larger in the Upper South, they did not have economic or political power. For the purposes of situating Du Bois, I am most interested in the Lower South (South Carolina down through the Gulf States), since the mixed-race populations of these states were more likely to have been born to the white slave master class and received economic and educational investment from their wealthy, powerful parents. Because the black enslaved population so significantly outnumbered the white planter class, free mulatto communities before 1850 were treated as a third racial class that acted as an allied buffer to protect white interests (Williamson, 15, 22-23).[26] As a result, even though there were fewer mulattoes in the Lower South, they were the most powerful group of African Americans in the slaveholding states. They were the most likely to have received an education, been apprenticed in skilled trades (Williamson, 19), and own land, and were thus the generational forebears of the wealthy, educated mulatto elites who comprised many of Du Bois's "Talented Tenth." This is also the period in mixed-race history in which Frederick Douglass came to prominence. Before 1850 "mulatto" (understood as mixed black/white individuals) existed in a racially fluctuating space – always in relation to blackness, but not fully identical to it– defined largely in response to white interests.

After 1850, those white interests and, as a result, the relationship between "mulatto" and "black" begins to shift dramatically. There were a number of factors that facilitated the shift in mulatto status after 1850. With the expansion West came an increase in the number of mulatto slaves and the domestic slave trade that, when combined with steadily decreasing rates of manumission for any slaves, led to an increase in the mulatto slave population overall and the solidification of the one-drop rule (i.e.,

that any black ancestry meant that a person was black) (Korgen, 15). At the same time the institution and practice of slavery, generally, was receiving increased scrutiny and criticism from abolitionists in the North, which led to the rise of 19th century racial pseudo-science to justify slavery based on differences in speciation and human hierarchies. Such emphasis on and denigration of blackness also required that white populations (even and especially the planter class) close ranks against all African Americans, which ended any remaining allied relationship and the preferential treatment mulatto communities received in the South. As Williamson puts it:

> Essentially, what happened in the changeover was that the dominant white society moved from semi-acceptance of the free mulattoes, especially in the lower South, to outright rejection. As mulatto communities in the 1850s confronted an increasingly hostile white world implementing increasingly stringent rules against them in the form either of laws of social pressures, they themselves move from a position of basic sympathy with the white world to one of guarded antagonism (Williamson, 62).

The same forces that cast mulatto elites out of their alignment with white culture and interests and lumped into the general black population, entailed that mulatto communities and black communities began to have largely identical experiences under white supremacy. That is, slavery became whiter, but no less harsh with the increase in mulatto slaves (Williamson, 63), and free mulatto and free black populations experienced the same racist violence and closure of opportunity (Williamson, 64). This foundation of

shared experience continued into and through the Civil War and, as Williamson argues "the fusion between mulattoes and blacks that had begun in late slavery and accelerated during the war came to fruition during Reconstruction" (Williamson, 78). During Reconstruction, the mulattoes who had fled North between 1850 and 1860 came back to the Lower South as teachers, relief workers, missionaries, and skilled laborers, which made the Lower South the primary location of alliance between mulatto and black groups (Williamson, 79-80). In this space, then:

> Southern black leadership tended to be ex-slave and advocated for greater economic opportunity. Mulatto leaders from the North and upper South who came to the lower South wanted full admission into American society and pushed for integration in public facilities. The two groups of leadership worked together to achieve their aims" (Williamson, 81).

Speaking to the strength and effectiveness of this alliance, Williamson also notes that, "It was precisely where Negro numbers were high and mulatto leadership was most concentrated and aggressive that Reconstruction had its longest and more significant life" (Williamson, 81). Beyond the realm of politics, Williamson also describes this time as the early forging of a new Negro community, one that takes the very best of mulatto sophistication, resource, and knowledge of the white world and partners it with a uniquely black culture born in Southern slavery (Williamson, 88).

Du Bois in Context

It is precisely in this period of time, 1885, that Du Bois himself traveled from Massachusetts to study at Fisk University in Tennessee. Deeply moved by his encounter with the South and the explosive celebration of varied blackness he encountered there, (Du Bois 2007, *Darkwater*, 9). Du Bois, a Northern self-identified mulatto, firmly allied himself with black America. He even followed the overwhelming trend of the time and taught in a rural black schoolhouse the summer after he graduated from Fisk in 1890. With this context considered, we can see how Du Bois might be perfectly positioned to aid the absorption of both mulatto and black into a new Negro group. He was born in 1868, after the dissolution of mulatto and white ties and within the context of a de-facto one-drop rule, after the Civil War, and in the midst of mulatto and black cooperation to create a new South that is not yet without hope. Du Bois inherits the vestigial categories, assumptions, mistrusts, and material differences that accompany generations of divisiveness between black and mulatto communities (driven by white interests). He no longer believes, as Douglass might have, that absorption into whiteness was possible, let along preferable, and he sees how creative collaboration and kinship between black and mulatto groups can help both attain mutual aims.

This firm alliance and identity between black and mulatto populations was not yet settled at the time Du Bois gave the *Conservation* address to the American Negro Academy. As noted, before, Crummell and others had strong suspicions of mulatto influence, just as mulatto elites were trying to sort out what to make of their privileges and oppressions in the context of new black allegiance. Everyone, regardless of side, felt the press of the rising white supremacist backlash that began at the end of Reconstruction and would reach its new height by the 1920s. This new white supremacy, grounded in the

explicit one-drop rule and spurred by impoverished hatred from lower-class whites, did not see mulatto and black Americans as distinct – they all became Negroes. This absorption is clearly seen in the disappearance of mulatto categories from the U.S. Census by 1930, a category (or multiple categories) that had been in existence in shifting forms since 1850. It is precisely this shared context of white supremacy that Du Bois is drawing on to create a foundation of shared experience, from which a striving for uplift can be formed and divisiveness can be overcome in favor of unity.

In "Conservation", Du Bois is trying to develop a new blackness that can describe, identify, and motivate a disparate mass of people to fight against their own extinction. His definition of race is expansive so as to not only capture, but create, a people already struggling into existence. It was not, as many have noted, a merely theoretical definition meant to be taken in the abstract. Du Bois is trying to knit together a set of conditions, histories, and experiences that are once deeply defined by white racism, since it had, in fact, created a shared condition for all African Americans (mixed or non), while also transcendent of this condition. This, I argue, is why you see references to "shared blood" and "family" throughout "Conservation" – they serve to pick out the group of people who have been so identified and affected by racism on these grounds. Though an incomplete and fickle component, color and blood have always been deeply and specifically embedded into blackness. Importantly, however, Du Bois does not rest with a racial identity prescribed by racism, but he includes history, as well as language, impulses, and traditions in an effort to secure a foundation for a race they can embrace, invest in, and be proud of.

At the same time, even though Du Bois is responding to a shifting context of white supremacy (and the ways in which that has also changed racial categories), he does not argue merely for the constitution and conservation of a race – his race – as a purely instrumental response to white supremacy. He instead argues for a vision of his race as a people with a mission upon which the fate of humanity depends (Bernasconi, 523). It is crucial for the hope and survival of his community that blackness is not reducible to oppression, that it is not a mere reflection of white supremacy itself, so Du Bois offers the opportunity of a spiritual gift instead.

As argued by many of the scholars discussed, Du Bois's conception of race in "Conservation" is a profoundly political conception – Du Bois is not merely describing race in the abstract, he is trying to *do* something with this definition. He is trying to generate a political community capable of recognizing and affirming itself and striving for political aims and not reducible to biology or the racism which spurred that science. I further claim, as an extension of Bernasconi's argument, that part of what Du Bois is *doing* with this definition is attempting to offer a foundation for a new conception of blackness itself, one capacious enough to capture both mulatto and black communities, articulate shared experiences, and motivate a shared political response. I argue that a concern about mixed race and its relationship to blackness was a central motivation for Du Bois's conception of race, not a peripheral influence. In "Conservation" – and extended through his oeuvre – Du Bois continued to try to knit together two groups under a new blackness and provide mulatto individuals (and communities) with a role to play in the uplift of their people. For a more thorough exploration of the role mixed race plays in the rest of Du Bois's work, I will turn to primary texts in Chapter 3.

Notes

[15] Paul Taylor went so far as to say when Appiah "launched his project by taking W.E.B. Du Bois as one of his principal interlocutors, he has also helped rescue an important theorist from the shadows of philosophical neglect" (Taylor, 2000, 103).

[16] As opposed to biological or otherwise essentialist.

[17] Appiah even comments "If he has fully transcended the scientific notion, what is the role of this talk about "blood"?" (Appiah, 25).

[18] See for an overview of this position: Glasgow, Joshua. "A Third Way in the Race Debate." *Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2006, pp. 163–185.

[19] Outlaw says elsewhere "Du Bois took care not to characterize a race by regarding the defining features (physical characteristics, geography, cultural practices and traditions) as essential and invariant and, when taken together, as severally necessary, connected conjunctively, and, collectively jointly sufficient" (Outlaw, 27). This is opposed to cluster concept, which refers "to a group of persons who share, and are thereby distinguished by, several properties taken *dis*junctively" (Outlaw, 28).

[20] Self-obliteration follows from Frederick Douglass's argument for assimilation through miscegenation – the disappearance of blackness due to race-mixing. There were similar views motivated by other Darwinians at the time, but Douglass was the primary specter for Du Bois and the American Negro Academy.

[21] Taylor also points out Appiah's awareness of this same point: "Appiah says himself that "what blacks in the West . . . have mostly in common is the fact that they are perceived-both by themselves and by others-as belonging together in the same race, and this common race is used by others as the basis for discriminating against them" (Taylor, 2000, 109).

[22] "It therefore seems to me that we are not dealing with a simple dismissal of race as a myth but, rather, a position that sees the falsehoods of mainstream racial discourse as ways of rationalizing and reinforcing the all-too-real materiality of institutionalized oppression" (Jeffers, 409).

[23] "The choice between, on the one hand, affirming race identity in terms of a "distinct mission" and, on the other hand, acquiescing in the "self-obliteration" of the race should not be confused with the choice between separatism and assimilation that the preceding generation of African Americans, such as Douglass, had been faced with or, at least, thought they had been. The door leading to racial integration had been slammed shut in the faces of African Americans…By the same token, the possibility of the self-obliteration of the race no longer primarily meant the abandonment of race consciousness as a result of a growing sense of human brotherhood, as it had done in Douglass's day, but the threat of "self-obliteration" meant extinction as a result of race mixing" (Bernasconi, 520).

[24] Bernasconi grounds this concern in the 1896 work of Frederick Hoffman, which "argued that the population of African Americans was declining and that they would soon

face extinction or obliteration unless the race became more independent" (Bernasconi, 533).

[25] In *New People*, Williamson utilizes the following naming conventions for the different groups he discusses: Black refers to unmixed people (or people of no visible mixture) of African descent; Mulatto refers to anyone with visible black/white mixture; and Negro refers to both the black and mulatto population. Although mulatto and Negro are both antiquated terms, they were engaged at the time and throughout Williamson's text, and so they will appear in my summary and analysis of his work (Williamson, xii).

[26] See also: Korgen, Kathleen Odell. *From Black to Biracial: Transforming Racial Identity among Americans*. Praeger, 1998. p. 13.

IV: THE PLACE OF MIXED RACE IN DU BOIS'S WORK

Even though a discussion of Du Bois's *Conservation* in context reveals the influence of mixed race on his conception of race, a more thorough exploration of Du Bois's oeuvre illustrates how this influence expands beyond his early career and informs other aspects of his thought. Looking at the ways in which mixed race factors in Du Bois's work enables us to see its centrality to Du Bois's thought and allows us to take him up as a mixed-race thinker – a thinker who both is mixed-race and whose thought takes up that identity or location in critically important ways.

While most surveys of Du Bois's work move chronologically through this life, to best show the development of his thought over time, I will present my case in a different order, starting with the most clear and compelling evidence of mixed race in Du Bois's life and thought and then showing how similar ideas exist throughout his canon. More specifically, I will begin by exploring his 1940 text *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*. I will then move to the 1903 *Souls of Black Folk,* then 1920's *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, and finally volume two of his historical fiction trilogy *The Black Flame*, *Mansart Builds a School* (1959). Taken together, these disparate projects written over the span of 56 years are the parts of a Du Bois who came to define his life, work, and problem through an experience of mixed race. They give us the mixed-race Du Bois.

Dusky Dawn

Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept is, as the subtitle suggests, a hybrid of autobiography and philosophical reflection. As noted by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his introduction to the 2017 edition, this is one among many

autobiographies Du Bois supplies in his lifetime and like many of the others, he does not provide any real personal information or details about his life outside of his work as a 'race man' (Du Bois, *Dusk*, xxx). Du Bois, instead, utilizes autobiography to help give a literal face and meaning to the problem of race, which serves to educate his white audiences, while providing greater representation and conceptual articulation to his black ones. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois tells us he has "written then what is meant to be not so much my autobiography as the autobiography of a concept of race" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, xxxii). As one might assume, this book provides a chronological overview of Du Bois's life as it relates to his knowledge and conception of race – from early childhood, wherein he experienced a dawning realization of racialized difference, to learning about the race problem at Fisk in the South, and then to greater study and scientific understanding in Harvard University, University of Berlin, and University of Pennsylvania.[27] And then, at Chapter 5, there is a break in the chronology and Du Bois shifts to define a conception of race through his family genealogy.

Chapter 5 of *Dusk of Dawn*, "The Concept of Race," provides the most straightforward, sustained, and compelling case for the centrality of Du Bois's mixed race in his thinking about race. Within this chapter, Du Bois provides a sustained acknowledgment of his own multiracial ancestry, the changing/changed theoretical conditions for racial identification over the span of his life, and an account of his (and his great-grandfather's) identification as Negro, which reveals the contingent nature of racial identity for persons with mixed-race backgrounds.

Identity

Du Bois's first acknowledgment of his own multiraciality in the "Concept of Race" occurs in the context of a class he took with Heinrich von Treitschke in Germany. Du Bois explains:

> Even when the matter of mixed races was touched upon their evident and conscious inferiority was mentioned. I can never forget that morning in the class of the great Heinrich von Treitschke in Berlin…Clothed in black, big, bushy-haired, peering sharply at the class, his words rushed out in a flood: 'Mulattoes,' he thundered, 'are inferior.' I almost felt his eyes boring into me, although he had probably not noticed me. 'Their actions show it,' he asserted (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 50).

With his experience of Treitschke's eyes boring into him, Du Bois identifies himself as an object of Treitschke's critique, due to his racial background. In the context of *Dusk of Dawn*, this is the first time Du Bois identifies himself as mulatto – albeit implicitly.

Shortly thereafter, Du Bois even more clearly and importantly articulates a complex evolution of his racial identification. He writes:

> I was born a member of a colored family, so too I was born a member of the colored race. That was obvious and no definition was needed. Later I adopted the designation 'Negro' for the race to which I belong. It seemed definite and logical. At the same time, I was of course aware that all members of the Negro race were not black and that the pictures of my race which were current were not authentic nor fair portraits (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 50).

Beyond the Trietschke account, this passage provides an even more compelling account of the process behind his racial identification. 'Colored,' here performs two functions:1) it helps denote the given nature of a non-white identity Du Bois inherits as a child (as opposed to the intentionally taken-up "Negro" identity, which gained traction closer to the turn of the 20th century) and 2) colored occupies a space adjacent to monoracial blackness, an identity that is not fully separate from blackness, but was a popular designation for mixed racial communities of the time. In this passage, then, we see Du Bois claim awareness of his non-white, but not fully black identity as a youth, and intentionally adopt a 'Negro'/identity in adulthood.[28] Du Bois also recognizes the differences and variations within the Negro community and claims that the monolithic image of black America lacks accuracy and fairness as a result of ignoring those differences. This might help explain, too, why Du Bois is so intent on providing color descriptions when introducing nearly every person and character in his autobiographical and fictional work;[29] he is attempting to correct this monolithic misconception and celebrate the diversity within black communities, while also implicitly arguing that blackness is capacious enough to include such multiracial variety.

Interestingly, however, his celebration of differences within the black community and other claims about the impossibility of scientific race[30] do not drive Du Bois to disavow blackness or attempt to transcend race. In fact, Du Bois acknowledges this popular conversation and strategy within mixed-race black groups when he writes:

> Despite everything, race lines were not fixed and fast. Within the Negro group especially there were people of all colors. Then too, there were plenty of my

> colored friends who resented my ultra 'race' loyalty and ridiculed it. They pointed out that I was not a 'Negro,' but a mulatto; that I was not a Southerner but a Northerner, and my object was to be an American and not a Negro; that race distinction must go. I agreed with this in part and as an ideal, but I saw it leading to inner racial distinction in the colored group (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 51).

This is one of the most important pieces of textual evidence that Du Bois wanted his audience to be aware of his mixed-race identity, as it makes his decision to become a Negro and work with and on behalf of that racial group even more salient. Through this passage, Du Bois also offers a critique of his acquaintances in similar racial positions who were more interested in transcending race to become 'American' and did not see themselves as part of a larger racial struggle alongside black communities. Notably they were creating a distinction that would reduce the power of both groups to pursue equity in the context of white supremacy.[31] In an effort, then, to do justice to both the difference within the Negro group and its coherence in the face of such difference, Du Bois turns to a genealogical exploration of his family as an illustration of the meaning of race.

Genealogy

In Du Bois's sustained treatment of his family genealogy, he directly acknowledges the role of white and black "blood" in the Du Bois side of his family, and of the interracial contact through which his black maternal line came to be. To justify his turn to genealogy, Du Bois writes,

> I early began to take a direct interest in my own family as a group and became curious as to that physical descent which for so long I had taken for granted quite unquestioningly. But I did not at first think of any but my Negro ancestors I knew little and care less of the white forbears of my father. But this chauvinism gradually changed. There is, of course, nothing more fascinating than the question of the various types of mankind and their intermixture" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 52).

He goes on to claim,

> We have not only not studied race and race mixture in America, but we have tried almost by legal process to stop such study. It is for this reason that it has occurred to me just here to illustrate the way in which Africa and Europe have been united in my family. There is nothing unusual about this interracial history. It has been duplicated thousands of times; but on the one hand, white folks have bitterly resented even a hint of the facts of this intermingling; while black folk have recoiled in natural hesitation and affected disdain in admitting what they know (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 52).

His genealogy is thus framed to address a great silence in conversations about blackness, whiteness, and their relation, which had been kept in place by both sides largely in the interest of self-preservation in the context of white supremacy. Of course, by 1940 there had been scores of volumes written about mulattoes, race mixture, and the worry and promise of passing from black to white. However, there were still insights to be gained

by exploring the phenomena from inside a particular family, especially the family of such a prominent race leader as Du Bois. In this vein, then, he notes that his "known ancestral family, therefore, consisted of eight or more persons...They were divided into whites, black and mulattoes, most of them being mulattoes" (Du Bois, Dusk, 52-53). This declaration early on sets us up to read his genealogy as a multiracial genealogy and the resulting conclusions about the race concept as deeply informed by mixed-race.

Alexander and Du Boisian Inheritance

Since, as Du Bois mentions, he spent more time considering his black Burghardt family than his more racially mixed paternal side,[32] his exploration of the Du Bois lineage tells us much more about the impact of intermixture on his conception of race. I will focus, as Du Bois does, primarily on the story he tells of the Du Bois clan, which begins with his "paternal great-grandfather, Dr. James Du Bois" who "was white" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 53). After moving to the Bahamas to run a plantation, Dr. James "had one of his slaves as his common-law wife…Of this couple, two sons were born, Alexander and John…[who] were white enough in appearance to give no inkling of their African descent" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 53). Dr. James brought both boys to the New England for their education after the death of their mother. After the unexpected death of Dr. James Du Bois, the sons' "connection with the white Du Bois family ceased suddenly, and was never renewed…" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 53) both boys were left without property, money, or the social capital of their father and extended white family and were quickly pulled from school and apprenticed. Du Bois has no further record of Alexander's brother, John, but notes that Alexander, his grandfather, "became a rebel, bitter at his lot in life, resentful at being classed as a Negro and yet implacable in his attitude toward whites" (Du Bois,

Dusk, 53). This glimpse of his grandfather's early life helps illustrate the close and complex interactions of (primarily) white fathers with their mixed-race children before the Civil War. Similar to the story of some mixed-race communities in the Deep South, Alexander experienced a close familial relationship with his white father who claimed and cared for both brothers, but their race and illegitimacy were reason enough to eject him from his father's white family and whiteness itself.

Despite this rejection, Du Bois describes Alexander's available choice in this position and offers the possibility:

> If Alexander Du Bois, following the footsteps of Alexander Hamilton, had come from the West Indies to the United States, stayed with the white group and married and begotten children among them, anyone in after years who had suggested his Negro descent would have been unable to prove it and quite possibly would have been laughed at, subject to scorn, or sued for libel (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 53).

In other words, Alexander could have still passed into whiteness by continued contact and marriage into the white world. Instead, however, "Alexander Du Bois did differently from Hamilton. He married into the colored group and his oldest son allied himself with a Negro clan but four generations removed from Africa" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 53).[33] This oldest son, Alfred, is Du Bois's father, whom Du Bois describes as a "throwback to his white grandfather. He was small, olive-skinned and handsome and just visibly colored, with curly hair" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 54).[34] Alfred, like W.E.B. Du Bois himself, was a light-skinned mixed-race man who aligned himself with the Negro community, whereas Alexander's "oldest daughter, Augusta, married a light mulatto and has descendants

today who do not know of their Negro blood" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 55). While Du Bois elsewhere describes in greater detail Alexander's reasons for marrying into the colored group and eventually aligning himself with a black community, it is important here that Alexander becomes a case study in choice and the contingency of racial identity. Du Bois even provides us with an alternative history in which Alexander aligns himself with whiteness instead and implicates a U.S. founder along the way. He also illustrates the way in which multi-generationally mixed-race families form patterns of racial alliance – Alexander rejects whiteness for the colored group and Alfred chooses to align himself with blackness via the black Burghardt clan. Du Bois's failure to mention his Aunt Augusta again is likely indicative of his negative attitude toward passing, and his desire to emphasize only instances wherein his mixed-race family identified with black communities.

Race Feeling

After describing the history of the Burghardt clan, Du Bois affirms the contingency of his identity by noting "I was brought up with the Burghardt clan and this fact determined largely my life and 'race.' The white relationship and connections were quite lost and indeed unknown until long years after" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 56). It is from his mother's family – especially his great-grandmother Violet's haunting African song – that Du Bois sources his connection to blackness. However, even in this Du Bois avoids essentialist implications by reminding us:

> Living with my mother's people I absorbed their culture patterns and these were not African so much as Dutch or New England…My African racial feeling was

> then *purely* a matter of my own later learning and reaction; my recoil from the assumption of the whites; my experience in the South at Fisk. But it was none the less real and a large determinant of my life and character. I felt myself African by 'race' and by that token was African and an integral member of the group of dark Americans who were called Negroes [emphasis added] (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 56).

With this, Du Bois gives us a way to understand the notion of race feeling, a popular Du Boisian device motivating race loyalty and collective political action, as the product of a process of learning, experience of both white and black worlds (negative and positive instances of racism and race), and choice. Moreover, this race feeling, and his resulting political actions, is enough to make him an integral member of the Negro group.

Concept

Du Bois utilizes this African race feeling to interrogate the very concept of race and illustrate its changes over time. He asks,

> What is Africa to me? Once I should have answered the question simply: I should have said 'fatherland' or perhaps better 'motherland' because I was born in a century when the walls of race were clear and straight; when the world consisted of mutually exclusive races; and even though the edges might be blurred, there was no question of the exact definition and understanding of the means of the word (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 59).

I, of course, would argue that the boundaries were less clear at the time he delivers "Conservation" and clearer when he's writing this in 1940, still under Jim Crow and disappearance of mixed-race categories from the U.S. Census by 1930. However, this is what makes Du Bois's emphasis on mixed race and its complications even more important, as he is destabilizing the concept of race upon which those racist policies rely, while also reinstating the foundation for collective black action against those same policies. We can see this motivation even more clearly when Du Bois further explains:

> Since the concept of race has so changed and presented so much of contradiction that as I face Africa I ask myself: what is it between us that constitutes a tie which I can feel better than I can explain? …one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory…the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is the unity that draws me to Africa (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 59).

This language of "common history," "common disaster and…one long memory," "social heritage of slavery," and "discrimination and insult" is largely reminiscent of his argument for racial solidarity offered in "Conservation" 43 years prior. Though, in contrast to his description of his own Negro identification earlier in "Concept of Race,"

this claim of group identity is largely located in relation to the racism and colonialism of white supremacy, as opposed to positive interactions he had with black folks at Fisk and elsewhere. Thus, we can see how race feeling is even more thoroughly a contingent fact of history and not some metaphysical essence, how blackness itself is defined from within and without, how Africa stands as a symbol for a history and future beyond whiteness, and how its mixed-race sons and daughters might engage in a darker striving despite rejections, privileges, and pulls.

Through this exploration of his identification and family history, Du Bois "tried to show all sorts of illogical trends and irreconcilable tendencies" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 67) in the concept of race that has defined his life. He concludes that "Perhaps it is wrong to speak of it at all as a 'concept' rather than as a group of contradictory forces, facts, and tendencies" (Du Bois, *Dusk*, 67). Exposing these inconsistencies, contradictions, and habits through his own history and the history of his family allows us to see how the concept of race as a social construction, impacts, constrains, and creates affordances for different members of a racialized society. Since he confronts this topic through his mixed-race experience and family history of intermixture, Du Bois's conception of race illustrates how considerations and experiences of mixed race can help elucidate how the boundaries, logic, and feeling of race functions. I will draw more conclusions about these elements in the next chapter. More immediately, I will continue to show that mixed race features in other works throughout Du Bois's oeuvre.

Looking Back to *Souls*

Location and Becoming

Du Bois's first major (and most critically successful) book was his 1903 *Souls of Black Folk*. *Souls* is a collection of songs, autobiographies, and essays meant to "show the strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century" by offering a "sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, [of] the spiritual world in which ten thousand Americans live and strive" (Du Bois, *Souls*, xxxi). As with many African American texts of the time, *Souls* was pitched at white audiences and aimed at white education, while also offering a greater sense of recognition and depth to black readers. Positioned between these two audiences lies Du Bois, who further frames the project in the "Forethought" by saying, "I have tried to show what Emancipation meant to *them.*..I have sketched in swift outline the two worlds within and without the Veil…Leaving, then, the white world, *I have stepped* within the Veil, raising it that *you* may view faintly its deeper recesses" [emphasis added] (Du Bois, *Souls*, xxxi). Tracing Du Bois's identification and location in this passage reveals him *on* the veiled boundary, capable of stepping within the veil to reveal the meaning of the black lives therein to the white reader thereout, while also somehow separate from those whose meaning and experience he means to express. Some of this separation is in keeping with other forethoughts or frontispieces of the era – think of James Weldon Johnson's introduction to *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, in which he gives voice to a fictional white publisher for introduction to the book, playing with the authority granted to the story thereby. Not one to leave things unsaid, Du Bois does clarify his allegiance with the concluding sentence of the "Forethought" with the reminder: "And, finally, need I add that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil" (Du Bois, *Souls*, xxxii). Not clearly speaking from the veil, himself, Du Bois

does make it known that he is speaking of and from a black experience. This issue of location is not surprising, though, when read in light of the insights from *Dusk of Dawn*. According to his telling of it, Du Bois did not spend his whole life defined by race and racial inferiority, this came in time, as did his gradual identification with blackness. It makes sense, then, that a relatively young Du Bois writing *Souls* would find himself uniquely situated to articulate black experiences to a white audience, since he has existed between both groups and has felt the impact of both on his life (through racism, positive experiences of black communities, and his own 'race feeling').

After the "Forethought," Du Bois places himself within the veil and articulates how it descended between him and the world in boyhood, only to be lifted briefly during his trip to Europe (Du Bois, *Souls*, 1-2). This racial origin story is repeated several times between *Souls*, *Darkwater*, and *Dusk of Dawn*, and essentially describes how Du Bois experienced a dawning realization of difference, which became racialized over time (as opposed to simply confined to skin color).[35] Much like the description of his identity development provided in *Dusk*, the Du Bois of *Souls* was not always a Negro. Indeed, he was just a person like any other until an outsider to his community rejected him during a classroom activity. This origin story has the benefit of articulating the role of racism in the existence and creation of racial difference, while also showing that process to be a contingent, historical event. Emphasizing contingency creates a space of possibility *before* racialization, which preserves the human dignity of those within the Veil. In other words, if black people are people before they become black, we have to take more critical responsibility for the process and effects of racialization and racism, highlighted in contrast to dignity denied.

Conserving Souls

As discussed in Chapter 2, this story of race and contingency has the added benefit of allowing Du Bois to destabilize reified notions of race while also affirming his black identity and race leadership. The fact that Du Bois, to a certain important extent, *became* black does not change the fact of his blackness. Like "Conservation," *Souls* does not offer many explicit mentions of mixed race. If we keep in mind that *Souls* is published a mere six years after Du Bois gives the "Conservation" address, this is likely due to a strategy on Du Bois's part to affirm his black identity to make clear his allegiance to Crummell and their joint project of uplift, which requires a strong base of solidarity within black communities.[36]

This helps us make sense of other instances in which Du Bois utilizes language in *Souls* similar to that in "Conservation" to motivate racial solidarity and action. For example, consider when Du Bois writes

> I've called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief…; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and Opportunity. All this caused us to think some thoughts together; but these, when ripe for speech, were spoke in various languages (Du Bois, *Souls*, 48).

Much like his language of things held in 'common' offered in "Conservation," Du Bois offers more commonalities grounded in material conditions that define and keep

together a community of disparate people and experiences. This device works in much the same way as it does in his reflections offered in *Dusk* – it allows him to address and name diversity within the Negro community and justify his identification and political leadership within that group, more generally. As a Northern, educated man from an interracial family, there were many ways Du Bois could have tried to disavow blackness, especially at this early stage. Instead, we see him continuing to think through the contingent, historical, and material conditions for a solidarity in blackness, which is not reducible to white racism (despite being greatly informed by it).

Du Bois offers only a very small reflection in *Souls* that directly addresses the assimilationist strategy he was working against. It is worth quoting at length:

> The free Negroes of the North, *inspired by the mulatto immigrants from the West Indies*, began to change the basis of their demands; they recognized the slavery of slaves, but insisted that they themselves were freemen, and sought assimilation and amalgamation with the nation on the same terms with other men. Thus, Forten and Purvis of Philadelphia, Shad of Wilmington, Du Bois of New Haven…and others, strove singly and together as men, they said, not as slaves; as "people of color," not as "Negroes." The trend of the times, however, refused them recognition save in individual and exceptional cases, considered them as one with all the despised blacks, and they soon found themselves striving to keep even the rights they formerly had of voting and working and moving as freemen. Schemes of migration and colonization around among them; but these they refused to entertain, and they eventually turned to the Abolition movement as a

> final refuge. Here, led by Redmond, Nell, Wells-Brown, and Douglass, a new period of self-assertion and self-development dawned. To be sure, ultimate freedom and assimilation was the ideal before the leaders, but the assertion of the manhood rights of the Negro by himself was the main reliance [emphasis added] (Du Bois, *Souls*, 35).

Here, in Du Bois's brief account of the history of black leadership in the United States, he provides a critique of the assimilationist strategy refused by Crummell and others. This strategy looks very similar to those opponents described in *Dusk* who sought to remind Du Bois that he (like them) was a 'mulatto' and the goal should be equality and opportunity through assimilation with whiteness, not solidarity with blackness. Importantly, most of the names Du Bois provides are well-known mixed-race free people of color in their respective cities, since assimilation was an accessible reality for them. The rejection from whiteness and assimilation these families and figures experienced also looks very similar to that endured by Alexander Du Bois, as one of the "mulatto immigrants from the West Indies" who wanted to be counted as a man, or at the very least a person of color. In the end, they failed their goal of assimilation and the fight to maintain the privileges they enjoyed. With rising white racism and changing categories before the Civil War, these liminal figures found themselves collapsing back into the black struggle for Abolition, just as Du Bois would have the privileged mixed-race figures of his time do in reaction to Jim Crow era white supremacy.

In fact, Du Bois later makes a case for such leadership later in *Souls* when he says:

> [T]o-day no one seriously disputes the capability of individual Negroes to assimilate the culture and common sense of modern civilization, and to pass it on…to their fellows. If this is true, then here is the path out of the economic situation and here is the imperative demand for trained Negro leaders of character and intelligence, - men of skill, men of light and leading, college-bred men, black captains of industry, and missionaries of culture; men who thoroughly comprehend and know modern civilization, and can take hold of Negro communities and raise and train them by force of precept and example, deep sympathy, and the inspiration of common blood and ideals (Du Bois, *Souls*, 120).

This is undoubtedly an articulation of Du Bois's early "Talented Tenth" strategy for racial uplift, in which the well-educated and skilled laborers, many of whom were mixed-race and/or free before Emancipation, would work to provide education and guidance to their racial community. It is also a strategy that relies on the commonality Du Bois is trying to draw on in order to motivate race loyalty among the class of assimilationists he is most concerned about losing (or not persuading to join him). Without the new, dynamic conception of race Du Bois employs in "Conservation," there would be little else except white racism pulling free communities of color and the resources they'd gathered to the cause of the black masses in Post-Reconstruction America. While not explicitly or exclusively mixed-race, the "Talented Tenth" serves as another touchstone for a mixed-race reading of Du Bois's political thought. Knowing who he's referring to (as already described), this group of predominantly mixed-race

folks would have the most access to education, wealth, and training to provide a newly freed population, if only their sense of obligation and loyalty could be secured. Their social location, contact with white people, and higher likelihood of racial ambiguity were also assets for the struggle that Du Bois explores in *Darkwater* and *The Black Flame* trilogy.

In the Quiet of *Darkwater*

In her Introduction to Du Bois's 1920 *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham notes several features of the text germane to my account of the role of mixed race in Du Bois's work. Where *Souls* presents Du Bois early understanding of and arguments concerning the color line at the turn of the century, Higginbotham reminds us that "The color line looked different from the hindsight of [World War 1]. Surely, the color line remained, but by 1920, it had become blurred and could be transgressed in ways inconceivable in 1903" (Higginbotham, xxvi). In fact, she notes: "*Darkwater* was…published at a time when the color line was imaginatively breached. Preceding *Darkwater* by several years was James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), which portrayed blacks who passed for white and whites who went 'slumming' in black entertainment venues" (Higginbotham, xxvii-xxviii). Even though *Darkwater* is noted as Du Bois's most virulent text, written in the wake of the Red Summer of 1919, where race riots rocked the United States, this attention to the blur and transgression of the color line characterizes the quieter moments of this collection. Since these instances are diffuse throughout the text, I will only focus on two salient moments: "The Shadow of Years," and the connected short fiction interludes "The Second Coming" and "Jesus Christ in Texas."

Autobiographical Echoes

Just as Du Bois begins *Souls* with an autobiographical account of his early years, he provides an even more thorough recap of his early-life racial experience in *Darkwater*. The most notable difference, however, is his inclusion of a brief genealogy akin to the one he provides in *Dusk of Dawn*, Chapter 5, which focuses on his Du Bois family history and not just his mother's Burghardt lineage. This genealogical account includes a description of his father as "small and beautiful of face and feature, just tinted with the sun, his curly hair chiefly revealing his kinship to Africa" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 4), as well as a remarkably similar account of his grandfather, Alexander, a product of Dr. James Du Bois and "a beautiful little mulatto slave" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 4). He and his brother John are described as "fine, straight, clear-eyed boys, white enough to 'pass'" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 4).

After Dr. James dies, Du Bois remarks that his family "apprenticed grandfather to a shoemaker; then dropped him" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 4). Interestingly, Du Bois provides more characterization of Alexander's subsequent racial position and strategy in *Darkwater* than he does in *Dusk of Dawn*. He writes:

> Always he held his head high, took no insults, made few friends. He was not a 'Negro'; he was a man! Yet the current was too strong for him. Then even more than now a colored man had colored friends or none at all, lived in a colored world or lived alone… If he had scant sympathy with their social clannishness, he was with them in fighting discrimination (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 4).

Perhaps we can read this harsher characterization of Alexander's attitude and limited choice in light of the increasing racial violence Du Bois is writing. In the wake of 1919, Du Bois might have found it even more important to reaffirm racial allegiances against white supremacy, which he did through the symbol of Alexander. In the end, Du Bois closes genealogical autobiography with a summary that he was born with "a flood of Negro blood, a strain of French, a bit of Dutch, but thank God! no 'Anglo-Saxon'" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 5). In this, he acknowledges his multiracial background as important to his outlook and context, but doesn't make a case for its centrality as much as he does in *Dusk of Dawn.* It is, however, an important precursor to the reflections offered in *Dusk* and an indication of the differences in context and strategy between 1903 and 1920 that enable Du Bois to bring mixed race to the fore in order to destabilize the assumptions and foundations of racism. As Higginbotham notes, "Du Bois continually undermines the fixedness of racial boundaries and subverts the visual coherence of racial identities to an extent that cannot be accidental. Little in *Darkwater* is completely black, little is completely white. He creates verbal tapestry rich in chiaroscuro images, combining lightness, darkness, and visual ambiguity" (Higginbotham, xxxiv). His autobiography is one such tapestry, but the fiction pieces of *Darkwater* might be even more exemplary of the racial liminality explored in this text.

Secret Black Jesus

As Higginbotham reminds us, "the crossing of the color line, or interracial contact, is evident in the literary interludes that bridge the essays" (Higginbotham, xxxiv). These interludes vary by genre and penetrability – from litanies, to poetic riddles, to short stories, to speculative science fiction – but all of them explore some quieter,

more inchoate aspect of black experiences and a striving to make meaning from a profound suffering. In the midst of this, it seems appropriate that these less argumentative, but no less persuasive pieces feature Du Bois's reflection on the power of a mixed-race position to reveal and navigate racial structures. Nowhere is this more straightforward than "The Second Coming" and "Jesus Christ in Texas."

"The Second Coming" follows Du Bois's essay on "Work and Wealth," a sprawling sociological case study of East St. Louis and the "economic snarl" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 47) facing economic and labor leaders. It is a very brief story – a scant two pages of text – detailing the three wise men converging on the site of the second coming of Christ. The three wise men include a white bishop from New York, a black bishop from New Orleans, and a Japanese priest in San Francisco, who are each brought to Valdosta, Georgia for different purposes. Importantly, Valdosta is the actual location of a major lynch mob and race riot in May of 1918, after a black farm worker, Sidney Johnson, murdered Hampton Smith, a white planter in a nearby town. This fact helps makes sense of the vague references to impending racial violence and a possible lynching, throughout the brief story.

In the context of the town's recently bloody past, then, the three religious men find themselves in Valdosta on Christmas Eve. Mistaking a glowing sunset for a fire in a small building, all three men gravitate toward the building and find "a white girl crouched…down by the very mules' feet, with a baby in her arms, - a little mite of a baby that wailed weakly" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 52). The black bishop mutters "'But He was to come the second time in clouds of glory, with the nations gathered around Him and angels--' at the word a shaft of glorious light fell full upon the child, white without came

the tramping of unnumbered feet and the whirring of wings" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 52). The white bishop discovers to his shock and horror that the child is black and the black bishop "spoke almost as if in apology: 'She's not really white; I know Lucy, you see her mother worked for the governor" (Du Bois , *Darkwater*, 52). Thus, in the midst of a growing lynch mob and race riot, a young mixed-race woman who is the daughter of the white, racist governor, gives birth to a mixed-race son. This is the Second Coming Du Bois gives us. In this tale, of course, the black bishop is the only one to recognize both the mother and son for what they are – both black and divine – though the Japanese priest responds with appropriate reverence, "offering incense and a gift of gold" (Du Bois 2017, *Darkwater*, 52). The white bishop is on the wrong side of history, and religion, in his allegiance with the racist governor and support for Lucy's legitimate white sister on her wedding day. Christ has returned amid violence and has returned as a black child!

The next interlude, "Jesus Christ in Texas" presumably follows this story (though not explicitly) and opens in a jail in Waco, Texas. Waco, like Valdosta, was the site of a lynching, in this case, of Jesse Washington in 1916, which became a critical case in the NAACP's anti-lynching campaign. As with Valdosta, while there is a lynching at the end of this story, Du Bois makes no explicit mention of this historical incident. The main character, known simply as 'The Stranger' makes his way through several interactions with both white and black people in the jail, at the judge's house, and at white farmer's house. In each of these encounters, it is clear that the white people initially take him to be white, and black people (notably the convict, the nurse, and the butler) all immediately recognize him – either as black or as Christ, but usually as both.[37] Eventually, someone turns on a light and the white party realizes "the man was a mulatto, surely; even if he did

not own the Negro blood, their practiced eyes knew it" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 60). The colonel recognizes the stranger's eyes, which remind him of "the soft, tear-filled eyes of a brown girl" (Du Bois 2017, *Darkwater*, 60).

In the meantime, the black convict introduced in the beginning of the story escaped from jail and is being chased by dogs. The stranger, having been revealed a black man, leaves the judge's house and intercepts the convict in the woods. The convict realizes the stranger is black, too, and tries to justify his stealing, to which the stranger offers one "Thou shalt not steal" (Du Bois 2017, *Darkwater*, 62). When the convict agrees to try to keep from stealing, the stranger removes the stripes from uniform – thus erasing the evidence of his criminal past – and sends him along to a nearby farmhouse to find work. As the convict eats, the farmhouse mistress "reassured at the voice of a white man" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 63), talks to the stranger and starts "quite unconsciously" to share things about herself, including her negative attitude toward black workers. When asked if she 'loved her neighbor as herself, she tries to justify her racism by saying "I try –", then "They are niggers", then repeating "But they are niggers!" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 63). She then turns the light on the stranger, seeing for the first time that he is black, and then runs down the hill and collides with the black convict. Her husband sees this and gets the jailhouse guard and mob to lynch both men, with the stranger burning on a crimson cross "heaven-tall, earth-wide…riven and blood-stained, with thorn-crowned head and pierced hands" (Du Bois 2017, *Darkwater*, 64). And with "his calm dark eyes, all sorrowful…fastened on the writing, twisting body of the thief…a voice came out of the wind of the night, saying: 'This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise" (Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 64).

"Jesus Christ," as with most of Du Bois's fiction, is odd. Despite its obscurity, a few elements remain clear and crucial to our understanding of his message here. First, that his audience should be as morally outraged by lynching violence as they would be by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; second, that in both stories, Jesus is a 'mulatto' and is granted ties to the downtrodden, as well as a deep understanding of the white people in power. [38] In "Jesus Christ in Texas" the stranger Christ figure is able to utilize his racial ambiguity to gain access to white spaces wherein he tries to prompt the moral education of white people. A similar dynamic appears with the stranger and the convict in the woods, where the stranger provides the commandment not to steal and gives the convict a second chance. The moral failings of both white racism and black anger/crime lead to the crucifixion of the stranger, however, the last word of the Christ figure is a word of forgiveness and acceptance of the lynched black convict. Through the black Christ's forgiveness of the black convict, Du Bois maintains his foundation of black race loyalty and racial justice, despite acknowledging failures on both sides. Importantly, too, the added distance and racial flexibility offered by the mixed-race stranger seems to offer him greater depth of knowledge and understanding of both sides in the conflict, though those gifts of insight are eradicated by racialized violence. Du Bois also explores the benefits and difficulties of a mixed-race position in his historical fiction trilogy *The Black Flame Trilogy.*

The White Black Flame

The Black Flame (*TBF*) has been almost completely ignored in Du Bois scholarship, whereas there are now extensive engagements with the other literary, autobiographical, sociological, and political work.[39] Because there is so little work on it,

it is important for me to explain what *TBF is. TBF* is a trilogy of historical fiction novels, comprised of *The Ordeal of Mansart*, *Mansart Builds a School,* and *Worlds of Color,* that documents the intersection of various elements of black, world, and American history from the end of Reconstruction into the Cold War. These books are a remarkable blend of historical fact, fictionalized characters relating to and precipitating these facts,[40] and a symbolic representation of the major 'groups' in this period of history. These groups include: Southern and Northern Black Americans, Southern and Northern rich and poor white Americans, and various figures representing other nations, such as England, France, Africa, India, and China. The historical fiction follows the representative families of these historical groups (excluding the international players, which are represented by individual characters), with a main focus on the Mansarts, of which the trilogy's protagonist, Manuel, is the head. The Mansarts generally represent the black folk in America,[41] with various members representing everything from the black politician (Tom), powerful, mystic grandmother (Aunt Betsy), the black business man (Douglass), black lawyer/judge (Revels), the sympathetic criminal (Bruce), the educated educator (Manuel himself), the black preacher/bishop (Roosevelt), and the Afro-musical daughter (Sojourner). This symbolic black race family provides Du Bois with the resources to discuss the ways in which black Americans participated in and were affected by this span of world history. The novels thereby depict a range of black (and white) American responses to the “Negro Problem” after the end of Reconstruction, thus presenting (and often rejecting) the various strategies black people tried to employ to attain their own liberation from white racism.

Du Bois further situated this project as a continuation of his historical work in *Black Reconstruction,* a sprawling counter-history of black peoples' constructive role in Reconstruction. Du Bois says, for example, in the postscript of *The Ordeal of Mansart,* "I am trying by the method of historical fiction to complete the cycle of history which has for a half century engaged my thought, research and action" (Du Bois, *Ordeal*, 229). In this way, then, the messages of *TBF* and *Black Reconstruction* are connected, as they are both elements of a continuous project (arguably beginning with *Souls of Black Folk*) of Du Bois's to rewrite black people's agency, ingenuity, resiliency, and cultural gifts, back into American and world histories. This historical project, then, forms the base for Du Bois's political projects against white racism, both structural and personal.[42] It is the history that he generates which allows him to argue for the humanity and rights of black peoples (and 'darker' peoples more generally). This history – of which *TBF* is a major part, becomes a foundational piece of Du Bois's critical project of racial uplift.

Jean, The Mixed-Race Flame

While there is much to discuss about mixed race and racial contact in *TBF*, I want to limit my scope to one central character, Jean Du Bignon, who is introduced in volume two of *Mansart Builds a School,* in the chapter titled "White Black Girl." It takes Du Bois several pages of Du Bignon genealogy to arrive at Jean's birth. He describes the matriarch of the New Orleans family clan, Hortense "Mère" Du Bignon, who knows of her family's racial history but is in deep denial of it.[43] Mère Du Bignon goes so far as to chastise her son, Maurice, and only granddaughter, Marie, for taking 'colored' partners and thus not passing for white.[44] Another generation later, a different Marie has a

daughter with a "thin and rather ineffectual octoroon" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 116) and they christen her "Jean." Growing up,

> "Jean then had an extraordinary, almost inexplicable life…She lived on a plantation with colored and white folks. She had always felt herself instinctively and complacently 'colored,' not because of any visible color, but because both of her parents talked frankly of their Negro descent. And yet she was continually getting into curious difficulties" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 117).

First of these difficulties arose when Jean moved with her mother to St. Louis, after her mother's failed marriage. There were the white children in her neighborhood who "suddenly discovered that she was 'colored' and accused her of it. She flared at the accusation. She couldn't understand of what she was accused. She had never deceived them or misrepresented herself. Her neighbors were of all colors – black, brown, yellow, white. Her father and mother were 'colored' even if they were white" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 117). Also in St. Louis "curiously enough, and to her utter perplexity came difficulties on the other side. Colored children avoided her or called her names. She had often to be especially introduced and vouched for. She had to be careful, so careful of their assumption that she wanted to be 'white' even if she wasn't" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 117). Thus, Du Bois presents Jean at an early age as caught between two worlds, but with a strong internal sense of her own identity.

This trend continues after she leaves St. Louis to move in with Mère Du Bignon.[45] In repeated conversation with Mère, Jean reaffirms her black identity and refuses to pass

for white. She says things such as: "'I think I want to study the races of the world and their relations, and I think that the United States is undoubtedly the best place to do that. Here we've had a long and most interesting contact between whites and blacks'" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 120); "I am neither white nor black. I do not object to this, but most people do. I am going, therefore, to make my own way" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 121); "I am interested in this matter of colored people because they explain the whites" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 121); and in response to Mere Du Bignon's plea "But you can work with them here", Jean says, "No, I cannot. Here I am neither one nor the other unless I entirely desert the one. I won't do that" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 121). Through Jean, Du Bois offers us repeated, explicit reasons why a mixed-race person would and should identify as black/Negro – out of academic interest, experience, family, and, finally, race feeling.

W.E. Jean Du Bois

Jean is, in fact, Du Bois's best case representation of race feeling, as he presents it in *Dusk of Dawn*. Take, for example, what Du Bois writes about Jean's impression of the black land grant college where she has just taken a job:

> Across [the school yard] went an almost continuous stream of humanity' student, teacher, and worked, and all colored. Jean sighed luxuriously; it was such a relief to see color, unconfined, free, content. To glimpse seldom if at all, the bloodless, straight features of that dominant worlds in which all her life she had been imprisoned, no longer set about her in unsmiling superiority. She felt at long last free in her own world. She sensed no incongruity in the fact that her face was

> white she was only keenly aware that the people she wanted, to whom she felt nearest, were now about her and that for and with them hereafter she was to work. She was not unconscious of the fact that these her people would not automatically or easily accept her, veiled as she was in a hated color of skin…. Acceptance would come. She would make it and it was the natural thing, for race was not color; it was inborn oneness of spirit and aim and wish; and this made this school her home; her very own (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 128).

This account of race feeling and *becoming* a part of a racial community sounds remarkably similar to Du Bois's reflections on his relation to Africa in *Dusk's* "Concept of Race." And this is hardly the full extent of the similarities between Du Bois and his character, Jean.

First, Jean is trained as a sociologist, just like Du Bois. Moreover, as Rampersad notes, "As a sociologist, she is thoroughly trained academically and socially for a position of leadership" (Rampersad, 281). This is consistent with Carby's suggestion (Carby, 2007)[46] that Du Bois is his own model for the "Talented Tenth," the leaders of the race. Consistent with her preparedness for leadership, Jean also defines her life and work in terms of loyalty to the black race, understanding it and fighting for its liberation and uplift. Much like Du Bois, who on his twenty-fifth birthday swore an oath to be a Messiah for his race, Jean, in her college career, argues fiercely for her Negro identification and loyalty. Unlike Du Bois, however, Jean's race loyalty is made especially powerful by the fact that she is able to pass for white. Jean, unlike Du Bois, could choose not to participate in blackness and could forgo the humiliation and

difficulty she faces for her race loyalty and association. Her education, sociological projects and race loyalty are the aspects through which Du Bois is apparent in her character. In effect, Jean is the female Du Bois.[47] The similarities between Jean and Du Bois do more than present part of his character or philosophy of race, as many of his other self-referential characters do; instead, the similarities between Du Bois and Jean help illustrate the ways in which Du Bois saw himself operating *on* the color line on behalf of his chosen racial community.

Liminal Power

More than acting as a mouthpiece for Du Bois, Jean allows him to explain the function such a person on the boundary might have in the context of the black uplift struggle. Immediately upon accepting the position at Mansart's college (as a secretary with a doctorate, mind you), the first thing Jean does is help Mansart assert himself and control his office space when he meets with white stakeholders (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 129-130). In other words, she helps Mansart establish and wield power in the context of relationship with white men. Dealing with the confusion and frustration of white stakeholders "was but one kind of difficulty with which Jean must cope and she realized it. She must not only help organize and systematize the general college administration, but in so doing the hindrance due to her color or lack of it could help in some cases and in others hinder" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 131). This sense of double-edgedness is echoed by a white character, Mr. Stearns, when the narrator acknowledges "this woman might wield more power on both side of the color line that he suspected" (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 131). Her undetermined and ambiguous racial position gives Jean a curious power to navigate white spaces – it seems to 'get her in the door,' even if

revealing her racial identity afterward puts white people on edge.[48] Since she is a Du Boisian character, she obviously uses this power to benefit her black community, as symbolized by the black college for which she works, and Mansart, who serves as the black everyman. She is, then, a perfect example of race feeling leading to race loyalty, study, and political action both small and large.

A Kaleidoscopic Oeuvre

Exploring disparate pieces across Du Bois's corpus help us see the consistent presence of mixed-race concerns, histories, and experience at the heart of his work. *Souls* gives us a stronger sense of how Du Bois's concern about mixed-race loyalties informs the early framing of his most seminal work. *Dusk of Dawn* illustrates most strongly and clearly the ways in which Du Bois utilizes his own mixed-race position to offer a critical revision of the race concept and glimpses of this same strategy are echoed twenty years earlier in *Darkwater*. The fiction interludes in *Darkwater,* namely "The Second Coming" and "Jesus Christ in Texas," allow Du Bois another opportunity to articulate the potential privileges and powers possessed by mixed-race characters, though the promise of this examination is even more robustly carried out through *The Black Flame's* Jean Du Bignon. Overall, then, we see Du Bois wrestling throughout his career with mixed-race relationships to blackness, his own genealogy as a case study in race formation and identification, and the possibilities mixed-race people bring to the struggle for racial uplift.

Notes

[27] While not a student at University of Pennsylvania (he was hired as an assistant in sociology after his first teaching position at Wilberforce), he did the field research for

"The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study" during this time and notes it as part of his scientific development.

[28] His experience at Fisk had much to do with this self-conscious choice. Du Bois describes this process as follows, "Then of course, when I went South to Fisk, I became a member of a closed racial group with rites and loyalties, with a history and corporate future, with an art and philosophy. I received these eagerly and expanded them so that when I came to Harvard the theory of race separation was quite in my blood… even in America [I] gave up courtship with one 'colored' girl because she looked quite white, and I should resent the inference on the street that I had married outside my race" (Du Bois 2017, *Dusk*, 51). We can see echoes of this sentiment of group loyalty, history, future, art, and philosophy elsewhere in his corpus, but most importantly for our purposes here is Du Bois's acknowledgement that he "became" a member of this group – he was not straightforwardly born into it, though he did have the racial/family background which allowed for (and he might even say mandated) his inclusion in the Negro race.

[29] For example, his "dark grandfather, Othello" and "grandmother, Sally, a thin, tall, yellow and hawk-faced woman…" (Du Bois 2017, *Dusk*, 5); "my mother was brown", "my father, a light mulatto" (Du Bois 2017, *Dusk*, 6); and "the grandfather (my father's father), a short, thick-set man, 'colored' but white in appearance" (Du Bois 2017, *Dusk*, 9). In most of his descriptions of his introduction to Fisk, Du Bois offers something akin to his remark that "I was thrilled to be for the first time among so many people of my color or rather of such various and such extraordinary colors, which I had only glimpsed before, but seemed bound to me by new and exciting and eternal ties" (Du Bois 2017, *Dusk*, 12).

[30] See his prolonged description of the changes and inconsistencies in racist ideology in *Dusk of Dawn* chapter 6, "The White World," wherein he concludes "it is easy to see that scientific definition of race is impossible" (Du Bois 2017, *Dusk*, 69-70).

[31] To be fair, this was a popular strategy for many in the age of Frederick Douglass. See Chapter 2 for a more thorough account of this tactic and why/how Du Bois allied himself with the opposition.

[32] This is likely due to the fact that he grew up almost exclusively with this side of his family. Talking primarily about them in earlier autobiographical writing also helped give greater strength to his black identity and race leadership.

[33] Again, we see here a difference between the more general 'colored group' and the 'Negro clan' of Du Bois's mother.

[34] With this reference to Alfred as a 'throwback', Du Bois is utilizing a popular theory of the time known as atavism – where a biological/evolutionary trait skips generations. Atavism when applied to race expresses a heightened concern at the time that generationally mixed-race children would expose their (and their family's) African descent, especially if the family were passing. Atavism in this context has been scientifically disproven.

[35] He writes: "being a problem is a strange experience – peculiar even for one who have never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one…it dawned on me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others: or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil" (Du Bois, *Souls,* 2).

[36] The result is an early text in which Du Bois describes central features of both the monoracial black experience as well as an experience of mixed race – namely double consciousness and the now infamous claim that "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line" (ibid, 10). Delving deeper into these double meanings is beyond the scope of the current project, but I will return to them in the next chapter.

[37] For example, when the butler enters the room with the stranger he "paused in bewilderment, tottered, and then with sudden gladness in his eyes dropped to his knees…'My Lord and my God,' he whispered" (Du Bois 2017, *Darkwater*, 60).

[38] I am reminded, here, of Du Bois's claim in "Souls of White Folk": "Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as a foreigner do I come, for I am native, not foreign, bone of their thought and flesh of their language. Mine is not the knowledge of the traveler or the colonial composite of dear memories, words and wonder. Nor yet is my knowledge that which servants have of masters, or mass of class, or capitalist of artisan. Rather I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the working of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know. This knowledge makes them now embarrassed, no furious. They deny my right to live and be and call me misbirth" (Du Bois 2017, *Darkwater*, 15).

[39] For exceptions see: "The Effect of Cooper's *A Voice from the South* on Du Bois's *Black Flame Trilogy*" Sandra Staton-Taiwo (2004), "Late Romance" Brent Hayes Edwards in *Next to the Color Line* (2007), Arnold Rampersad's *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois*, and pieces in Richard Kostelanetz *Politics in the African-American Novel* (1991) and William Andrews's *Critical Essays on W.E.B. Du Bois* (1985).

[40] An example of fictional characters giving rise to factual events would be Dr. Baldwin and the black "Christ" figure starting the great Atlanta fire (Du Bois, *Ordeal*, 38-40).

[41] This is consistent with one of Du Bois's earliest articulation of 'race' in "The Conservation of Races", in which he declares the black race to be a "great family."

[42] Patricia Morton presents this same reading of the role of history in Du Bois's vision. She states that, "it is clear that Du Bois regarded history as having a special value as a tool of racial protest and for promoting a proud black self-identity. In this sense, as Herbert Aptheker has pointed out, 'what interested Du Bois as a maker of history helped determine what he wrote, and what he wrote helped make history'" (Morton, 57).

[43] For example: "There remained a dagger in her heart because there were others less beautiful, less rich, and less aristocratic who sneered that there was other blood in her veins; that it was indeed royal but that it came from a thousand years of rule among black chieftans in West Africa" (Du Bois, *Ordeal*, 111).

[44] See: "Maurice [Hortense's son] had never married but, according to the custom of Louisiana gentlemen, had taken a slightly colored concubine and from her had one daughter…It was this girl, Marie…whom Mère Du Bignon was castigating for not being willing to 'go white'" (Du Bois, *Ordeal*, 112) and "Marie, a singularly beautiful blonde, has fallen in love with a man also colored, and flatly refused to obey her grandmother's order to give up acknowledgement of her colored blood and pass as white" (Du Bois, *Ordeal*, 112).

[45] Jean had to move because she wasn't perceptively colored enough for Marie's black friend, Sarah, to take her in, as it would have been dangerous for Sarah

[46] While it is the case that, by this point, Du Bois has dismissed the model of the "Talented Tenth" as the preferred means for racial uplift, this is still relevant to the current project because *The Black Flame* offers an analysis of every strategy suggested for dealing with the "Negro Problem" and, therefore, inevitably includes this earlier articulation of his vision.

[47] Note: Hayes Edwards fails to note this relationship in his introduction to the 2007 reissue of *Ordeal*.

[48] For example: "In stores when they learned she was buying for the Negro college, she must always be on guard against being cheated, against being sold one grade of goods and having a cheaper grade delivered at the same price…There was no use getting angry; she would calmly refuse or in emergency call in the proprietor…Gradually, however, the stores learned that they were dealing with a level-headed woman whom it was profitable to treat honestly" (Du Bois, *Ordeal*, 132).

V: RECONSIDERING RACE THROUGH *DUSK*

To summarize so far, Chapter 1 was an inquiry into contemporary understandings of mixed race, toward an historical analysis of mixed race centered on W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois has been understood as an iconic influence in African American letters and philosophy of race. Chapter 2 was an investigation of the distinct historical context that grounded Du Bois's conception of race within the projects of black racial uplift and the context of concerns about mixed race in African American leadership. Chapter 3 turned to Du Bois's autobiographical and literary works for a deeper understanding of how his own mixed-race identity and experience informed his life and work.

Using the textual instances in Chapter 3, this chapter is addressed to the conception of race via mixed race we can derive from Du Bois's work. I argue that mixed race helps elucidate the ways in which Du Bois is working both with and through a conception of mixed race, within which race itself is developed on the ground, is responsive to conditions, is anti-foundationalist and anti-essentialist at its core, and carries with it epistemic access into social-political conditions. These elements are present in other people's interpretation of Du Bois's concept of race, but I contend that viewing them specifically in terms of mixed race gives particular insight into their construction and import.

Methodology

Before drawing out the theoretical role of mixed race in Du Bois's work, I need to first attend to some methodological questions which help situate that work. The first concern is a broad series of question on how to read Du Bois's work, generally. What is it trying to *do*? How are the various pieces and strategies *related* to each other? Is it

possible to even read and make claims about Du Bois's work across the span of his life? The second concern is a more specific application of the first, that is, Why and how can both fiction and non-fiction be understood together, to draw out a conception of mixed race in Du Bois's work?

As mentioned in Chapter 2, I read Du Bois as engaging with a more-or-less consistent conception of race throughout his career. Beyond, or rather, surrounding his conception of race, I also read Du Bois as engaged in a more-or-less consistent theoretical project throughout his writing life. I grant that this project varies in scope and form over the course of his life, but there are certain overarching concerns and strategies that apply across the whole, namely: (1) a concern for the marginalization, disenfranchisement, and violence inherent in the conditions of/for black life in a context of white supremacy and (2) a strategy of utilizing rhetoric to elicit sympathies and correct judgements of white folks, which, in turn, (3) transform action and help realize an aspirational democracy/collective political life.[49] Defining Du Bois's main concern in terms of a primary emphasis on African American experience in the Unites States does not seek to erase his shift to a more global concern for the 'darker peoples' of the world. Instead, it is a way of drawing out the continuity of his early and primary concern for black folks in the context of U.S. white supremacy and his later critiques of imperialism and capitalism, more globally. I have discussed Du Bois's concern for the condition of black life in the context of white supremacy throughout the previous chapters of this project, so I will focus primarily on the role of rhetoric and transformative action as unifying forces in his work.

Rhetoric as Unifying Strategy

Melvin Rogers's "The People, Rhetoric, and Affect: On the Political Force of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*" is perhaps the best, most comprehensive account of the role of rhetoric in Du Bois's seminal text. Rogers begins his argument with an exploration of the two meanings of 'the people,' a concept that is central to democracy, which he defines as the descriptive and ascriptive meanings. As summarized by Nick Bromell, Rogers illustrates how "Du Bois [exploits] the gap between [the] ascriptive and descriptive meanings of the people and [launches] rhetorical appeals aimed at stimulating the feelings of existing citizens in ways that dispose them to expand their sense of who can and should be described as 'the people'" (Bromell, 11). The *descriptive* meaning of 'the people' addresses the current sphere of political life, which has often been narrowed to white, male participation and has gone through several legal expansions since the 19th century. These expansions, Rogers points out, have been fueled by an *ascriptive* vision of 'the people' that fully realizes the central premise of "all men are created equal" in the founding of the Unites States. In Rogers's account, this ascriptive vision helps us capture the distance between our current reality and our ideals, and it spurs a form of collective action to correct this distance. Rogers also points out that, in order to fully illustrate this divide and create a collective to remedy it, there needs to be a shared foundation of judgement and affective response to the suffering caused by failing to reach our ideals. Through his analysis of Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*, Rogers focuses mainly of the particular suffering of black folk in the U.S. and shows us how Du Bois utilizes rhetoric to accomplish this goal of collective judgement and sympathy. "Through the art of rhetoric, *Souls* attempts to project and vivify a form of citizenship, and it seeks to evoke

in the reader those desires and actions commensurate with realizing that life" (Rogers, 125).

Rogers claims that

> By emphasizing rhetoric, I mean to suggest that *Souls* attempts to craft a common horizon for author and reader from which common emotional judgements regarding racial inequality might be reached. For Du Bois, this common horizon is not merely the result of a fortuitous union but emanates from a shared political identity that can, in turn, be used to guide the responses of the community and its inhabitants as to the justice or injustice of the judgements they make and the actions they undertake" (Rogers, 125).

In other words, through rhetorical devices in his writing, Du Bois helps his reader develop the proper affective response to black suffering. This corrected sympathy is meant to then prompt proper judgement and political action aligned with justice in order to achieve a shared democratic ideal of respect, dignity, and full participation in a collective political life.

Importantly, in Rogers's account, rhetoric is not a manipulation of the audience, nor mere persuasion.[50] Instead, rhetoric (and art, by extension) are a form of truth-telling for Du Bois. In "Criteria for Negro Art" Du Bois offers an "explicit explanation that artists are conveyors of moral and political truth, in possession of bringing truth into view for their fellows" (Rogers, 133) and art is the "one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest" (Du Bois, "Criteria," 290-297). With this in mind, then, we can see how

Du Bois utilizes rhetoric to expose the realities and triumphs of black life as a form of moral instruction for his white readers that not only helps them see certain truths, but also helps them have the appropriate moral response (namely shame and sympathy). to the truths of black humanity and suffering As Rogers points out, "Building blacks up into that judgement requires…a dramatization of their struggles – a jarring presentation of those who live behind the veil, to generate sympathy for their plight and to shame those who were complicit in and unresponsive to their struggles" (Rogers, 136). Du Bois provides this dramatization throughout *Souls* – the autobiographical reflections "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," the description of Josie's tragic life in "Of the Meaning of Progress," his articulation of Alexander Crummell's life and death in "Of Alexander Crummell," and the poetic eulogy for his departed son in "Of the Passing of the First Born." All together, these works create an experience of black life that both implicates white readers in this structure of lives lived in spite of profound suffering and teaches them how to respond to this fact.

Rogers also reminds us that "Importantly, Du Bois treats art as a much wider category to include his own literary engagements with the public and not simply those expressed by his works of fiction…" (Rogers, 134). This applies to Du Bois's work beyond *Souls* and includes the fiction, poetry, and essays of *Darkwater,* through the autobiography of *Dusk of Dawn,* and the sociological study of *Black Reconstruction*. Taken together, these pieces (and others not mentioned) help us read the multi-generic pieces throughout Du Bois's corpus as the different ways he tried to achieve his rhetorical aims. Rogers goes on to claim that Du Bois uses fiction and prose to illustrate lives behind the veil,[51] historical reconstruction to give depth to a re-imagining of our shared

story with black humanity at the center, and journalism and sociological works of fact correct the vision of racist propaganda. Rogers's interpretation thus also helps us understand how to read Du Bois's fiction and non-fiction work in tandem, as two strategies utilizing rhetoric toward the same ends. As other contemporary theorists have pointed out – Amir Jaima most notably and recently – Du Bois encourages us to read much his fiction as an *affecting* articulation of his sociological and philosophical thought.

Uniting Fiction & Non-Fiction

In "Historical Fiction as Sociological Interpretation and Philosophy: on the Two Methodological Registers of W.E.B. Du Bois' The Black Flame," Amir Jaima illustrates that Du Bois's fiction – especially *The Black Flame* trilogy – should be "read as continuous with his life-long project to study Black people and their problems" (Jaima, 585). In other words, Du Bois's fiction is still exploring the same issues, conditions, and solutions found in his more theoretical texts like *Souls of Black Folk*, *Darkwater*, and *Dusk of Dawn* and we should read them with the same attention to argument and theory as this non-fiction work. Jaima, moreover, argues that *The Black Flame* "operates on two methodological registers with historical, sociological, and philosophical import," namely sociological interpretation and propaganda (Jaima, 585). First, Jaima claims that *The Black Flame* is an example of how fiction becomes a space where "sociologist-qua-creative-artist uses 'pure imagination' in the service of articulating and understanding the 'distinct social mind' of Black people" which is, as Jaima and Du Bois remind us, "an historical and sociological component of culture and society that ' history can but mention and which statistics can not count" (Jaima, 585) (Du Bois 1957, 3151898, 20). This reminder calls us to look beyond mere fact into the contested space in which facts

are produced, and deeper still into the lives of the people sociology is meant to represent. In other words, to provide a 'true' picture of a people, one would need to provide the more meaningful details of their lives, which can come directly from interviews or, in the case of *The Black Flame*, can be potentially substituted by the work of 'pure imagination.'

Du Bois tells us quite clearly in the postscript to *The Ordeal of Mansart* (part one of *The Black Flame* trilogy) that he thinks fiction can give us access to the profoundly intimate and human details of history that expose a truth beyond statistical fact. It is worth quoting the postscript at length for this insight:

> The basis of this book is documented and verifiable fact, but the book is not history. On the contrary, I have used fiction to interpret those historical facts which otherwise would not be clear. Beyond this I have in some cases resorted to pure imagination in order to make unknown and unknowable history relate an ordered tale to the reader. In a few cases I have made slight and unimportant changes in the exact sequence of historical events and in names and places. In no case have these changes altered, to my mind, the main historical background. It may well be asked, and as one who has done some historical research, I join in the asking, why should one tamper with history at all in order to write truth? The answer of course is Never, if exact truth can otherwise be ascertained. But every historian is painfully aware how little the scientist today can know accurately of the past; how dependence on documents and memory leaves us all with the tale of the past half told or less. The temptation then comes to pretend we know more

> than we do and to set down as accurate history that which is not demonstrably true. To me it seems wiser and fairer to interpret historical truth by the use of creative imagination, provided the method is acknowledged and clear. When in this world we seek the truth about what men have thought and felt and done, we face insuperable difficulties. We seldom can see enough of human action at first hand to interpret it properly. We can never know current personal thought and emotion with sufficient understanding rightly to weigh its cause and effect. After action and feeling and reflection are long past, then from writing and memory we may secure some picture of the total truth, but it will be sorely imperfect, with much omitted, much forgotten, much distorted. This is the eternal paradox of history (Du Bois, *Mansart Builds*, 315).

In another part of the postscript, Du Bois claims that *The Black Flame* should be read as an extension of his sociological tome *Black Reconstruction*, in that it is striving toward the same ends and articulates truths about the same lives.[52] Du Bois credits a limitation of time and resources for his methodological shift to fiction to carry out his re-telling of black history after *Black Reconstruction*. Du Bois's postscript here resonates with a similar sentiment provided in his 1926 essay "Criteria for Negro Art", wherein he argues that art should convey truth and assist in the fight against racism. Taken together, "Criteria", *Black Reconstruction*, and *The Black Flame* trilogy illustrate a continuity of concern and strategy in Du Bois's work, a concern that revolves around exposing truths about the lives of those 'within the veil' as a rhetorical strategy for confronting and combatting white supremacy.

The second way in which *The Black Flame* functions, according to Jaima, is as propaganda "in the strong, DuBoisian sense, which is to say, entailing arguments and insights that are not reducible to the facts" (Jaima, 585). I argue along with Jaima, Rogers, and others that all of the seemingly disparate elements of Du Bois's writing work together to not only elucidate, expose, and explore the meaning of black life, but also to affect a change in the reader such that they are better able to see such life and respond correctly to empower and protect the dignity of that life in a global community. Thus, his historical fiction functions as propaganda, shifting beyond a reporting of fact into a performance of the right kind of sympathy one should have for other people.

Rogers reminds us that Du Bois's use of rhetoric not only evokes the shame and sympathy of his white readers, but also serves as a form of vision-making and uplift for his black readers. Elevating black folk (and other oppressed people around the globe) not only in the eyes of white beholders, but in their own eyes as well, is a primary purpose of Du Bois's various historical reconstructions, of which autobiography, literature, sociology, poetry, essay, philosophy, and pageant were all different forms of this central strategy. Despite major shifts in Du Bois's thoughts (from liberalism to communism, assimilation to separatism, a reliance on legislation to a focus on economic critique) the central continuity of rhetorical strategy and concern for conveying a truth about black lives allows us to string together these disparate elements of his life and thought and gather insights about his work as a whole. This continuity also allows me to string together instances of mixed-race figures and concerns throughout Du Bois's writing, and endeavor to make claims about them, overall. Rhetoric provides a central way of accounting for the doing-ness of Du Bois's work; the affective, generative dimension of

his multi-generic project. In that doing-ness, there are different roles to be played, including roles for mixed-race people. Examining the instances of mixed-race in Du Bois's work illustrated how these figures help elucidate the lives within and limits of the veil – they play a critical role in affirming positivity of blackness while undermining racist conceptions of it at the same time. The role of mixed race in Du Bois's work has consequences for our understanding of his conception of race, as well as his political project.

Reprising a Conception of Race

In Chapter 2, I argued that Du Bois's conception of race should be read as deeply political, non-essentialist, and concerned with providing a foundation for a new, capacious blackness that would motivate solidarity between black and mulatto (black/white mixed-race) populations for political action.[53] Under such consideration, Du Bois's conception of race from "Conservation" forward is deeply responsive to concerns about shifting racial categories and animus between multiracial and monoracial African-Americans. After reviewing the myriad ways in which mixed race factors in Du Bois's work throughout his career, an additional impact on Du Bois's conception of race becomes clear, namely, the role of mixed race in destabilizing the very racial categories Du Bois puts forth to help advance his rhetorical and political projects. Returning to an analysis of "The Concept of Race" in *Dusk of Dawn* helps reveal this further dimension of how mixed race informs Du Bois's conception of race and broadens its function.

Revisiting Dusk of Dawn

There are several elements of *Dusk of Dawn's* fifth chapter that speak to the dynamic effect of mixed-race on Du Bois's conception of race. Each of these 'moves'

have been described in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this project, but a brief overview here will elucidate this effect. First, to justify a reading of "Concept" that is thoroughly grounded in mixed race, we should remember that Du Bois begins the chapter with the acknowledgement that he was "born colored" and "became Negro," and was also identified as a mulatto by other mixed-race contemporaries and was ridiculed for his race loyalty (as opposed to the strategy they espoused, to become more 'American') (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 51). Du Bois also offers an account of his experience while studying in Berlin, wherein his professor proclaimed that "mulattoes…are inferior" and Du Bois describes his uncomfortable reaction, as if the comment were directed at him.[54] These early personal experiences with racial identification make it clear that, at least in some ways, a mixed-race identity was either ascribed to or subscribed to by Du Bois.

In keeping with my focus on Du Bois's use of rhetoric (or the doing-ness of his texts), it is important to remember that Du Bois presents these experiences as the framing of his "Concept of Race" chapter in *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*. The subtitle of this project suggests that we should read Du Bois's autobiography, not as the self-told story of a human being, but the story of a concept. When Du Bois chooses to tell this story through an explicit, curated exploration of his mixed-race experience, we have good reason to read Du Bois as providing an argument for the ways in which mixed race offers insight into the very formation and function of the race concept. For those insights, we'll continue to read further into the chapter.

After Du Bois introduces us to the concept of race by situating himself in the complex web of mixed-race blackness, he turns to a genealogical exploration of his families' interracial history. As detailed in chapter 2 of this project, Du Bois's genealogy

in “Concept of Race” is much more focused on the relationships between white and black branches of his family tree than the previous accounts of his family provided in *Souls of Black Folk* or *Darkwater*. In previous descriptions of his family, Du Bois focuses primarily on the black Burghardts, his mother’s family, with whom he grew up in Massachusetts. Even while Du Bois holds to the blackness of this side of his family in “Concept,”[55] he also spends significant time articulating the relationships to the white Dutch family from which they received their family name and location in the Berkshires (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 56), and his great-great-grandfather’s military service during the Revolutionary War, which affirms the ‘Americanness’ of his black family (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 58).

Even while Du Bois provides more detail about the interracial history of his black Burghardt family, “Concept” holds an even more intricate account of the Du Bois side of the family. Du Bois had sparse contact with this side of his family growing up, since his father left him and his mother at a young age, but from them, Du Bois inherited a complex relationship to whiteness and an illustration of the fickle nature of racial identification and race-based discrimination. This relationship begins with Dr. James Du Bois, Du Bois’s white great-grandfather, a Frenchman who owned a plantation and slaves in the Bahamas. One of these slaves, he took as his “common-law wife” and they had two sons together, Alexander and John (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 53). Like his brother John, Du Bois’s grandfather, Alexander, was able to pass for white and they were both moved to the United States for their education with the support of their father, with whom they had a close relationship. After James’s death, Alexander and his brother were both removed from school and were severed from all their ties to the white Du Bois family. As a result,

Alexander "became a rebel, bitter at his lot in life, resentful at being classed as a Negro and yet implacable in his attitude toward whites" (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 53). Instead of passing into whiteness, Alexander "married into the colored group" (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 54) and had Alfred, Du Bois' father.[56] Almost in contrast to his own story of racial allegiance, Du Bois uses Alexander to illustrate both the range of options and restrictions places on mixed-race people, depending on a variety of contingent factors. Alexander, for example, might have chosen to pass for white if he had not been so betrayed by his father's family,[57] or he might have been more thoroughly aligned with blackness if he hadn't had such a denigrated view of it or hadn't been arbitrarily relegated to 'colored' status after his father's death. Alexander thus holds a complicated racial position as a mixed-race man who holds animus for both whiteness and blackness, but chooses to align himself with black causes when necessary.[58] Emphasizing the contingent nature of racial identification illustrated by Alexander, Du Bois ends his genealogical narrative with a reminder: "I was brought up with the Burghardt clan and this fact determined largely my life and 'race.' The white relationship and connection were quite lost and indeed unknown until long years after" (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 56). In this reminder, Du Bois calls us to keep in mind the larger import of this genealogical reflection that race is constructed through contact and in response to historical (and interpersonal) forces. Even though growing up amongst the black Burghardts "determined" his race to a certain extent, Du Bois also recognizes that culture is not the same thing as racial designation. He wrote, "Living with my mother's people I absorbed their culture patterns and these were not African so much as Dutch and New England…My African racial feeling was then *purely* a matter of my own later learning and reaction; my recoil from the

assumption of the whites; my experience in the South at Fisk. *But it was none the less real* and a large determinant of my life and character" [emphasis added] (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 58).

In response to these more concrete case studies of racial identification mined from his family history, Du Bois transitions to a more abstract reflection on the question "What is Africa to me?" Through this reflection, he offers a similar definition of blackness/race found in his 1897 "Conservation," even though he acknowledges in the 43 years since, "the concept of race has so changed and presented so much of contradiction" that the definition of race and his ties to blackness are not as clear as he once thought (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 59). Du Bois's revised conception of race emphasizes that biological connections (symbolized through "color and hair) have "little meaning in themselves" (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 59) except as symbols for more significant differences. Dismissing biology as the basis for race and race feeling, Du Bois turns to the set of historical, economic, social, and cultural factors that have given rise to the blackness that has so influenced his life. Du Bois's description of his foundation is worth quoting at length:

> But one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. The actual ties of heritage between the individuals of this group, vary with the ancestors they have in common and many others; Europeans and Semites, perhaps Mongolians, certainly American Indians. But the physical bond is least and badge of color is relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social

heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult…It is this unity that draws me to Africa" (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 59).

As illustrated here, Du Bois argues that white supremacy and imperialism create a shared experience and set of conditions through which black folk become black and have a shared ground for solidarity. This insight, when combined with Du Bois's claim that he *became* black through learning, reaction against whiteness and racism, celebration of affinity at Fisk (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 58), offer insight into the ways in which Du Bois is trying to provide a conception of race that acknowledges the negative role of white supremacy in constructing blackness and race through restriction and indignity, and the role of those 'raced' in offering a positive cultural meaning and community in excess of these strictures. Du Bois's self-described position between these two poles, his underdetermined identity at birth, and subsequent negotiation of these meanings of race, together help us see the process by which race continues to be constructed and reconstructed in response to historical conditions and personal interactions.

The thoroughly constructed image of race offered in "Concept" helps emphasize the anti-essentialism behind Du Bois's previous definitions of race and illustrate how his metaphysical language around striving and gift might have been rhetorically beneficial for generating political solidarity. Forty-three years later, however, Du Bois sees more value in articulating the "illogical trends and irreconcilable tendencies" (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 67) of the race concept revealed through an exploration of his process of identification and interracial family history, both of which are notable in their attention to

mixed race. Race, understood through mixed-race, is deeply contingent, anti-foundationalist, anti-essentialist, and lacks stability over time and place.

Grounding this conception of race in Du Bois's own autobiography and family history is also an articulation of how mixed race is part of the African-American story, while still preserving some unique characteristics of this position that can serve the full community as an awareness of and attention to the formation and contingent rules about race. This awareness of the rules behind race allows Du Bois to affirm blackness without reifying race. Locating white supremacy as an historical agent in racial formation, and not an articulation of an essential truth of human difference, allows for a non-essentialist foundation to race. Without a racist essence, the people confined to a race by white supremacist ideology and policy can create a responsive vision of blackness that is not reducible to racism. Through Du Bois's mixed-race story, we thus receive a vision of race as non-essential and not reducible to white supremacist ascriptions. As argued in Chapter 2 of this project, this conception of race also allows a way to further enhance mixed race solidarity with black populations in response to white supremacy, through a politically real category and community.[59] The benefit of excavating Du Bois's mixed-race analysis extends beyond the a re-imagining of a conception of race; his emphasis on mixed-race experiences also expand our insight into Du Bois's vision of effective black political action and the roles individuals need to play in order to achieve these liberatory political ends.

Notes

[49] As with the previous point, it is a debatable the extent to which Du Bois gives up on Democracy as an ideal in his later life, given his shift toward Communism. Despite his

shift toward a Marxist analysis, from his early work in *Souls* through *The Black Flame* trilogy, Du Bois continues to emphasize collective knowledge creation in the wake of epistemic limitations, the importance of interpersonal connection across difference, and a heuristic of "the people" to evaluate the relative justice or injustice of a society.

[50] See Rogers's note: "To appreciate this, I follow Du Bois back from his 1926 essay "Criteria of Negro Art" to his 1903 work *Souls*, where we find the key to understanding the rhetorical nature of the latter: "all art is propaganda and ever must be," a mode of persuading the community in the direction of some cause that neither panders nor manipulates but enlists the judgement of the reader…" (Rogers, 125).

[51] See Rogers's claim that "the content of his rhetoric must be aimed at expanding his white counterparts' capacity for judgement. Building blacks up into that judgement requires…a dramatization of their struggles – a jarring presentation of those who live behind the veil, to generate sympathy for their plight and to shame those who were complicit in and unresponsive to their struggles" (Rogers, 136).

[52] See: "In the great tragedy of Negro slavery in the United States and its aftermath, much of documented history is lacking because of the deep feeling involved and the fierce desire of men to defend their fathers and themselves. This I have sought to correct in my study of the slave trade and of Reconstruction. If I had had time and money, I would have continued this pure historical research. But this opportunity failed and Time is running out. Yet I would rescue from my long experience something of what I have learned and conjectured and thus I am trying by the method of historical fiction to complete the cycle of history which has for a half century engaged my thought, research and action" (Du Bois, *Ordeal*, 316).

[53] See from Chapter 2: "Along with these same group of scholars, I also read Du Bois as a realist about race and firm believer that races (as sites of cultural production and value) should be maintained at least until the eradication of race-based oppression – but likely beyond, as well. On this view, Du Bois's definition of race is not merely (or even primarily) descriptive but is instead deeply normative and aligned with a political project" (39).

[54] To be fair, he also acknowledges that Trietschke probably didn't notice him, so it was unlikely that the comment was directed at him (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 50).

[55] Du Bois reflects "I early began to take a direct interest in my own family as a group and became curious as to that physical descent which so long I had taken for granted quite unquestioningly. But I did not think of any but my Negro ancestors. I knew little and cared less of the white forbears of my father. But this chauvinism gradually changed. There is, of course, nothing more fascinating than the question of the various types of mankind and their intermixture" (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 52).

[56] Alfred, despite being similarly light-skinned, allied himself with a "Negro clan but four generations removed from Africa" – the black Burghardts (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 54).

[57] In fact, Du Bois mentions another branch of Alexander's family that went this route (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 55).

[58] See Du Bois's account of Alexander's role in advocating for better treatment for black domestic workers and founding a black church (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 54).

[59] See from Chapter 2: "Du Bois is not merely describing race in the abstract, he is trying to *do* something with this definition. He is trying to generate a political community not reducible to biology or the racism which spurred that science, that is capable of recognizing and affirming itself and striving for political aims. I further claim, as an extension of Bernasconi's argument, that part of what Du Bois is *doing* with this definition is attempting to offer a foundation for a new conception of blackness itself, one capacious enough to capture both mulatto and black communities and experiences, articulate shared experiences, and motivate a shared political response. I argue that a concern about mixed-race and its relationship to blackness was a central motivation for Du Bois's conception of race, not a peripheral influence" (50).

VI: MIXED RACE IN DU BOISIAN POLITICS

Following this analysis of Du Bois's conception of mixed race, I turn to an argument about the work mixed race is doing in his anti-racist politics. Here, I flesh out previous gestures toward the potentialities of mixed-race positions: more fluidity in social/political spaces, closer proximity to white culture and parallel ability to clarify and subvert the standards and assumptions of that culture, and increased capacity for advocacy for racialized people in white spaces, with the attendant responsibilities to utilize this unique position for the benefit of the oppressed. According to Du Bois, I argue, those figures on the boundaries between races have particular capabilities in virtue of their position and a moral responsibility to exercise those capabilities in acts of translation and advocacy across difference. This obligation is especially true and activated by Du Bois, for mixed black/white folks in response to white supremacy.

In order to discuss the role of mixed-race (both the position and the people) in Du Bois's political project, we'll need to first develop a basic understanding of what that project *is*. Defining and discussing Du Bois's political project is just as difficult as it is to discuss his work overall. This is due to the length of Du Bois's career, spanned post-Reconstruction, to the day before Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and including the rise and fall of Jim Crow, the Harlem Renaissance, both World Wars, and *Brown v. Board of Education*, to name just a few. As with Du Bois's conception of race and racial identification, his political project was deeply responsive to the times and the struggles he was aware of and attending to. He was, at different times, assimilationist and separatist, domestic and international in scope, a deeply Victorian moralist and a Communist. His political thought manifests in speech, essay, novel, poem,

and sociology. I confront these challenges with a similar strategy as I provided in regard to his idea of race: I take there to be a few consistent elements in Du Bois's political project throughout his life, which even help elucidate the strategy behind his shifts, and which we can use to make general claims about his aims and the role of mixed-race in achieving these aims. In what follows, I will discuss some of those consistent elements, address the issue of the "Talented Tenth," and illustrate the role mixed-race people seem to play in Du Bois's political project.

White Supremacist Context

Perhaps the most important element of Du Bois's political project is understanding it in the context of white supremacy, which George Frederickson defines as "'color bars,' 'racial segregation,' and the restriction of meaningful citizenship rights to a privileged group characterized by light pigmentation…[i]t suggests systematic and self-conscious efforts to make race or color a qualification for membership in the civil community" (Fredrickson, xi). These 'citizenship rights' expand beyond basic civil rights and include access to public political life, economic opportunity, and the material and interpersonal conditions necessary for fully participating in shared group life. The whiteness of white supremacy is most clearly linked to light pigmentation but is more accurately characterized as an idiosyncratic mass of ideologies, habits, patterns that denote racial group participation through geographic genealogy, skin color, culture, religion, and language. Describing this mass and its development and transformation over time has become a cottage industry in the academy, but for the purposes of this project it is most important to locate Du Bois's political strategy in response to the particular form of white supremacy found in the Jim Crow United States.

As Robert Gooding-Williams reminds us in *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America,* we should read Du Bois as offering an "exploration of how to create and conduct a politics for African Americans that counters white supremacy in the instance of Jim Crow" (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 4) where Jim Crow is understood as "a relentless assault on black people's dignity and helped to stiffen a form of economic subjugation by which white landowners and industrialists controlled southern black laborers" (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 3). Gooding-Williams claims that *Souls of Black Folk* "is still [Du Bois's] answer to the question, 'What kind of politics should African Americans conduct to counter white supremacy?'" (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 1). Even though I, and others, think Du Bois's political project shifts focus and strategy after his early work in *Souls*, white supremacy remains critical to that project and our understanding of both its changes over time and its consistencies.

The Uplift Strategy

Just as Du Bois's conception of race remains deeply informed by his early ideas, there are elements of his political project that remain indebted to the racial uplift ideology that he and others espoused around the turn of the twentieth century. To help understand that ideology, I turn to Kevin Gaines's *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. As an echo of the previous point about white supremacy, Gaines frames "The self-help ideology of racial uplift [as] the response of educated African Americans, who, according to Alfred Moss, numbered roughly two percent of the black population, to de jure, or legal segregation" (Gaines, xiv). Although Gaines criticizes uplift's reliance on the sexist and classist standards of white American

culture and "bourgeois qualifications for rights and citizenship" (Gaines, xv),[60] he also notes that this strategy was "an ideological response by blacks to a segregated, deeply racist society that prescribed their subordinate place and thus circumscribed their opportunities" (Gaines, 166), and that "uplift, among its other connotations, also represented the struggle for a positive black identity in a deeply racist society, turning the pejorative designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through an ideology of class differentiation, self-help, and interdependence" (Gaines, 3).

Du Bois's political project clearly falls within Gaines's conception of uplift ideology and Du Bois's work is cited frequently throughout Gaines's argument.[61] Gooding-Williams offers a helpful insight into how such a strategy might have made sense to Du Bois in the context of early Jim Crow:

> During the years he wrote the essays that found their way into *Souls*, "the Negro problem" was Du Bois's primary category for comprehending white supremacy… As Du Bois defined it, the Negro problem was the exclusion of the segregated masses…from the group life of American society. In his view, the problem had two causes. The first was racial prejudice. The second was the cultural (economic, educational, and social) backwardness of the Negro (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 17).

In his attempt to address the context in which he's writing, and his belief that reason and example will be enough to correct a white prejudice based in ignorance, early Du Bois seems to accept some white racist premises, such as black intellectual

backwardness, criminality, and unprotected womanhood. As a result of what seems to be Du Bois's early acquiescence to white conceptions of black backwardness, many subsequent scholars criticize Du Bois as an elitist who strove to show that he and others like him were not the same as those for whom certain white supremacist assumptions were accurate. Attending to the context and early premises of his political thought and considering the role of service/representation, however, might temper such critiques and offer important insight into Du Bois's conception of group leadership.

Motivated by a belief "that the improvement of African Americans' material and moral condition through self-help would diminish white racism," the majority of black leadership post-Reconstruction through the 1920s, including Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Anna Julia Cooper, and Booker T. Washington, among many others, turned to the 'lift as we climb' strategy "to rehabilitate the races image by embodying respectability, enacted through an ethos of service to the masses" (Gaines, xiv). Gaines's description of uplift's dual-focus on elevating the masses, while also remaining faithful representatives of the group is mirrored in Gooding-Williams's analysis of Du Bois's political theory. For example, Gooding-Williams claims that

> For Du Bois, a politics that was suitable to counter Jim Crow has both to uplift the backward black masses – to assimilate them to the constitutive norms of modernity – and to heed the ethos of the black folk…In short, it had to be a politics of modernizing 'self-realization'…that likewise expressed the spiritual identity of the folk" (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 4).

This aspect of group fidelity is critical to understanding Du Bois's political project and the rhetorical function of the almost metaphysical blackness he constructs in "Conservation" and carries in the form of 'race-feeling' throughout his work. It also informs Du Bois's vision and requirements for group leadership.

Uplift & Group Leadership

Gooding-Williams perhaps most clearly captures this more elitist conception of Du Bois's model for group leadership with his statement:

> If the Negro nation is to move forward on this path, Du Bois implies, then its populace must not be left to itself. Rather it must be governed by a representative elite that prescribes rules for ordering Negro actions and attitudes. Practical advance requires rule, but genuine rule requires the rule of the best (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 24).

This early notion of 'the rule of the best' is most frequently understood as Du Bois's "Talented Tenth." An early uplift strategy wherein the 'top' tenth of the black population – typically understood as those who had the most access to education, professional jobs, and middle-class mobility – would offer guidance to the rest of the 'black masses' because of their superior training and access to strategic resources. For Gooding-Williams, this strategy is a clear articulation of Du Bois's emphasis on leadership rule. He claims:

> Du Bois…envisions the cultured and civilized members of the talented tenth as issuing precepts to Negro communities: that is, issuing commands, or injunctions for members of those communities to obey…to the force of precept per se must be added vivid example, heartfelt sympathy, and allusions to common blood and ideals…Du Bois's leaders will rule and remember the masses, relying on illustration, sensitivity to suffering, and a sense of shared identity to enter into their lives and uplift them (Gooding-Williams, 32).

Gooding-Williams, Hazel Carby, and many others have made the claim that Du Bois was himself a model for the "Talented Tenth" and felt deeply responsible for his role in the uplift of his people.[62] As an example, Gaines calls us back to "a ritualistic, solitary celebration of his twenty-fifth birthday in Germany, complete with candles and incense, [when] he pledged to devote himself to racial uplift…" and reminds us that "Du Bois's retrospective description of his developing race consciousness, certainly the project of a uniquely privileged education, disclosed his firm belief, shared by many educated blacks, that the black intelligentsia held the key to race advancement" (Gaines, 152). We cannot forget, however, that this notion of race leadership is only justified through a deep connection to 'the race' and the masses who embody it. In other words, we must remember Gooding-Williams's point about the driving force of 'heartfelt sympathy, and allusions of common blood and ideals' for Du Bois's sense of both group and leadership. Belief in leadership that is deeply connected to and representative of the folk remains consistent for Du Bois. A closer look at the values expressed in Du Bois's work, however, shifts us beyond conversations of elitism and white bourgeois values and

offers more important insights into the role mixed-race people might play in the political advancement of black people.

Through and Beyond Uplift

For a glimpse beyond the uplift strategy and further into the values beneath Du Bois's political work, I turn to Carole Lynn Stewart's "Challenging Liberal Justice: The Talented Tenth Revisited." In re-approaching Du Bois's "Talented Tenth," Stewart begins by acknowledging that "Du Bois's early ideas about 'talent,' freedom, and a paradoxically aristocratic form of democracy have been critically assessed within the context of his later Marxist and somewhat misleading assessments of the elitism implicit in his early ideas" (Stewart, 112). In response to these critiques, Stewart asks us to reconsider this straightforwardly elitist reading of Du Bois's early political strategy and argues that an interpretation of "Du Bois's 'talented tenth' as a cultured and educated elite, who guide the uneducated and 'primitive' masses into acquiring the 'tools of civilization,' would be to conflate Du Bois's concept of the constitution of civilization as cross-cultural, with his mentor Alexander Crummell's normative and hierarchical concept of 'civilization,'" which she disputes (Stewart, 113). Stewart places Du Bois's ideas in context/contrast to Booker T. Washington and Alexander Crummell, both of whom fall short of realizing what Stewart argues are Du Bois's thoroughly democratic ideals.

Granting Gaines's point that Du Bois was "a youthful scholar seeking admittance into the black intelligentsia" and thus seems to share much of "his outlook…with that of his more established elders," Stewart articulates some significant ways in which Du Bois diverges from the ideological poles he inherited, as he tried to emphasize a form of race leadership that emphasizes cross-cultural contact as the robust and fragile site of

democratic life. For example, Stewart draws us first to consider Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" strategy of technical training (as opposed to liberal education) and maintaining separate institutions. "In contrast to Washington, who worked for eventual 'equality,' or assimilation," Stewart argues, "Du Bois was firmly committed to the need for democratic institutions and to the need for a public sphere that would guarantee formal and social equality while at the same time allowing them to strive for a form of selfhood and public freedom that formal equality alone could not provide" (Stewart, 123). Stewart further claims that "Washington's program of moral improvement insinuated that black people would eventually integrate into the individualist structure of Americanism and its instrumentalist ideology of progress" (Stewart, 128) and that his notion of compromise "effectively nullified the need for public spaces – spaces of contact among and between the races" (Stewart, 123). Washington's political strategy, then, advocates for a best-case scenario that centers around the assimilation of black life into the individualism of white American capitalism, in such a way that does not demand any change of the dominant society or the cultivation of a shared democratic life. Du Bois is very clear by the time of *Souls* that he disagreed with Washington's values and strategies. He was decidedly less vocal about his divergence from Alexander Crummell's ideology.

As Stewart notes, "Crummell was the founder of the American Negro Academy at the turn of the twentieth century who coined the term 'talented tenth' in opposition to Washington's accommodationist politics" (Stewart, 130). In fact, "It was from Crummell that Du Bois derived the term 'talented tenth.' Crummell shared Du Bois's enthusiasm for an intellectual meaning of black culture. It as from Crummell that Du Bois derived the notion of 'talent' as a critical and positive meaning of race leadership" (Stewart, 129).

Despite a shared set of terms and emphasis on the development of black cultural products, Du Bois's conception of black leadership and the goal of black politics is significantly different from Crummell's, who espoused a "merger of civilization and Christianity that engaged the highest 'talents' of the Negro" (Stewart, 129). Du Bois, for example, did not believe with Crummell that "as a race in this land, we have no art; we have no science; we have no philosophy; we have no scholarship.' There may be exceptional 'individuals,' but on the whole, descendants of slaves have not 'attain[ed] the role of civilization'" (Stewart, 131). Not only did Du Bois firmly believe that black culture had already contributed significantly to the birth and growth of a uniquely American culture, he also saw the barriers to the cultivation and communication of these racial 'gifts' as fundamentally unjust, not a necessary consequence of a lack of requisite civilization among black people.[63]

Even though Du Bois carries forth Crummell's "recognition of black intelligence, not in deference to white power but for itself" (Stewart, 134), he seems to surpass Crummell's moralizing and civilizing uplift mission, which relies on a fundamental assumption of black deficiency. Moreover, Du Bois raises a concern about provincialism in Crummell's thought. Stewart points out the moments wherein Du Bois notes how one "becomes provincial and centered upon the problems of one particular group, a 'race' man," and how "[i]n this sense, there is a particular 'group imprisonment within a group' that can be fed by 'unreasoning resentment and even hatred, deep disbelief in them and refusal to conceive honesty and rational thought on their part.'" (Stewart, 134).[64] For Du Bois, the only guard against the closure and resentment produced by Crummell's conception of black leadership, are "interactions and ordinary, daily confrontations with

the 'folk.'" (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 692). Consistent contact helps promote a humility in leadership by keeping leaders connected with their people – both of which are missing from Crummell's vision and necessary for Du Bois's re-vision of black leadership. Du Bois's conception of black leadership is thus much more thoroughly democratic, especially when compared to Washington and Crummell. Even Du Bois's "Talented Tenth" is a democratic ideal, because anyone can be talented (not just the privileged few),[65] leaders participate actively in the lives of the people they lead and represent, and political activism aims to reduce barriers to full participation in and mutual contact with the wider democratic society. This issue of cross-cultural contact, as stressed by Stewart, helps us understand the democratic impulse behind the elements of Du Bois's uplift politics that last beyond *Souls*.

Democracy and Cross-Cultural Contact

Beyond offering the contrasting visions of Washington and Crummell and an argument in defense of Du Boisian uplift, the critical intervention Stewart makes into the dialogue between Du Bois and Crummell is recapturing Du Bois's project as a thoroughly democratic political vision that is focused on cross-cultural contact. Stewart frames her argument through a reconciliation of Du Bois's emphasis on black life and a larger concern for democratic practices. She observes, "Throughout his life Du Bois was concerned with a viable and creative life for African Americans," and argues that "this concern should not overshadow that fact that he was simultaneously concerned with the nature and possibilities of racial democratic institutions as forms of human life and exchange in the modern world" (Stewart, 114). Stewart also importantly situates Du Bois's interest in historical reconstruction (part of the larger rhetorical strategy I claim

unites his thought) as a way to reclaim and elevate black people's contributions to history and explore what those contributions mean for political life. Stewart argues:

> He did not champion the cause of African Americans so they would simply assume the forms of American culture and join the mainstream. While he showed an interest in Africa and African peoples, it was not a romanticism or essentializing of the continent and its peoples. He was, rather, interested in a critical reassessment of world history and the role of Africans within it, especially in the formation of the Atlantic world and the United States and the possibilities this world opened for radical democratic institutions (Stewart, 114).

The forms of radical democracy, as explored in Du Bois's work, rely on the existence of difference in various forms – racial, cultural, class, sex, age, education, experience, and so forth – that come into physical contact and mingle.[66] Stewart claims that *Souls*, in part, is a meditation on "the initial promising moment of meeting, rupture, cross-cultural interaction, and 'contact' between different groups and value systems" and explores "a difficult and fleeting historical moment of possibility" in the post-Reconstruction United States (Stewart, 119). Expanding on this notion of 'possibility,' Stewart claims that "Du Bois's true ideal of freedom is a fragile possibility produced through minglings, 'contacts,' and the conglomerate interaction of plural cultural orientations," where this possibility is the possibility of "experience of novelty, rebirth, and talent" (Stewart, 136).

The importance of connection as a condition for democratic possibility is further emphasized by Du Bois's final reflections on the life of Alexander Crummell in *Souls*. Du Bois writes "herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor, - all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked, - who is good? Not that men are ignorant, - what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men" (Du Bois 2007, *Dusk*, 243). From this section, Stewart draws the conclusion that "*The lack of space for exchanges and listening to each other to advance understanding is the tragedy for Du Bois*" [emphasis added] (Stewart, 135). Stewart also claims that these kinds of exchanges are not just central to democracy for Du Bois, but are "[t]he everyday work of freedom" because they require "that everyone come forth to add his or her voice and judgement to the story" (Stewart, 138). Radical democracy and public freedom are thus inextricably linked for Du Bois in *Souls* and beyond.[67] In fact, Stewart argues that

> Du Bois longs [for the new song of the fragile novelty produced by coming together] in the final chapter of *Souls.*… and he will continue this repetitive echoing for the experience of freedom and novelty, a difference and distinctness that is produced through public dialogue, rather than referring to a static racial essence, as late as the writing of *Black Reconstruction*" (Stewart, 136-137).

I would, of course, argue that you see these cross-cultural characteristics of radical democracy all the way through *The Black Flame* trilogy, the first book of which was published 17 years after *Black Reconstruction*.

Mixed Race Responsibility

From this analysis of the primary and secondary literature, we can say a few general things about Du Bois's political project. The first is that his project is deeply and thoroughly constructed as a response to U.S. white supremacy. Even though it takes on a more international focus in Du Bois's later years, that international concern is due to Du Bois's growing realization that the domestic white supremacy behind lynching and Jim Crow has always had a recursive relationship with the broader project of European imperialism and capitalistic exploitation.[68] In this sense, we cannot understand any of Du Bois's political strategies without understanding that they're trying to develop an adequate response to the material deprivation and dehumanizing force of institutionalized oppression which is embedded in the very fabric of the race concept itself. With this in mind, then, we arrive at the next general aspect of Du Bois's political thought: insofar as Du Bois is responding to a more-or-less consistent (even if expanding) system of white supremacy, the elements of uplift ideology that appear to be an effective response, such as a structure of race leadership, access to education, and civil rights activism addressing barriers to political participation and the grave disparity in material conditions, seem to carry forward in later iterations of Du Bois's political strategy.[69] Perhaps even clearer than the persistence of uplift in his thought is the role of cross-cultural contact in creating even the fragile possibility for radical democratic institutions. I contend, with Stewart, that such contact and possibility is the overarching goal of Du Bois's political project and that the many shifts in theory, strategy, policy, and rhetoric Du Bois's thought goes through are largely in service of trying to better understand the breakdown in this contact, as well as developing ways to remove barriers and construct spaces capable of expanding these possibilities.

But what does understanding the context of white supremacy, the importance of uplift, characteristics of group leadership, and radical democratic contact do for our understanding of mixed race in Du Bois's politics? Despite much political writing about Du Bois ranging across disciplines, this relationship is largely absent in the scholarly literature. This is odd for many reasons, but chief among them is the fact that mixed race is deeply informed by the very same forces that shape all of Du Bois's concerns and, as I have shown throughout this project, Du Bois's life and work were influenced by and preoccupied with mixed racial experiences and positions. If we place mixed race back in relation to Du Bois's politics, like we did for his conception of race, we might discover the ways in which: 1) white supremacy draws distinctions between people in theory, policy, and habit, as well as how those distinctions and their meanings have changed over time and place, 2) Du Bois's notion of uplift and race leadership is the political consequence of his conception of race, since both create a foundation for a capacious blackness that justifies solidarity between mixed- and mono-racial African Americans for the purposes of political action against white supremacy, and 3) mixed-race people who function on the boundaries between black (non-white) and white races facilitate contact, perform acts of translation, and upset the assumptions and habits of racism to generate more democratic possibilities.

Let us consider, for example, the expressivism in Du Bois's conception of race leadership. The justification of black leaders' representative capacity and ability to act politically with and of their people is that their leadership is expressive of the spiritual/cultural life of the entire black group, as informed by deep ties to a common set of experiences and conditions.[70] If we factor mixed-race back into the context of this

aspect of Du Bois's political project, we remember that this strategy is responding both to anti-mulatto sentiments in Alexander Crummell's American Negro Academy,[71] and to a contrasting political strategy for overcoming white supremacy through biological assimilation into whiteness, espoused by figures like Frederick Douglass and T. Thomas Fortune.[72] Even into the twentieth century, we see Du Bois as one among many mixed-race political writers contending with their underdetermined racial position. Gaines reminds us:

> If some found the image of the mulatto to be suspect, others sought to rehabilitate the mulatto's racial loyalty…Sutton Griggs [*Imperium in Imperio*] created a fictional insurrectionary alliance uniting a dark former slave and a free mulatto… And the fictions of Pauline Hopkins and Frances Harper featured mulatto characters who were committed race men and women. At the turn of the century, as skin color continued to determine perceptions of racial loyalty and class differences among blacks, many blacks of all colors avowed public commitments to uplift and education as a declaration of racial solidarity transcending color differences (Gaines, 120).

The political loyalty of mixed-race people at this crucial, yet indeterminate time creates a set of structures and concerns that continue to inform Du Bois's work well past the 1920s. In some ways, who he was, who he became, and why became a foundation through which Du Bois developed an interpretation of white supremacy and the beliefs, habits, and political strategies needed to counter it. We can see here, however, that he

was not alone in trying to answer these particular questions about mixed race, nor was he the only person to arrive at some of these strategies of race loyalty.

When we attend to the issue of choice, the importance of mixed race in Du Bois's political thought becomes even clearer. For a discussion of the power (or specter) of racial choice, we turn again to Gooding-Williams, who cites Lucius Outlaw's argument that Du Bois himself, although biologically linked to both Dutch and African ancestors, chose to identify racially with his African predecessors" (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 39). It can be difficult to definitively state if this is truly the case for Du Bois, personally; even though he explicitly tells us this in *Dusk of Dawn*, the critical role rhetoric plays in his writing should caution us from making claims about his inner life. Even so, Gooding-Williams argues that "it can be shown that Du Bois's notion of race allows for a measure of individual choice (regardless of choices Du Bois himself did or did not make), and that this allowance is critical to both the *political* agenda of 'Conservation' and the *political* expressivism of *Souls*" [emphasis mine] (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 40). Expanding on this point, Gooding-Williams states the following:

> Du Bois's…belief that two individuals cannot count as belonging to the same race unless they have in common a certain history, certain impulses, and certain strivings…entails that choice will be critical to racial membership. In other words, Du Bois's new, stated definition of the concept of race…leaves open the possibility that a human being could choose to scuttle her racial identity by deciding to renounce and forsake the traditions or impulses or strivings that (in

> part) constitute it…a Negro as discerned and defined by sociology and history could choose to discard her sociohistorical racial identity by turning her back on the traditions or impulses or strivings without which one cannot be a sociohistorical Negro (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 52).

This notion of choice is pervaded by a worry over the possibility of passing, as racial choice is especially available to individuals who have the phenotypical characteristics that could allow them to adopt the traditions, habits, and identity of another race (most all of the people who are capable of passing are mixed-race in some form). This phenomenon is, of course, only possible in a context of white supremacy that depends on maintaining a strict racial boundary, and still relies on physical signifiers for racial categorization. Even without the concern for passing, if it is even possible for middle-class black people or African Americans who are otherwise removed from the 'masses' to slough off the critical elements of their racial membership, as might have seemed conceivable at the turn of the century, Du Bois would have reason to believe that "the political mobilization of Negroes will be difficult, and perhaps impossible, if they cannot be persuaded to choose to maintain a sociohistorically constituted Negro racial identity" (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 53). This explains Du Bois's early exhortation that "'it is the duty of the Americans of Negro descent, as a body, to maintain their racial identity' until the Negro people, as a race, make their contribution to civilization and humanity" (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 53). In either case, reclaiming Du Bois's personal and/or contextual concern for mixed-race helps us

understand the political relevance of his conceptual moves – especially the relationship between the conception of race and political project of uplift.

Figuring Mixed Race

When we take these conceptual insights back to Du Bois's fiction, we being to get an even more thorough image of how Du Bois thinks mixed-race people should function in this context of white supremacy. For example, we see how Du Bois's black Christ figure in *Darkwater* takes advantage of his indeterminant racial appearance to function in both white and black spaces as a moral educator and martyr. He bears witness to black suffering and both unsettles white assumptions about black humanity and exposes white inhumanity through violence against black bodies. His position as a Christ figure also articulates a vision of black leadership and representation that's accessible (if not mandated) to ambiguous mixed-race figures.

The Black Flame's comprehensive overview of the multitude of strategies and solutions to the 'Negro Problem' is arguably an even grander expansion of the morally transformative goals of *Souls* and *Darkwater*. One of the most notable, consistent elements of these novels is a thorough documentation of not just the strategies employed to overcome white supremacy, but the many failures in racial contact. The multi-generational failure in relationship formation between the Scroggs (the poor white family) and the Mansarts (black everymen) is the most notable example and allows Du Bois to expose the ways in which such failures are the result of interpersonal prejudice and structural inequities that harm relations between African Americans and poor whites and thus harm the possibilities of a shared democratic life. We also see the ways in which

Mansart symbolizes the democratic ideal of the black everyman, as he is a talent from among the black masses who rises to group leadership.

Most notably, Jean Du Bignon embodies the possibilities and obligations of mixed-race people – she undergoes a range of experiences that give rise to her race-feeling and result in her utilizing her talents to support Mansart's leadership, as well as the flourishing of her community. Crucial for our considerations are the ways in which Jean is in a position to utilize her own indeterminate racial appearance to create and leverage relationships with white people and helps uplift the self-esteem of her darker counterpart.

Du Bois's fiction and non-fiction work articulate not just a strategy for African Americans (and, more broadly, the 'Darker Peoples' of the world), but a strategy for black and white mixed-race people in particular. In Du Bois's political project, mixed-race people are responsible for acting in solidarity with the larger black population, for participating in its group life, and for generating instances of cross-racial contact that promote the possibility of freedom and democratic advancement for all. Mixed-race people can also utilize their unique position to destabilize structures of race, while also affirming cultural blackness, as well as navigating any power or privileges they've been afforded to advocate for and work toward black freedom.

Du Boisian Insights

Taken all together, then, we see a more complete picture of Du Bois's work, as informed by mixed race. We see a conception of race that is a non-essentialist historically grounded phenomenon that is responsive to shifting conditions. We see how this concept is mobilized to elevate the achievements and articulate the humanity of racialized people

and address injustices toward greater freedom. We also see how articulating humanity and destabilizing categories are key to Du Bois's strategy for greater freedom and democratic possibility, and how mixed-race people support this project by thwarting white supremacist assumptions about racial presentation, meaning, and performance. Of course, this role is only necessary and possible in the context of white supremacy and imperialism, but as long as these conditions persist, for Du Bois, the responsibility to engage with and on behalf of the marginalized persists. We are all responsible for role in this struggle and (plural) striving.

Notes

[60] This critique arises in comparison to an earlier, pre-abolition instantiation of uplift ideology. See "There was a historical tension between two general connotations of uplift. On the one hand, a broader vision of uplift signifying collective social aspiration, advancement, and struggle had been the legacy of the emancipation era. On the other hand, black elites made uplift the basis for racialized elite identity claiming Negro improvement through class stratification as race progress, which entailed an attenuated conception of bourgeois qualifications for rights and citizenship" (Gaines, xv).

[61] In fact, Gaines cites Du Bois throughout his analysis of uplift, including his insight/claim that "when Du Bois employed uplift ideology to mobilize the missionary zeal of 'better class' blacks, hoping to gain the respect and recognition of influential, progressive whites, he was exhibiting a variant of double-consciousness" (Gaines, 166).

[62] See earlier analysis of this phenomenon in Chapter 2 of this project. See also: Carby, Hazel V. "The Souls of Black Men." *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois.* Eds. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

[63] "In at least one respect, as Sundquist notes, Crummell and Washington were alike: 'Crummell shared the view with Washington that civil rights activism was secondary to acquisition of the tools of civilization'" (Stewart, 130). See: Sundquist, Eric J. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1993. Print. p. 55.

[64] Quoting Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 382.

[65] "I argue that his concept of a talented tenth is implicitly democratic; the model of leadership is not the singular privilege of the bourgeois professional class – anyone could potentially be talented" (Stewart, 113).

[66] Even these forms of difference are not static monoliths in themselves. For example, "The early concept of 'strivings' and 'talent' in *Souls* is clearly plural and 'when ripe for speech, [is] spoken in various languages'" (Stewart, 120). See: Du Bois, *Souls*, 103.

[67] This relationship helps further mediate critiques of Du Bois's elitism, for, as Stewart recognizes "Critics who charge Du Bois with elitism overlook the difference between a public concept of freedom, inserting one's voice into the public process of decision-making, and a concept of private liberty, also necessary but concerning only the protection of basic human rights and formal equality" (Stewart, 121).

[68] See Du Bois's analysis of World War I in "Souls of White Folk" in *Darkwater* for an example of the continuity between these two systems.

[69] Of course, these elements are added to over time. For an example, see later Du Bois's argument for a separate black economy in *Dusk of Dawn* (88-110).

[70] See also Gooding-Williams claim that "In endorsing political expressivism, Du Bois presents a politics geared to solving the Negro problem as an identity politics and embraces a form of cultural nationalism that is equally a politics of uplift" (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*, 57).

[71] See previous discussion of the context around mixed-race animus in the discussion of "Conservation" in Chapter 2 of this text. Not all were happy with Du Bois's solution to double-down on black group identity and solidarity. Gaines notes T. Thomas Fortune's response to Du Bois's "Conservation" speech: "Although T. Thomas Fortune understood Du Bois in biological terms, claiming that his speech confirmed the academy's antimulatto sentiments, Du Bois's primary concern was with the statement of distinctive Negro culture and consciousness" (Gaines, 121).

[72] See Gaines: "For the black South, miscegenation was synonymous with the rape of black women by white men. Among educated circles, theories influenced by scientific racism and eugenics positing the immorality and degeneracy of mulattoes also provided an additional bases for arguments against intermarriage. Drawing on such theories, *but also in an assertion of race pride*, black elites with nationalist leanings challenged the views supporting miscegenation espoused by men like Frederick Douglass, T. Thomas Fortune, and the Washington D.C. bibliophile Daniel Murray (all of whom had nonblack ancestry). Against the dominant view of mulatto degeneracy, these men had argued that progress through biological 'race assimilation' was inevitable, accompanied by an eventual fading of racial differences. But this tendency to look favorably on 'amalgamation,' shared by the most radical of the abolitionists, was hardly universal among blacks. The tightening coils of white supremacy, along with the perception of the snobbery and opportunism of mulatto elites and the persistent white conviction that black progress and achievement were the result of white parentage, led a growing number of blacks, drawn mainly from the rising ranks of journalists, educators, professionals, and self-made men to reject such arguments" (Gaines, 59).

VII: CONCLUSION

In this project, I have attempted to address gaps in two different literatures, one in the conversations about mixed race since the 1990s, and the other about the philosophical work of W.E.B. Du Bois. In Chapter 1, I have attempted to offer a glimpse into the preoccupation with individual choice and lack of political engagement I see in the scholarly literature about mixed-race people, identities, and communities. I use this gap to motivate a look backward toward W.E.B. Du Bois, who was deeply concerned with the issue of race and responsibility and, I argue, provides resources for a vision of mixed-race responsibility in particular.

In Chapter 2, I led you through a philosophical dialogue about Du Bois's work, starting with the debate surrounding his conception of race offered in "On the Conservation of Races." Through an engagement with the secondary literature stemming from Kwame Anthony Appiah's late 1980s critique, I aimed to present my own reading of Du Bois's conception of race as fundamentally normative and political, and anti-biological, anti-foundationalist, and anti-essentialist. Through a more complete account of the mixed-race context surrounding "Conservation," I articulated how such a conception was informed by a concern about the indeterminacy and privilege presented by mixed race at the turn of the twentieth century. I further argued that re-contextualizing Du Bois's "Conservation" in relation to mixed race helps illuminate how Du Bois's conception of race is itself an attempt to describe a new, capacious blackness into being, which is capable of confronting and exceeding white supremacist ascriptions.

From here, I took you in Chapter 3 back through Du Bois's primary texts and illustrated how mixed-race experience, genealogy, contingency, and possibility are all

present throughout the work of his lifetime. To support this claim, I provided an analysis of mixed-race moments within *Souls of Black Folk, Darkwater, Dusk of Dawn,* and *The Black Flame* – four of Du Bois's major works spanning nearly the entirety of his active years. I offered these autobiographical reflections, recovered these conceptual negotiations, and introduced these fictional characters to show how mixed race is a persistent worry and strategy for Du Bois. From this, I concluded that we find mixed-race figures, positions, and solutions throughout Du Bois's work – including in his self-portrayal – to such an extent that we are justified reading Du Bois as a mixed-race thinker.

After this survey of mixed race in Du Bois's oeuvre, I spent Chapters 4 and 5 drawing out how this presence of mixed race influences Du Bois's discussion of race as a concept, and his attempts to provide a political vision capable of engaging and overcoming white supremacy. Chapter 4 returned to Du Bois's conception of race, as re-read through his multiracial genealogy provided in *Dusk of Dawn*'s "The Concept of Race." I first grounded this analysis in Du Bois's use of rhetoric through his writing, which accounts for the function and doing-ness of his work. Then I shifted to an analysis of how mixed race functions in "The Concept of Race" to both destabilize the racial concept and affirm a cultural blackness capable of responding to the denigration of black life in the context of white supremacy.

From this insight about his conception of race, I continued to draw conclusions about the influence of mixed race in Du Bois's political project in Chapter 5. Here, I provided a more thorough presentation of the white supremacy to which Du Bois was responding in his political thought. I then moved to a description of Du Bois's political

project, as expressed through the ideology of uplift and group leadership, which was a popular black political strategy of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. I also addressed popular critiques of elitism in Du Bois's notion of uplift and the 'Talented Tenth' by turning to opposing scholarship from Carole Lynn Stewart that argues for a more democratic understanding of his political strategy and who he thought was capable of this kind of leadership. Stewart's reading of Du Bois's politics emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural contact for black political growth and striving against white supremacy, which is consistent with the political role for mixed-race figures presented throughout Du Bois's work. I then revisited these mixed-race figures and elucidated their political function in translation, moral education, the negotiation of white power, and the advancement of black people.

Taken together, these five chapters work to illustrate the gap in the contemporary literature about mixed race responsibility and political engagement in the context of white supremacy, while also offering a re-vision of Du Bois as a philosopher whose engagement with race and responsibility were deeply influenced by mixed race experiences and concerns. In other words, I have endeavored to show a way we might reclaim Du Bois as a mixed-race intellectual, in order to help provide greater depth to contemporary conversations about mixed-race identity and responsibility. Considering Du Bois as a mixed-race thinker, of course, does not negate his blackness. Rather, it provides a lens through which to view the blackness he engages and examine how he engages it for what might be a guiding a strategy for black/white mixed-race people operating in a (too) similar context.

In this way, I have bridged my initial concerns about the lack of normative guidance within critical conversations on mixed race since the 1990s to my re-reading of a mixed-race Du Bois. By showing how Du Bois provides a way of thinking about mixed race as a racial identity and position in the context of monoraces, and the various forms of power and domination within/between them, I illustrate how Du Bois might provide contemporary conversations about mixed race with necessary considerations of political responsibility and concrete strategies for its fulfillment. Just as Du Bois's strategy for negotiating his own mixed-race position was developed in the context of white supremacy in the United States, I further submit that the same should apply to our considerations of mixed-race identity today.

In the years since Barack Obama's presidency, which include the murder of Trayvon Martin that sparked a movement for black lives, the United States has seen a clear and steady rise in violent anti-black racism and explicit white supremacist political activity. In a context of dangerous, racialized political hatred not dissimilar enough from Du Bois's, turning back to strategies for mixed-race responsibility is especially important. The benefits of reading Du Bois through a consideration of mixed race, in this moment, are numerous. Approaching Du Bois as a mixed-race intellectual helps provide greater historical depth to contemporary mixed-race identity. This recovered mixed-race history also provides a fertile landscape of resources, strategies, possibilities, and cautions for younger generations of mixed-race folks who are trying to navigate a racial divide far older than these 'new people.'[73] From Du Bois in particular, we gain conceptual resources to describe a blackness that does not simultaneously erase mixed-ness, and a blackness that can reactivate racial solidarity and define a set of political

obligations to help fight against white-supremacist domination and oppression. While this strategy seems to simply be a reabsorption of mixed-race people into blackness, as though through hypodescent, a clearer understanding of Du Bois also shows us how mixed-race people can engage in black political struggle and use their very existence and solidarity to subvert and alter the very racial categories that are the fundamental to white supremacy. The possibility for mixed-race people to subvert racial categories and assumptions was a key strategy for white moral education and black empowerment in Du Bois's work. We see inklings of similar approaches in our contemporary context.[74] Just imagine what we could do with a thorough, philosophically rich articulation of mixed-race identity and an analysis of political strategies in the face of white supremacy. My hope is that this project is a first step in that direction, using Du Bois as a forebearer and example of how this analysis might work.

Further research in this area could recover other mixed-race thinkers and provide a similar treatment of their thought to mine for yet more strategies for mixed-race responsibility. Even though Du Bois's strategy for obligation might be a popular option, since we still see many mixed-race African Americans accepting a black identity, it is in no way the only strategy. One might look to Jean Toomer, Nella Larsen, and Sutton Griggs for more mixed-race visions to contrast with Du Bois's. Similarly, since the vast majority of scholars advocating for mixed-race identity as a standalone identity are women, it would also be interesting and illuminating to delve deeper into the gendered dynamics of mixed-race identity. An engagement with Du Bois's articulation of mixed-race could be a productive counterpoint to this contemporary trend, as Du Bois's model for (mixed) racial leadership is clearly male dominated.

If nothing else, I hope to have shown that there is value in return to Du Bois for conceptual and strategic resources for understanding and negotiating mixed-race experiences for black/white mixed-race people in the United States. My contribution to these seemingly disparate literatures around mixed race and Du Bois is to bring them into conversation with one another. Bridging differences between black and white, future and past is part of my Du Boisian inheritance, just as it has been for so many other mixed-race people before (and after) me.

Notes

[73] This is a call back to Joel Williamson's *New People*, which is also the title of a novel by mixed-race author Danzy Senna. Senna, Danzy. *New People*. Riverhead Books, 2017.

[74] See Paye, Amity. "Biracial in the Time of Black Lives Matter." *NBC News*, NBC, 22 Nov. 2015, www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/editorial-biracial-time-black-lives-matter-n466801.

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