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"It is easy to lose ourselves in details in endeavoring to grasp and comprehend the real condition of a mass of human beings," notes W.E.B. Du Bois in one of the middle chapters of the seminal text, *The Souls of Black Folk*. He continues, "We often forget that each unit in the mass is a throbbing human soul. Ignorant it may be, and poverty stricken, black and curious in limb and ways and thought; and yet it loves and hates, it toils and tires, it laughs and weeps its bitter tears, and looks in vague and awful longing at the grim horizon of its life" (1903:88). This passage lays the foundation for Du Bois's scholarly inspiration. Speaking specifically about black farm-laborers in rural Georgia, it highlights the prolific scholar's humanistic approach to his work. While race was an elusive concept that dominated his scholarship and political beliefs, Du Bois was undeniably invested in the study of and advocacy for black communities. Throughout his extensive academic and activist career, Du Bois strove to question the influence of socially formed identities, to resist scientific racism, and to challenge white supremacy during the 20th century, all while staying grounded in the fact that black Americans were living human beings with something to say and life experiences worthy of sociological inquiry.

Born on February 23, 1868, to a domestic worker and a laborer, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois grew up and was educated in the relatively racially integrated town of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. After attending predominantly white schools during his primary education, Du Bois was not truly introduced to a segregated community until enrolling at Fisk University in Tennessee in 1885. He graduated in three years, having spent time during

the summers teaching in rural county schools. He then earned a second bachelor's degree in 1890 and a master's in 1891 from Harvard University. There, studying under professors who were trained abroad, Du Bois was encouraged to petition for a Slater Fund Fellowship to support his educational pursuits at Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (now the University of Berlin) in 1892. He studied in Berlin for two years with renowned German intellectuals and aligned himself with the Historical School until his stipend ran out and he was required to return to the States to complete the degree (see Appiah 2014). Though disappointed at this turn of events, Du Bois did receive his doctorate in history from Harvard in 1895, the first doctoral degree Harvard bestowed to an African-American student. His dissertation was published as *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* in the inaugural volume of the Harvard Historical Studies series (1896).

Though a trained historian, Du Bois began making formative contributions to the fields of sociology and anthropology. Having taught at Wilberforce University in Ohio while completing his doctorate, in 1896 Du Bois began a lengthy and ambitious study of the black community in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward. This resulted in *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), the first scientific study of race and one of the first examples of sociological ethnographic research that would set the stage for urban ethnographers to later attempt the same in various northern American cities. With the goal to focus on the black population and "their occupations and daily life, their homes, their organizations, and, above all, their relation to their million white fellow-citizens" (1899:1), this text posits that "poverty, segregation, and lack of health care, not racial inferiority, disposition toward criminal activity, and bad morals were the root causes of Negro degradation" (Baker 1998:114). Based on household visits, Du Bois's observations of the Seventh Ward are recognized as local, but they are used as comparative data to speak to phenomena other scholars have observed in cities like Washington and Atlanta, and countries like England, Germany, and Italy. This holistic ethnography established an immersive methodology to study the so-called Negro Problem in America.

Du Bois joined Atlanta University as a professor in 1897 – the first of two lengthy tenures with the institution – which further solidified his immersion in the social issues of the American South (see Formwalt 2013). Soon after, he published the timeless classic *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), a compilation of his essays on race in America that revolved around the idea that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line" (1903:v). For Du Bois, the color-line referred to the fact that Jim Crow in America and colonialism in Africa represented interconnected expressions of oppression that produced coeval black American communities and African societies. As a result of the color-line, Du Bois theorized two metaphors that speak to the collective consciousness of the black American population. Together, both the veil and double consciousness create a duality in black Americans because the former provides them with a view of the world much different than that of other Americans, but the latter then creates two divergent ideals, as they strive to reconcile their Negro and their American associations, two seemingly mutually exclusive identities. As a concept, the existence of two souls in one person is likely influenced by Du Bois's exposure to

the German notions of *streben*, or striving, and *Geist*, or soul (Appiah 2014); he carries the notion throughout his work.

In *Souls*, Du Bois not only introduced two important concepts and grappled with several philosophical dilemmas, but he also delivered an unprecedented public critique of Booker T. Washington. Chapter three, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," is a direct challenge to the conservative's political ideology, outlining how the two were opposed in their ideas for how to address black labor, political involvement, and civil rights. Upon closer inspection, it becomes obvious that their opposition goes beyond just the educational debate (Washington's push for industrial education and Du Bois's support for the liberal arts and higher education) on which many assume their disputes were centered. Du Bois's ideological arguments with prominent black scholars did not stop with Washington, as his antagonism with leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a biracial organization he helped found in 1909, led him to leave it in 1934.

The desire to combine lived experience, politics, and historical facts permeated Du Bois's career, and this unique methodology arose because Du Bois sought to stay grounded in the discrimination and violence that his community was experiencing. He believed that he "could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered and starved" (1940:67). Thus, he became an activist scholar, skillfully uniting the facts with experience, to bring lived realities to light and to challenge the notions of global white supremacy that allowed them to even exist. His work as editor of the NAACP's *The Crisis* magazine and his involvement with Pan-African Congresses that brought attention to the need for all people of African descent to fight for freedom together are just a couple examples. However, his continued publication of texts that highlight the history and humanness of the black population, like his passionate plea in the masterful *Black Reconstruction* (1935) to give credit to black agency during Reconstruction following the Civil War, is only further proof. As Du Bois was determined to "put science into sociology through a study of the condition and problems of my own group" (1940:51), he grappled with a unique kind of double consciousness, as he was both a sympathetic insider because of his membership in the black community and a critical outsider because of his work on it. He spent his life attempting to reconcile both his Americanness and his Negroness, "two warring ideals in one dark body" (1903:2), that ultimately allowed for him to combine emic and etic perspectives for vivid cultural description and insightful analysis of cultural details.

Given Du Bois's genius was a product of his geographic environment and the political climate of his time, he developed an ambivalent relationship to America, unsure of how to navigate life in a country that actively oppressed his race. Out of this contradiction grew his affinity for Africa and his eventual socialist and communist leanings. His leftist politics influenced his decision to renounce his American citizenship and move to Ghana in 1961, allowing him to find comfort in a land where his blackness did not automatically equate to discriminatory treatment. It was here, in Accra, Ghana, where he died in 1963, one day before the March on Washington. Despite his countless contributions as a sociologist, historian,

and activist, his funeral was not attended by anyone from the United States Embassy because of his perceived radicalism.

It would be difficult to deny Du Bois's influence in shaping current assumptions and understandings of the concept of race, given the movements and associations he was involved with throughout his career. Because of the cultural cache his ideas hold, posthumous texts both about and on behalf of his life and writings are abundant; David Levering Lewis' two-part biography (1993; 2001) and the *Du Bois Review*, an interdisciplinary scholarly journal, are among the most notable on this long list. But these works are not the only ways he is connected to the contemporary moment. In *Souls*, Du Bois poignantly asks his black brothers and sisters: "How does it feel to be a problem?" (1903:1). A philosophical question that is still included in contemporary ethnographies and studies of African-American communities, Du Bois addresses the psychological ramifications of belonging to a group constantly marked as a problematic people, unable to escape the burden associated with its blackness. An awareness of this trauma weaves its way through all of Du Bois's texts, as his writings act as a response in opposition to this damning characterization. Taking advantage of the difficulties associated with his own two-ness, Du Bois repeatedly finds success in his goal to bring attention to the true brilliance of the global black population.

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