1. **Herskovits, Melville J. The Myth of the Negro Past. Boston: Beacon Press, 1941**

The myth of the Negro past is one of the principal supports of race prejudice in this country. Unrecognized in its efficacy, it rationalizes discrimination in everyday contact between Negroes and whites, influences the shaping of policy where Negroes are concerned, and affects the trends of research by scholars whose theoretical approach, methods, and systems of thought presented to students are in harmony with it. Where all its elements are not accepted, no conflict ensues even when, as in popular belief, certain tenets run contrary to some of its component parts, since its acceptance is so little subject to question that contradictions are not likely to be scrutinized too closely. The system is thus to be regarded as mythological in the technical sense of the term, for, as will be made apparent, it provides the sanction for deep-seated belief which gives coherence to behavior.

This myth of the Negro past, which validates the concept of Negro inferiority, may be outlined as follows:

1. Negroes are naturally of a childlike character, and adjust easily to the most unsatisfactory soctal situations, which they accept readily and even happily, in contrast to the American Indians, who preferred extinction to slavery;
2. Only the poorer stock of Africa was enslaved, the more intelligent members of the African.communities raided having been clever enough to elude the slavers' nets;
3. Since the Negroes were brought from all parts of the African continent, spoke diverse languages, represented greatly differing bodies of custom, and, as a matter of policy, were distributed in the New World so as to lose tribal tdentity, no least common denomtnator of understanding or behavior could have possibly been worked out by them;. Even granting enough Negroes of a given tribe had the opportunity to live together, and that they had the will and ability to continue their customary modes of behavior, the cultures of Africa were so savage and relatively so low tn the scale of human civilization that the apparent superiority of European customs as observed in the behavior of their masters, would have caused and actually did cause them to give up such aboriginal traditions as they may otherwise have desired to preserve;
5. The Negro ts thus a man wunthout a past.

Naturally, there have been reactions against this point of view, and in such works as Carter Woodson's The African Background Outlined and W. E. B. Du Bois' Black Folk, Then and Now serious attempts have been made to comprehend the entire picture of the Negro, African and New World, in its historical and functional setting. In still another category of those who disagree with this system are writers whose reactions, presented customarily with little valid documentation, center attention on Africa principally to prove that 'Negro culture" can take its place among the "higher" civilizations of mankind. Scientific thought has for some time abjured attempts at the comparative evaluation of cultures, so that these works are significant more as manifestations of the psychology of interracial conflict than as contributions to serious thought. They are in essence a part of the literature of polemics, and as such need be given little attention here. (2)

Though the historical relationship between the present-day Negroes of the United States and Africa admits of no debate, there is little scientific knowledge of what has happened to this African cultural heritage in the New World. Statements bearing on the absence or the retention of Africanisms, even though these are drawn out of differing degrees of familiarity with the patterns of Negro life in this country, share one character in common. That is, their authors, whether lay or scholarly, not only are unencumbered by firsthand experience with the African civilizations involved, but the majority of them know or, at all events, utilize but few, if any, of the works wherein these cultures are described; while such works as are cited in documentation are commonly the older sources, which today are of little scientific value. (3)

Scholarly opinion presents a fairly homogeneous conception as to African survivals in the United States. On the whole, specialists tend to accept and stress the view that Africanisms have disappeared as a result of the pressures exerted by the experience of slavery on all aboriginal modes of thought or behavior. As a starting point for subsequent analysis, a few examples of this body of thought may here be given to make available its major assumptions. Representative of this point of view is the following statement of R. E. Park, who in these terms summarizes a position he has held consistently over the years:

My own impression is that the amount of African tradition which the Negro brought to the United States was very small. In fact, there is every reason to believe, it seems to me, that the Negro, when he landed in the United States, left behind him almost everything but his dark

complexion and his tropical temperament. It is very difficult to find in the South today anything that can be traced directly back to Africa.* E. F. Frazier, in his study of the Negro family, stressed this position in a passage where, speaking of the “scraps of memories, which form only an insignificant part of the growing body of traditions in Negro families’? and which “are what remains of the African heritage,” he says:

Probably never before in history has a people been so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as the Negroes who were brought to America. Other conquered races have continued to worship their household gods within the intimate circle of their kinsmen. But Amertcan slavery destroyed household gods and dissolved the bonds of sympathy and affection between men of the same blood and household. Old men and women might have brooded over memories of their African homeland, but they could not change the world about them. Through force of circumstances, they had to acquire a new language, adopt new habits of labor, and take over, however imperfectly, the folkways of the American environment. Their children, who knew only the American environment, soon forgot the few memories that had been passed on to them and developed motivations and modes of behavior in harmony with the New World. Their children’s children have often recalled with skepticism the fragments of stories concerning Africa which have been preserved in their families. But, of the habits and customs as well as the hopes and fears that characterized the life of their forebearers in Africa, nothing remains. (4)

The same point of view concerning the retention of the African background is expressed by nonacademic specialists in the field, and by those professional students whose concern is with particular segments of culture wherein Africanisms may have persisted. Embree, who translates the physical homogeneity of the mixed Negroes of the United States into the concept of a “brown American” type, and expresses the opinion that, “it is astonishing how completely the Negro has been cut off from his African home,” explains the process in these terms: .

Torn from their previous environment, Africans found themselves grouped in the homesteads and plantations of America with fellow blacks from divergent tribes whose customs differed widely, whose languages even they could not understand. A new life had to be formed and was formed in the pattern of the New World. The old African tribal society was completely destroyed. From membership in their primitive social units, Negroes were forced into the organization required by the plantation and by the demands of the particular American families to which they were attached. The only folkways that had elements in common for all the slaves were those they found about them

in America. The Africans began to take hold of life where they could. They began to speak English, to take up the Christian religion, to fall into the labor pattern demanded by American needs and customs, to fit themselves as best they could into all the mores of the New World.® (5)

The nature of this experience may be sketched here, to make more explicit how research findings repeatedly forced revision of prevailing hypotheses. The citations given in the preceding note represent a point of view deriving from studies oriented toward the analysis of racial crossing in the United States; that is to say, they are based on observations made during investigations wherein the major issues lay outside the relevant sociological field. In studying race-crossing, however, it became apparent that without comparable measurements from ancestral African populations, the findings must have less value than were such data available. Consequently, ethnological researches, aimed at discovering the precise localities from which these African ancestral populations had been derived, were instituted. Out of this program has come firsthand field study.of New World Negroes in Dutch Guiana, in Haiti, and in Trinidad. Extended research has also been carried on into the history of slaving, and close contact has been maintained with specialists in Negro studies in the countries of South America and with those devoted ethnological amateurs who, in several of the colonies of the Caribbean, have been impelled by a desire to know more of the folk about them to con-

tribute to the store of data on New World Negro cultures. From the need to trace African origins has come research in Africa itself where, in Nigeria, the Gold Coast, and more especially in Dahomey it has been possible to study at first hand the important ancestral civilizations. Through this continually widening experience has grown recognition of the need for scientific reinvestigation of the problem of the retention of Africanisms in the New World—in the United States itself. (6)

At this point it must be again emphasized that exact knowledge touching survivals of African traditions and beliefs in the behavior of present-day Negroes in the United States and elsewhere in the New World, or of the effect of these survivals on the daily life of their carriers, is not at hand. Materials are scattered and fragmentary, where they are not altogether lacking; but the controversy aroused when the very problem is broached attests its vitality and its importance."*
The study has progressed far enough, however, to indicate some of the main lines of approach. We know today that the analysis of

African survivals among the Negroes of the United States involves far more than the commonly attempted correlation of traits of Negro behavior in this country with aboriginal tradition in Africa itself. On the contrary, such an analysis, to be adequate, requires a series of intermediate steps. A knowledge of the tribal origins of the Negroes of this country is indispensable if the variation in custom found among the tribes from which the African ancestry was drawn is to be properly evaluated; and this is the more to be desired since almost all those who write of the Negro make a capital point of this variation—variation in terms of the African continent as a whole, however, rather than of that relatively restricted area from which the slaves were predominantly derived. An analysis of the slave trade as revealed in contemporary documents and in African traditions, to give us a knowledge of any selection it may have exercised, and the reaction of the slaves to their status, 1s similarly essential. The mechanisms of adjusting the newly arrived Africans to their situation as slaves, and the extent to which these operated to permit

the retention of old habits, or to force the taking over of new modes of behavior, or to make for a mingling of old patterns and newly experienced alternatives, must be understood as thoroughly as the data will permit.

Nor may any investigation on these lines confine itself to the United States alone. For if any methodological caution has emerged from exploratory research, it is that a knowledge of the Negro cultures of the Caribbean islands and of Latin America 1s indispensable. The matter has been well put by Phillips:

As regards negro slavery the history of the West Indies is inseparable from that of North America. In them the plantation system originated and reached its greatest scale, and from them the institution of slavery was extended to the continent. The industrial system on the islands, and particularly on those occupied by the British, is accordingly instructive as an introduction and a parallel to the continental regime. !*

From the point of view of the study of Africanisms, also, it 1s as important to know the variation in Negro customary behavior, traditions, and beliefs over the entire New World as it is to understand the variation in the ancestral cultures of Africa itself, for only against such a background can the student project a clear picture of what has resulted from the differing historical experiences that constitute the essential control in the research procedure. And only with this background mastered are those mores of Negro life in the United States which deviate from majority sanctions to be realistically analyzed. (7)

Finally, further steps in research will be outlined to the end of attaining a better understanding of the processes of culture as a whole, and of an attack on the social issues presented by the Negro in the United States, in so far as the elements of conflict in the interracial situation are sharpened by~beliefs concerning the quality of the cultural background of the Negro. (9)

Despite the short-ness of his stay, and the undisciplined: observation and analysis of data that here, as in his other works, characterize the writings of this soldier, writer, and artist, his book is illuminating. For it demonstrates how much in the way of abcriginal tradition exists in West Indian and South American regions where, in disregard of even its surface manifestations, it has been overlooked by those students from the United States who, without grounding in African cultures and equipped only with the hypothesis of the disappearance of African customs as a frame of reference, have tended to minimize African Retentions. (11)

Perhaps the earliest student in the United States to point out the importance of research in the West Indies was U. G. Weatherly. He stressed the significance of “social groups in an insular environment,” particularly where, as here, an historical record is at hand to aid in determining the experience of the people, and where contact with the outside world and other factors such as “internal revolutions” or “radical shifts in control from the outside’ have made for “something more than rectilineal development.” The “smaller West Indian Islands, extending from St. Thomas to the South American coast,” according to him, “possess many of these characteristics.’ Here the present culture is the result of contact between Africans and Europeans of many nationalities, and their historical experience has been that of transfer from one of these European powers to another, with consequent historically known changes in cultural impulses. (11)

We turn again, therefore, to the phenomenon of race prejudice, the factor that provides the rationalization for many of the interracial strains that are the essence of concern to the practical man. Racial prejudice, when analyzed, is found to rest on the operation of two closely interrelated factors, one socio-economic, the other historical and psychological. These social and economic factors are well recognized; certainly, it is with these that both practical and academic studies of Negro life have been primarily, and often exclusively, concerned. The reason for this is clear. Stresses lodging in

this area are immediate, and call so compellingly for solution that the impulse to render first aid is difficult to resist. Moreover, on the surface, at least, these stresses can be referred to the situation of slavery; and their accentuation during the slave regime and since its suppression can thus be readily and satisfactorily explained. Finally, in programs of action, many of these difficulties are of a kind encountered in analogous form elsewhere in the socio-economic configurations of this country, and can thus reasonably be regarded as susceptible of effective attack through the operation of short-time ameliorative projects.

The effect of this approach has been to relegate to the background the psychological basis of the race problem, and its less immediate historical aspects, when not entirely ignoring them. Again, this is understandable, for phenomena of this order cannot be studied, much less evaluated, without long and sustained analysis, such as has been already sketched. And this, too often, gives these problems an air of remoteness which militates against their appeal to those seeking the immediate solution of pressing needs. Yet these factors are as deeply intrenched 1n the interracial situation as are those other elements which lie on the social and economic level, and they are far more insidious. In the light of current thinking about racial differences in general, they are the most effective cause in perpetuating all shades of superiority-inferiority ranking given whites and Negroes by members of both groups. For here we are dealing with points of view that have received their directive force through generations of reiteration of cultural values, of comparative worth, of historic dignity. It is, therefore, at this point that the entire historical setting, which includes the problem of Africanisms in American Negro behavior, becomes crucial, since the question of social endowment enters intimately into the determination of the assumptions on which attitudes regarding Negro inferiority rest. And it is these attitudes, as validated by the series of conceptions grouped under the heading of the myth concerning the Negro past, which rationalize and justify the handicaps that, perpetuated from one generation to the next, cause current unrest among the Negroes who suffer under them and make for a diffused, all-pervading sense of malaise and even guilt among those who impose them. (19)

2. American Negro Folklore

Phylon, 1945-01, Vol.6 (4), p.354-361

Brewer, J. Mason

The folklore of the American Negro is characterized by work, worship, superstition and fun, the factors which constituted his chief interests during the period of his enslavement. These forces caused him to develop a definite psychology-a fixed way of looking at life-as tragic or comic. The folksongs and superstitions are tragic for the most part, while the bulk of the rhymes and tales are comic in nature. (1)

Most of these folk materials are the American Negroes' inheritance of Old World and African survivals, but a large proportion of them are indigenous. They are not the products of one Period alone-the Slave Period-but of the two subsequent eras in the process of American Negro development as well. While the Slave Period, beginning in 1619 and ending in 1865 furnished the background for the entire framework of Negro folklore, the era of re-adjustment and progress, 1866 to 1917, and the modern epoch, beginning in 1917, have provided additional types of Negro folk inventions.

In addition to the folk materials of the preceding eras are those of the modern epoch which are strongly flavored by migration, the first World War and more recently by the depression, unemployment, and the culture of the underworld. 3 (355)

songs of this type will exist for some time to come, for wherever there are Negroes, there also, will be sorrow songs and all kinds of laments.

The same tragic theme is found here, but in direct contrast to the motive expressed in the preceding song. In the former the writer is expressing his thanks to the Government for saving him from tragic consequences-in the latter the composer is expressing a desire to bring tragedy into the lives of those who would harm the United States. In the other sector of the tragic materials, superstitions, which in the Negro's terminology are called "signs," much work remains to be done, not only in the field of Voodooism, but also in the realm of popular superstitions similar to those of the following: Ef 'n a kettle wid grub in it shakes on yo' stove it's shakin somebody out o' you' fam'ly. Ef'n you brings eggs in de house atter dark, de Sheriff gwine be in yo' house fo' de week is up. To incidents holding interest by the symbolical lingo the rhymes of the adult Negro in the modern era bear conformity. Their rhymes are   usually in dialogue form and are frequently influenced by the underworld. For example: Two Negroes of the underworld are seated at a table in the corner of a dive in Ft. Worth, Texas. An officer of the law enters. The first Negro, whom we will call Cup Grease, and his companion, whom we will christen Red Horse exchange the following: Cup Grease: Hello Stranger! Red Horse: I'll see you in Ranger! Whereupon the both get up and leave the beer tavern, one going in one direction and one in another. The "Hello Stranger" was a signal that a policeman had entered the door and the response "I'll see you in Ranger" meant that it is better for us to go separate ways when we leave this place, but I'll see you at our hang-out where it's safe. Ranger symbolizes an oil town near Ft. Worth, where plenty of money and good times prevail. The headquarters of the gang to which these Negroes belong bears the same ear marks as Ranger. 4

3. **DuBose Heyward's use of folklore in his Negro fiction / by Frank M. Durham**

Durham, Frank
1961

Futher- more Heyward's constant aim was to present the Negro as an exotic , a primitive — atavistic , with roots reaching down into the dark , rich soil of savagery , drawing on a knowledge unshared by the civilized man . In fact , one of his chief themes is the contrast between the natural , the primitive , the unconsciously wise , and the ugly sterility of rationalism , industrialism , and civilization . Heyward constantly employs the so - called " scientific " folklore , espe- cially in Porgy and The Half Pint Flask . The Negro , as Heyward shows him , has a body of superstitions that guide his actions and influence his thinking .(11)

Conjuring , or " conjer ” or “ cunjer , " is depicted as playing a promi- nent role in the beliefs of the Negro . In Porgy when Bess is sick Maria persuades Porgy to send two dollars to Lody on Ediwander Island " an ' tell she tuh mek a conjer tuh cas ' de debbil out Bess " (pp . 100-101) . Porgy's faith in the " conjer " is shown by his calculating the time to the minute that the charm will take effect . At the exact moment Bess emerges from her delirium . However , Heyward lets Maria discover that her message had never reached Lody and the " conjer " was never made (12)

The Negro created the spirituals out of his personal need . His joy over the resurrection expresses itself in its relation to himself in his many stirring Judgement Day songs . As a matter of fact , there is little profit in quoting words of the spirituals . It is the music that is the great thing , and the words

are often almost ridiculous . But there is a tremendous story which would touch on the Negroe's [sic] African background , his awakening in the New World , his reaction to Christianity , then the growth of the spiritual as his means of expression . For the spiritual said everything for him that he could not say in the new language that he found here - awe in the presence of death - his racial terror of being left alone- his escape from bondage into the new heaven - everything.30 This letter , which well describes Heyward's use of the

spiritual , was written after the success of Porgy and Mamba's Daughters and the favorable critical attention given the treatment of Negro music in his fiction and his plays . (19)

4. **The Negro Stereotype: Negro Folklore and the Riots**

The Journal of American folklore, 1970-04, Vol.83 (328), p.229-249
Abrahams, Roger D.

The whites didn't see the message clearly because of stereotypes thye could brush this behavior off as typical.

Breaks down why contemporary folklorists have now shifted to studying peasant or indigenous groups. With this new knowledge they are able to compare black practices with that of other marginalized groups to see why certain practices and customs are present.

The definition of stereotype. The force of a stereotype and its ambivalence.

Positions folklore as the main indicator of a people's self-identity, and place as a main factor for grounding a people together and knowing who they are. Uses comparative folklore to contrast with the Mexican American and how their sense of identity continued to develop in oppression as opposed to the Negro who was building from scratch and also from negatives. Lack of a distinct culture outside the dominant.
Mainly, we see that Abrahams looks at what the folklore says about negros and how they have taken it in as part of their own ideology. Taking the negative traits, lazy, violent, sexual deviant, and turned them around as positive traits. Infusing them into their animal stories and bad man tales, casting their heroes with crime and suicidal tendencies. When the people are finaly ready to rise up, their cries go unheard because this behavior is in line with the stereotypes white people already have of them.

5. **Zora Neale Hurston - Of Mules and men**

Use this introduction to talk about Zora's methods, and how her work marked a change into black people telling their own stories and owning the narrative. Mark how she was able to go in and be accepted. No more masked man as when black people were likely to hide their true lives and inner truth from white people.

Also need to talk about her mentor Frans Boa and how her academic lineage comes from his exploration of scientific racism and how he aimed to dismantle it with anthropology. Major shift in how people study folklore.

I WAS GLAD when somebody told me, "You may go and collect Negro folk-lore."

In a way it would not be a new experience for me. When I pitched headforemost into the world I landed in the crib of negroism. From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that.

Dr. Boas asked me where I wanted to work and I said, "Florida," and gave, as my big reason, that "Florida is a place that draws people -white people from all over the world, and Negroes from every Southern state surely and some from the North and West." So I knew that it was possible for me to get a cross section of the Negro South in the one state. And then I realized that I was new myself, so it looked sensible for me to choose familiar ground.

First place I aimed to stop to collect material was Eatonville, Florida.

And now, I'm going to tell you why I decided to go to my native village first. I didn't go back there so that the home folks could make admiration over me because I had been up North to college and come back with a diploma and a Chevrolet. I knew they were not going to pay either one of these items too much mind. I was just Lucy Hurston's daughter, Zora, and even if I had -to use one of our down-home expressions -had a Kaiser baby, 1 and that's something that hasn't been done in this Country yet, I'd still be just Zora to the neighbors. If I had exalted myself to impress the town, somebody would have sent me word in a match-box that I had been up North there and had rubbed the hair off of my head against some college wall, and then come back there with a lot of form and fashion and outside show to the world. But they'd stand flat-footed and tell me that they didn't have me, neither my sham-polish, to study 'bout. And that would have been that.

I hurried back to Eatonville because I knew that the town was full of material and that I could get it without hurt, harm or danger. As early as I could remember it was the habit of the men folks particularly to gather on the store porch of evenings and swap stories. Even the women folks would stop and break a breath with them at times. As a child when I was sent down to Joe Clarke's store, I'd drag out my leaving as long as possible in order to hear more.

Folk-lore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually under-privileged, are the shyest. They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!" We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing. The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a

feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries.

The theory behind our tactics: "The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song."

I knew that even I was going to have some hindrance among strangers. But here in Eatonville I knew everybody was going to help me. So below Palatka I began to feel eager to be there and I kicked the little Chevrolet right along.

I thought about the tales I had heard as a child. How even the Bible was made over to suit our vivid imagination. How the devil always outsmarted God and how that over-noble hero Jack or John -not John Henry, who occupies the same place in Negro folk-lore that Casey Jones does in white lore and if anything is more recent -outsmarted the devil. Brer Fox, Brer Deer, Brer 'Gator, Brer Dawg, Brer Rabbit, Ole Massa and his wife were walking the earth like natural men way back in the days when God himself was on the ground and men could talk with him. Way back there before God weighed up the dirt to make the mountains. When I was rounding Lily Lake I was remembering how God had made the world and the elements and people. He made souls for people, but he didn't give them out because he said:

6. Inventing the new Negro : narrative, culture, and ethnography
Lamothe, Daphne Mary. methodology and ethnography chapters

Chapter 3
Raising the Veil: Racial Divides and
Ethnographic Crossings in The Souls of
Black Folk
Objectivity, Authority, and Epistemologies of Difference
Like Franz Boas, W. E. B. Du Bois profoundly helped shape modern American thought on race and culture. As I have already mentioned, DuBois's 1897 speech "The Conservation of the Races" was a landmark moment in the development of cultural pluralism. Biographer David Levering Lewis credits Du Bois with first articulating the principles of cultural pluralism in this speech to the American Negro Academy, long before the terminology to describe cultural pluralism even existed. 1 Lewis writes:
The writings of James and Dewey would point the way for the "cultural radicals;' the pluralists of the near future, but the boldest signpost was first erected by Du Bois when he asked rhetorically of the seventeen attentive men in the Washington church: "[W]hat after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it

my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? If I strive as a Negro, am I not perpetuating the very cleft that threatens and separates Black and White America? Is not my only possible practical aim the subduction of all that is Negro in me to the American? Does my Black blood place upon me any more obligation to assert my nationality than German, or Irish or Italian blood would?" (172)

In asking these questions, he began to unravel notions of citizenship and national identity, work that would contribute to a project of making America more inclusive and pluralistic. I will go on in this chapter to argue that Du Bois would prove to be a driving force in the New Negro movement, not only as a theorist of race and culture, but also as a literary figure. But in order for me to argue for his influence as a theoretician and social scientist, we must consider how the disciplines of anthropology and sociology paralleled each other at a time when both he and Boas embarked on their careers. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, sociology, like anthropology, broke with

the less professional standards of writing upheld by earlier generations, by emphasizing empiricism and objectivity as proof of the disciplines' scientific legitimacy.2 Each centered on the study of "primitive" societies-abroad in the case of anthropology and at home in the case of sociology-with ethnography functioning as a privileged mode of inquiry.3

Trained at Harvard primarily as a philosopher, historian, and political scientist, Du Bois acquired the skills and methodological approach necessary to conduct the empirical research that informed his earliest writings during his years at the University of Berlin (1892-94). Although he considered majoring in philosophy at Harvard, he eventually studied history because his professors warned him of the impracticality of the philosophy major, particularly for an individual committed to the work of racial uplift.4 When he turned as a graduate student more decisively to the social sciences, buoyed, in part, by his studies at Harvard with the philosopher William James, Du Bois revealed a pragmatist's concern with the tangible application of ideas to the material world. 5 The years he spent studying at Humboldt University reinforced this approach. Carved above the university's entrance was the maxim, "until now philosophers have only explained the world, our task is to change it" (Lewis 142). Under the tutelage of Gustav Schmoller in Berlin, he learned to privilege inductive reasoning and analysis built on objectively accumulated historical and descriptive material. Schmoller "saw the goal of social science as the systematic, causal explanation of social phenomena, and he believed that social scientific facts, based on careful, inductive analysis, could be used as a guide to formulate social policy."6 Until1910, DuBois's sociological works show ample evidence of Schmoller's influence, including his emphasis on empirical data collection, the use of facts as the basis for creating social policy, an underlying interest in social justice, and an emphasis on an historical approach, of which The Philadelphia Negro (1899) is a stellar example (Lewis 201).

After returning to the States in 1896 and a short stint teaching classics at

Wilberforce University, DuBois was offered a temporary position at the University of Pennsylvania to study the social condition and urban problems of Philadelphia's African American population. At that time, Philadelphia contained the largest community of African Americans in the North. Du Bois produced a 400-page monograph entitled The Philadelphia Negro, which analyzed the plight of the urban Black using survey and demographic data, much of which Du Bois collected during his stay in the city. Dan Green and Edwin Driver describe his sojourn in Philadelphia, during which he rented a room over a cafeteria in the "worst part" of the Seventh Ward, as an exercise

in participant-observation, although the extent of his immersion in neighborhood life is debatable given his displeasure with the rougher element that populated the district. This fifteen-month appointment was followed by his employment at Atlanta University as a professor of economics and history, and as director of the Sociological Laboratory and the Atlanta University Conferences. Between 1897 and 1920, DuBois took charge of this series of annual sociological conferences, which had been inaugurated in 1896 to study the effect of urban problems on African Americans. He also edited the annual volumes that issued from the conferences and taught a course on sociology. Yet by 1910 he moved away from pure sociology and toward other forms of address and redress, such as fiction, and his activism in the NAACP. 7

Du Bois's early commitment to empiricism is uncontested, but the question of whether and if so, when his commitment wavered varies as critics consider the significance of his varied rhetorical strategies and methods in doing anti-racist work. Wilson Moses argues, for example, that Du Bois the scholar initially adopted the discourse of the social sciences because "as a youth Du Bois was romantically involved with the idea of social science, which he naively believed might yield a science of racial advancement:'8 To describe this commitment as romantic suggests that Du Bois's faith in empiricism as a weapon against social injustice was youthfully naive, an interpretation that resonates with other critics who note that as Du Bois matured and became more aware of the roots of racial inequality, his approach to sociological research changed. Green and Driver note, "beginning in 1901 and continuing until his public split with [Booker T.] Washington in 1903, he was apparently moving through a transition period away from academic science and sociology toward action, agitation, and writing for popular magazines" (19). The lynching of Sam Hose, a Palmetto, Georgia farmer proved especially influential to DuBois's diminished belief in the value of inductive reasoning as a tool for social engineering.9 He became convinced, they assert, that scientific investigation was not sufficient to solve the problems of Black Americans because the problems were not, as he had initially and idealistically assumed, those of ignorance, but were instead based on the conscious determination of one group to suppress and persecute another.

In contrast, Robert Stepto argues that Du Bois adhered to a scientific

language because of his desire for authentication. "He seeks nothing less than a new narrative mode and form in which empirical evidence, scientifically gathered in a literal and figurative field (for example, the Black Belt), performs the authenticating chores previously completed by white opinion."10

And Houston Baker underscores DuBois's lifelong commitment to scientific

observation, stating that "while studying in Berlin under Gustav Schmoller (1892-94), Du Bois came to believe that the solution to the American racial problem was 'a matter of systematic investigation; and throughout his life he was dedicated to critical objectivity-to what Mathew Arnold defined as 'disinterestedness.' " 11

DuBois's view of empiricism and inductive reasoning (which he never fully abandoned) is as important as his level of commitment to these methods. Even as a young scholar, his work shows that he reflected on the possibilities and limits of constructing a scientific discourse on race, even as he revealed an acute awareness of the cultural capital that science held. In 1903, when he published The Souls of Black Folk, the reader finds Du Bois wary of an unquestioning embrace of empiricism and even of the possibility of a Negro living a "life of the mind." Rather than advocating pure science early in his career, which he later retains or discards depending on the critic's point of view, we can see Du Bois inhabiting the middle ground, at the intersections of thought and action, reason and emotion, scholarship and activism.

Shamoon Zamir's argument that the empirical and emotional exist dialectically in DuBois's body of work introduces an alternative to other critics' chronological or developmental narratives of Du Bois's thought on the uses of sociology. Reflecting on the importance of his writing the first chapters of Souls while in the midst of working on The Philadelphia Negro, Zamir identifies a "triumphant" conflict between scientific empiricism and political advocacy, or between "thought and feeling." He concludes, "if the different approaches represent conflicting understandings, then it is the very contradictions and struggles, not the straightforward triumph of one option over another, that must be accepted as the truth ofDu Bois's thought" (55-56). Dialectical exchange can be seen as the operable mode not only among discrete periods of his career, or texts (Souls and Philadelphia), but also within the singular masterpiece, The Souls of Black Folk. 12 Thought and feeling, or science and activism, acquire meaning when we understand one in relation to the other. Du Bois makes evident his awareness of this fact in his layering and piecing together of different discursive traditions.

Race, Marginality, and the Formation of National Communities

The Souls of Black Folk is comprised of twelve essays and one short story, addressing a range of topics from the personal, to the sociological, historical, ethnographic, and political. 13 According to Gates and West, the breadth of

topics and genres mirrors the scope of Du Bois's accomplishments. They call

the book a monumental achievement that charts "the contours of the civilization [the Negro "nation-within-a-nation"]-the arts and sciences, the metaphysical and religious systems, the myths and music, the social and political institutions, the history both before and after Emancipation-that defined a truly African American culture at the outset of the new centurY:' 14

The work's expansiveness was necessary for DuBois to successfully portray Negro "civilization" from both internal and external points of view. Sociology gave him a framework through which he could produce an empirical and historical analysis of the state of Black America. Fiction allowed him to explore the post-emancipation dynamics between the emerging intellectual and professional classes and the masses of Black Southerners; and the "sorrow songs;' as Du Bois called African American spirituals, voice the despair, longings, and hopes of Black people who had been historically silenced and subordinated because of the dual stigmas of color and poverty. In all these discursive moments, Du Bois presents himself as a representative subject who exhibits kinship and solidarity with the oppressed from a shared history of oppression, even as the adoption of the social scientist's identity in the service of racial uplift and activism produces a tension that threatens to unravel the affiliations he so fiercely maintains.

The Souls of Black Folk is not the first work in which Du Bois experiments with the rhetorical approach of simultaneously representing the Negro from "without" and "within;' although he did not necessarily accomplish this through discursive hybridity, as he does in Souls. In "The Black North in 1901;' he tackles the perception that Black communities in the North are homogenous by twinning his analysis of demographic statistics about social patterns such as domestic configurations and employment statistics with a brief psychological sketch of the "average New York negro" that attempts to describe the emotional and psychic resources on which Black people draw in response to racism. In the essay he observes, "they live and move in a community of their own kith and kin and shrink quickly and permanently from those rough edges where contact with the larger life of the city wounds and humiliates them" (reprinted in Green and Driver 151).15 This description emphasizes that social contact across interracial lines is obstructed by a racism that can be palpable in its damaging effects. Du Bois states that racism is a force from which the Negro shrinks and retreats into the protective fold of a homogenous community in an act of self-defense. Yet this observation occurs in as essay in which substantial effort has been made to establish the high degree of social, economic, and moral differences

among Blacks in New York's segregated neighborhoods. The incongruous representation of New York Blacks as both heterogeneous and insular suggests that both juxtaposition to and segregation from a dominant group can render a marginalized community cut off and isolated. Rather than positioning Blacks, the domestic U.S. version of the primitive others, as "out of time;'

Du Bois underscores the notion that segregation is directly caused by adverse social and historical forces.

Insights such as these were made possible by Du Bois's multiple allegiances to scholarly and racial communities. Inspired by the liminality of his own subject position, he introduces the symbol of the veil as a figure for the racial divide. The image can also be read as a symbol of the ethnographer as participant-observer. In the "Forethought" of The Souls of Black Folk, he conjures an image of a narrator unique in his ability to move and communicate across the color line: "Leaving, then, the world of the white man, I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses, the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls" (359). This portrait illustrates an ideal relation between ethnographer and audience, characterized by the narrator's mastery of the nuances of transculturation and the reader's openness to greater understanding of the racial other, yet it is also a depiction rife with ambivalences. It hints at, for example, the narrator's liminality through the image of his stepping "within the Veil." To step within the Veil is to traverse anxiously between, and live partly in, both White and Black worlds, a circumstance that may lend its own insight but that also speaks of alienation. As Houston Baker argues:

The "veil" is Du Bois's metaphor for what might be thought of as the "edge" of the performative frame, the dissonant rim where safe, colored parochialism is temptingly and provisionally refigured as an anguished mulatto cosmopolitanism. The "veil" hangs in the performative moment like a scrim between dark, pastoral, problematic folk intimacy with black consciousness, and free-floating anxieties of a public mulatto modernism that subjects one to the white "gaze:'16

That dissonant edge, the performative space inhabited by the cosmopolitan Black (or racially hybrid) modern is also a space of undefined possibility for the audience as much as it is for the narrator. The image of the reader viewing beyond the Veil "faintly" both promises and withholds the possibility of his identifying with the author's Southern Black subjects. This ambivalence over the narrator's ability to cross racial boundaries easily, or facilitate the passage of others, is rendered still more complexly in other parts of the book.

so Chapter 3

DuBois queries the efficacy of scientific authority, for example, by rendering uncertain the possibility of the scientist (himself included) knowing his subjects fully. His description of the Georgia Black Belt, the "center of the Negro problem;' commences with the narrator aboard a train rumbling through Georgia; its movement across the rural landscape allows the narrator to cover historical ground as well, from the slave trade, to the Cherokee nation's displacement by the U.S. government, and into the present moment of the plantation system's dissipation and disappearance. Du Bois's summons the reader-"Ifyou wish to ride with me you must come into the 'Jim Crow Car' "-playing with the idea of simultaneous closeness and distance

(440). While this invitation holds out the promise of a kind of intimacy that would grow commensurate with the reader's increased understanding of the Black Belt and proposes the closure of a social divide, it also accurately positions the narrator and Black folk in separate racial camps and social strata from Whites and indicts the nation for its failures to live up to its social contract with the Negro. Du Bois continues, "There will be no objection,-already four other white men, and a little white girl with her nurse, are in there. Usually the races are mixed in there; but the white coach is all white .... The discomfort lies chiefly in the hearts of those four black men yonder-and in mine" (440-41). The inability of the White passengers to share the Negroes' sense of constraint in movement and choice, limits their ability to truly empathize even as they share the same social space. Consequently, Du Bois's invitation to the reader to accompany him into the heart of the Black Belt, to delve deeply beneath the layers of history and social customs to arrive at a greater measure of understanding, is accompanied by a subtle reminder of the (white) reader's privileged social status that constrains his ability to identify with the experience of oppression that is de rigueur for the African American.

The (im)possibility of knowing the racial other deepens in Du Bois's representation of Albany, Georgia, a typical Southern town whose Negro inhabitants he describes as "black, sturdy, uncouth country folk, good-natured and simple, talkative to a degree, and yet far more silent and brooding than the crowds of the Rhine-pfalz, or Naples, or Cracow" (442)Y The silence and brooding that Du Bois observes suggest a collective resistance to the clinical gaze of the observer, a wall of reserve erected to fend off the outsider who is the reader; and perhaps DuBois the social scientist and light-skinned Yankee, despite his repeated claims of affiliation with Southern Black folk. The inscrutability of the masses, their refusal to be "read" as examples of a primitive type, rears up almost simultaneously with the narrator's assertions of his

ability to represent them. And admittedly, it is this same narrator who observes about this landscape and the people who populate it: "How curious a land is this,-how full of untold story, of tragedy and laughter, and the rich legacy of human life; shadowed with a tragic past, and big with future promises" (447). Such statements make clear that the author's reservations arise from his sense that the reader will not or cannot adequately discern these individuals' humanity either through the poverty, disrepair, and despair that overrun their town, or through a totalizing scientific narrative, that would view them as an abstraction known as "the folk:'

The narrative's shift from an ethnographic perspective to an elegiac one underscores this question by probing the ability of ethnography to adequately represent the Black Belt in all its complexity and prodding the reader to deeper levels of empathy. Du Bois thus moves from a survey of the dilapidated cabins, to a brief historical meditation, to a lyrical recounting of the

Negroes' arrival in the American South:

Then came the black slaves. Day after day the clank of chained feet marching from Virginia and Carolina to Georgia was heard in these rich swamp lands. Day after day the songs of the callous, the wail of the motherless, and the muttered curses of the wretched echoed from the Flint to the Chickasawhatchee, until by 1860 there had risen in West Dougherty perhaps the richest slave kingdom the modern world ever knew. (448)

The portrait being drawn here, with its sentimental tenor, gothic images of enslavement, and hints at cultural richness yet to be discovered ("the richest slave kingdom the modern world ever knew"), differs strikingly from the earlier description of Black Belt inhabitants as "black, sturdy, uncouth country folk:' The almost seamless narrative's transition from "clinical" observation to sentimental lyricism and grand mythmaking mirrors the perspectives of the narrator and reader, outsiders working to achieve a measure of closeness to the subjects under observation. As Hazel Carby argues, "In The Souls of Black Folk, Du Bois's initial premise was that black people and black cultural forms did not exist in opposition to the national ideals but, on the contrary, embodied those ideals. He thus attempted to rewrite the dominant cultural and political script by transferring the symbolic power of nationalism, of Americanness, into a black cultural field and onto the black male body."18

I want to suggest that the Southern Black folk, the narrator, and his readers are all active participants in a narrative whose intent is to make possible the formation of a more pluralistic national community. The narrator and his readers' passage through the Black Belt is the more obvious in that

they are understood to be modern men of reason who use travel to understand and, hopefully, cross social and geographic boundaries. Yet even as the Black Belt inhabitants seem, in contrast, to occupy a typically static positionstuck in a backward society, rooted in tradition-Du Bois produces an alternative reading that underscores the Southern country folk's passage through time. He emphasizes, in other words, the importance of their temporal progress, their steady, collective march into the future not visible to the outsider unless he is willing to leave behind the comfort of racist ideologies and regimes to join Du Bois on the journey in the "Jim Crow car:'

The challenges posed by African Americans' social marginalization provided much of the impetus behind DuBois's sociological theories and methods. In "The Negroes of Dougherty County, Georgia;' Du Bois described his methods for collecting data: "My first work [in studying small communities] was at Farmville, Virginia. What I did in that case was to go to a typical town and settle down there for a time. I made a census of the town personally, went to the house of each negro family in town, and tried to find out as much as I could about the general situation of things in that town" (reprinted in Green

and Driver 154). Here he suggests settling within and blending into a community results in more acute observations; in Souls it allows for an empathetic linking of the individual and the group, the articulation of racial
feeling, and the formation of a racial community. The privileging of communal relations in Souls marks a shift from The Philadelphia Negro, in which Du
Bois writes in the voice of"classic social analysts [who] pretend to speak either from a position of omniscience or from no position at all;' to his explicitly positioning himself within a particular social context.19 Declaring in the
Forethought, "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 claims a racial
and biological affiliation that minimizes the regional, educational, and class
differences that distinguished him from the masses of Southern Black slave
descendants (209). Where in The Philadelphia Negro he highlights intraracial
difference, in this text, written almost contemporaneously, he underscores
notions of attachment through kinship.
Stepto argues that "DuBois's efforts at binding or combining create expressions of a special unity between 'we' and 'I; 'our' and 'my; 'theirs' and
'mine: that is unquestionably central to the rhetorical and narrative strategies of The Souls and, quite likely, essential to Du Bois's personal sense of
self."20 This strategy also anticipates the Renaissance project of communal
and cultural identity construction. By merging the "I" and the "We:' the individual and the communal, he signals a shift toward the articulation of a

common, modern identity emerging from the ashes of slavery. Du Bois turns
to the South at a moment when Blacks were beginning to leave the region
and its slaveholding legacy iri increasingly larger numbers (the trickle he documents will, in a matter of decades, turn into a flood of urban migrants). He
documents the development of an expressive culture that held traces of the
old and new, the South and the North, the Black and the White. The ongoing importance of these ideas is signaled by the frequent turn by New Negro
contributors to the folklore and culture of the African American slaves as a
source of artistic inspiration, even as they announce a definitive break from
the past.

The Literal and Figurative South

Members of the New Negro Renaissance legitimized the movement's progressiveness by underscoring the rural, slaveholding South's setting in the
retrograde past; and looking back at the progress narrative intrinsic to the
"Hampton Idea," we can see that this was not a formulation invented by
the upwardly mobile African Americans of the 1920s. Du Bois's response to
this impulse, however, was to suggest, through what I call the homecoming
trope (in "Of the Coming of John"), that one must first revisit the past in
order to move more assuredly into the future. 21 The reoccurrence of the
Southern home as trope in the literature of the period gives weight to Sterling Brown's observation that Harlem was not the epicenter of the New

Negro Renaissance. He insisted, "the New Negro movement had temporal roots in the past and spatial roots elsewhere in America."22 Houston Baker provocatively suggests, "Modernism's emphasis falls on the locative-where one is located or placed-in determining how constricted the domain of freedom might be" (Turning South 69-70). Fiction as diverse as Jean Toomer's Cane (1923), Walter White's Fire in the Flint (1924), Nella Larsen's Quicksand (1928), Langston Hughes's Ways of White Folk (1933), and Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) repeat and revise Du Bois's story of education, migration from, return to, and uplift of Southern homes. These narratives of homecoming and cosmopolitan migration constitute a collective, fictive grappling with both the ethnographic imagination and its implications in the complex relations of the "talented tenth" to the "folk" he or she aspires to represent. Especially at this historical moment, the South represents, according to Baker, "a liminal zone, a middle passage of the imagination, a space of performance, a series of peculiar 'strips' of

interactive behavior where blackness has played or performed toward the scene of modernity" (36). The South was a symbolic location with which New Negro intellectuals constructed and performed modern Black identities.

The social sciences' emphasis on fieldwork as a fundamental mode of inquiry established the notion of"the field" as isolated, set apart, and uncorrupted by outside communities. 23 Yet we should not attribute the place of the South in the Renaissance imagination solely to this fact. Because the Southern Black Belt is a central site of analysis for Du Bois he, as much as a figure like Boas, influenced Harlem Renaissance constructions of New Negro identity in relation to the Southern past. Alain Locke extends Du Bois's thesis when he argues in "The New Negro;' for example, for the recognition of more progressive, assertive, and urban identified Negro, whose advancement was tied to a revaluation of the artistic and cultural roles Southern Blacks have played in the regional and national scenes. What was needed, in other words, for the advancement of the race, was a reassessment of the value of the culture from which it was born:

> It must be increasingly recognized that the Negro has already made very substantial contributions, not only in his folk-art, music especially, which has always found appreciation, but in larger, though humbler and less acknowledged ways. For generations the Negro has been the peasant matrix of that section of American which most undervalued him, and here he has contributed not only materially in labor and in social patience, but spiritually as well. The South has unconsciously absorbed the gift of his folk-temperament. In less than half a generation it will be easier to recognize this, but the fact remains that a leaven of humor, sentiment, imagination and tropic nonchalance has gone into the making of the South from a humble, unacknowledged source. (15)

Locke's identification of the Southern "folk" as a point of orientation for the

creation of an African American expressive culture corresponds with and is informed by a period in which Black writers absorbed the idea of the "field" as apart from the real and modern present because of their ethnographic training and/or interests.24 In fact, DuBois's representation of the Southern Black Belt anticipates the New Negro consumption of anthropological concepts when, in The Souls of Black Folk, he describes a Southern town as a product of the imagination of modern, urbanized Northerners:

> Once upon a time we knew country life so well and city life so little that we illustrated city life as that of a closely crowded country district. Now the world has well nigh forgotten what the country is, and we must imagine a little city of black people

> scattered far and wide over three hundred lonesome square miles of land, without train or trolley, in the midst of cotton and corn, and wide patches of sand and gloomy soil. (442)

When writing from a distance, whether geographic or experiential, Du Bois suggests descriptions of the other inevitably leave something lacking because the writer endows them with characteristics of the familiar, or relies on easy stereotype. The city dweller, he implies, may aspire to represent "country life;' but her or she may only be able to imagine a "little city" in which the relational geography assumes the characteristics of life in an urban setting, while at the same time imposing on the landscape stock features of associated with the rural: cotton, corn, and gloomy soil.

The irony is that while Du Bois certainly emphasizes the isolation of Southern towns because of historical circumstances (namely racial segregation), he also stressed its status as an ideal study site because the advent of emancipation allowed for the rapid social transformation of a once oppressed group of individuals. In "The Atlanta Conferences" (1904), for example, he wrote:

> The careful exhaustive study of the isolated group then is the ideal of the sociologist of the 2oth century-from that may come a real knowledge of natural law as locally manifest-a glimpse and revelation of rhythm beyond this little center at last careful, cautious generalization and formulation. For such work there lies before the sociologist of the Untied States a peculiar opportunity. We have here going on before our eyes the evolution of a vast group of men from simpler primitive conditions to higher more complex civilization. (reprinted in Green and Driver 54)

Du Bois's implicit suggestion is that we should not equate geographical isolation with temporal stasis; Southern Black society was caught up in a dynamic process of regeneration. Baker points out that the South became in the African American imagination a locus of sustained analysis, identified more than any other place with African American culture, not because of uncritical essentialism or nostalgia for a vernacular culture but because it was the home of the vast majority of Blacks after emancipation.25 For DuBois, the South was the birthplace of African American culture, but he also viewed it as a microcosm of a culture in the process of social advancement, progress

writ large. And, just as importantly, he considered the Southern Negro condition to be intimately tied to the outcomes of their Northern kin. He wrote,
for example, in "The Black North in 1901: New York;' "The North ... has
much more than an academic interest in the Southern negro problem. Un-
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less the race conflict there is so adjusted as to leave the negroes a contented,
industrious people, they are going to migrate here and there. And into the
large cities will pour in increasing numbers the competent and the incompetent, the industrious and the lazy, the law abiding and the criminal"
(reprinted in Green and Driver 143). The suggestion here is that northward
migration is not the only avenue to lead to socioeconomic progress, and the
improvement of race relations was a-if not the-critical step toward collective Black advancement. In his early sociological works DuBois not only emphasized North/South interconnectedness, he also differentiated among
social and economic strata within urban Negro communities in order for
Whites to better recognize the achievement of the "better classes:'
This agenda is first apparent in The Philadelphia Negro. In his overview
to this study, Du Bois writes:
It is often tacitly assumed that the Negroes of Philadelphia are one homogenous mass, and that the slums of the Fifth Ward, for instance, are one of the results of long contact with Philadelphia city life on the part of this mass. There is just enough truth and falsehood in such an assumption to make it dangerously misleading. The slums of Seventh and Lombard streets are largely results of the contact of the Negro with city life, but the Negro in question is a changing variable quantity and has felt city influences for periods varying in different persons from one day to seventy years. A generalization then that includes a North Carolina boy who has migrated to the city for
work and has been here for a couple of months, in the same class with a descendant of several generations of Philadelphia Negroes, is apt to make serious mistakes. The first lad may deserve to be pitied if he falls into dissipation and crime, the second ought perhaps to be condemned severely. In other words our judgment of the thousands of Negroes of this city must be in all cases considerably modified by a knowledge of their previous history and antecedents. (reprinted in Green and Driver 127)
Du Bois's efforts to differentiate within the race implicitly challenged the
ethnographic imperative to construct a narrative of a community, or "field"
that was isolated, homogenous, and "authentic" because of the presumed
lack of encounters with contaminating outsiders. Ironically, he reveals in this
overtly sociological text his awareness that representing a community in a
field site as representative of the whole race runs the risk of masking the reality of profound differences within it, a prospect that would have run
counter to Du Bois's attempts to make visible different levels of accomplishment within Black communities. Although he stressed that the outside observer needed a sufficiently historical view of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward in
order to recognize the different levels of achievement (or potential for
achievement) within the urban enclave, he changes approaches in The Souls

of Black Folk precisely because he has different rhetorical aims. In contrast to emphasizing a Northern Black urban neighborhood's heterogeneity, he seems to conclude that such a setting was less suited to the kind of collective cultural identity construction that he embarks upon in The Souls of Black Folk. There, ·he turns his prophetic vision southward to a region whose recognizable traits seemed to offer more to the cultural nationalist and ethnographer bent on drawing a unified portrait of a racial group with a cohesive cultural identity.

Du Bois anticipates New Negro constructions of identity construction when, in The Souls of Black Folk, he writes about the African-derived cultural origins of Southern Black American genius in his discussion of the sorrow songs. Black writers, including Du Bois, produced an equally compelling depiction of the South as a place of violence, dispossession, and displacement, a portrait perhaps epitomized by Richard Wright's post-Harlem Renaissance fiction. But because Locke and his peers-following in Du Bois's very large footsteps-were so bent on articulating the modern and progressive in African American culture and situating that culture within a expressive Black tradition, they initiated a sustained "reading" of the South as what French historian Pierre Nora has labeled a site of memory.26 Nora suggests that acts of commemoration of a folk past are frequently deployed in the service of a particular kind of nationalism, which resonates with the New Negroes' incipient cultural nationalism. Farah Jasmine Griffin argues that the portrait of the South as home, site of ancestral wisdom and spirituality, finds its fullest articulation in post-Civil Rights era literatures of migration as a response to Northern experiences of violence and dominationY In each case-whether in the France described by Nora, the industrializing decades heralded by the New Negro, or the post-6os cultural dislocation captured in contemporary Black fiction-the construction of a cultural space of wholeness is pressed into service to represent an always desired, never achievable state of plenitude by a people contending with social fragmentation and ensuing crises of identity. 28 The paradox of the Harlem Renaissance era is that its writers, like Du Bois, initiated this trope while simultaneously contending with widely held assumptions that Southern Negro culture held not wisdom but indecipherability and little of true value. Sociology, like anthropology, could be a weapon in the anti-racist project, but it was not without its pitfalls in that both tended to deny individual agency and to generalize about a group based on the example of representative subjects.29

Creating a counter-narrative to this discourse of Negro primitivism required that Du Bois view himself as something other, or more, than a social

scientist as he wrote about his own people, and that he recognize and validate the everyday knowledge and wisdom of common people. The ability to express what cannot always be articulated through language-the heights and

depths of human experience-epitomized for Du Bois the best of African American expressivity rooted in the Southern slave experience and simultaneously illustrated the notion that culture and knowledge could develop in ways, and emerge from sources not recognized by hegemonic structures. Thus he devoted large sections of his book to rendering, indeed articulating, folk wisdom. Implicitly, Du Bois asks us to consider what happens when certain modes of knowledge production disallow certain kinds of knowledge. And also, he makes the reader see that these different modes of knowing need not exist in a racially or socially segregated vacuum. This fact makes The Souls of Black Folk an important theoretical intervention on the practices of doing fieldwork, writing ethnography, and producing culture.

The Sorrow Songs: Expressing the Incomprehensible

In order to construct an argument that is both culturally nationalist and humanistic, DuBois emphasizes the universal significance oflocal forms of cultural expression. The Sea Islands, he writes for example, were "touched and moulded less by the world about them than any others outside the Black Belt" (537). DuBois's emphasis on the Sea Islands' isolation follows what will eventually become standard ethnographic practice, localizing, and isolating the cultural field (at least rhetorically) from a contaminating exposure to modernity and difference. Yet despite the Sea Islanders' strangeness-that is, their alienation from the American majority-Du Bois implored, "their hearts were human and their singing stirred men with a mighty power" (537). His ensuing discussion makes clear that the spiritual and emotional pull of the music arises from its capacity to convey the most common and tragic of human experiences and emotions. The sorrow songs, we learn, are the expressions of exile, betrayal, despair, death, mourning, strife, fugitivity, and struggle (539-41). To DuBois, their creation was made possible by intercultural contact and they promised social transformation.30 Noting the nation's neglect of the slave songs before the Civil War, Du Bois identifies the war as a pivotal moment because "after the capture of Hilton Head, and perhaps for the first time the North met the Southern slave face to face and heart to heart with no third witness" (537). In the absence of the South's biased witness and

interference, Du Bois implies, White Northerners would finally see Southern Blacks' humanity in its fullness. 31

His decision to conclude The Souls of Black Folk with a passionate discussion of the sorrow songs underscores his conviction of their ability to convey information about and feelings for the African American. In other words, the sorrow songs' movement through history illustrates much about the Africans' movement through American history, at the same time that it also articulates their complex reactions to that passage in time and space, and through centuries of oppression. DuBois represents the sorrow songs, following multiple models of travel, from the diasporic to the entrepreneurial.

On the one hand, he identifies three steps in the development of Black music,

from the "African;' characterized by its "strange" and "primitive" chants; to the "Afro-American;' to which Du Bois fails to ascribe any particular characteristics; to a "a blending of Negro music with the music heard in the foster land" (541). He even suggests the possibility of identifying a fourth step in development, "where the songs of white America have been distinctively influenced by the slave songs or have incorporated whole phrases of Negro melody" (540). This trajectory focuses on a collective history of forced displacement, a cataclysmic break that is inscribed in spirituals which allow for the fullest expression of Black people's mourning and loss. Yet at the same time, Du Bois sounds a hopeful note by locating signs of transformation and renewal, evidence of which can be found in the hybrid notes sounded on both ends of the racial spectrum.

The Fisk Jubilee Singers signify for Du Bois the most accomplished and idealistic exemplars of this traveling musical form. Exiled wandering shapeshifts into a voyage of conquest as the Fisk Singers-"four half-clothed boys and five girl-women"-travel first across the country and then around Europe exposing nations to songs that "conquered till they sang across the land and across the sea, before Queen and Kaiser" (538). DuBois's description suggests that the Fisk Singers' vocal soundings had the power to topple, if not actual empires, then certainly regimes of racist reasoning and uncivil action against people of African descent. Moreover, their travels bolstered newly freed Blacks' burgeoning entrepreneurial spirit by allowing the singers to raise and bring back "a hundred and fifty thousand dollars to found Fisk University" (538).

Racial uplift and the reformation of White racism were made possible by what began as the diasporic wanderings of enigmatic African song. From his great-great-grandmother's crooning in an unknown and half-remembered

language-"Do bana coba, gene me, gene me" -to the "strange chants" of the most primitive, that is, least acculturated of the spirituals, Du Bois lays claim to a musical tradition that carries the awesome responsibility of conveying a people's history. It is not coincidental that Du Bois so often recounts musical expression emanating from women like his great-great-grandmother or the "girl-women" from Fisk, for femininity and emotion are typically linked in patriarchal discourse. Yet at the same time that Du Bois articulates the Black male subject's aspiring toward full masculinity through the mastery of language (here, the protagonist in "Of the Coming of John" will prove illustrative), he also problematizes the binary by calling into question the power and authority typically located in language (hence, reason). African American history's defining moment, the Middle Passage and ensuing enslavement, centers on an experience of cataclysmic rupture and loss that resists the author's attempts at mastery and translation because of language's failure to fully render the scope of human tragedy. Du Bois's turn to an artistic, emotive, nonlinguistic, and vernacular tradition at these moments suggests the limits of the

ethnography and historiography practiced elsewhere in the volume. Musical soundings, in other words, must do the expressive work that language fails to achieve.32

The first indication that the music resists assimilation into a more transparent language lies in its uneasy juxtaposition with the poetic verses that introduce, along with untitled bars of music, each chapter. Du Bois offers no explanation for these pairings until the final essay, "The Sorrow Songs;' in which he informs the reader of the slave-era spirituals each refrain is meant to represent.33 At the time of the book's appearance, this pairing of African American music with European verse posed a radical intervention because, according to biographer David Levering Lewis, Du Bois intended "to advance the then-unprecedented notion of the creative parity and complementarity of white folk and black folk alike. Du Bois meant the cultural symbolism of these double epigraphs to be profoundly subversive of the cultural hierarchy of his time" (Lewis 278).

Sandra Adell's reading of this musical and textual juxtaposition echoes Lewis's in that she too sees it as an assertion of cultural parity. Moreover, Adell explicitly challenges Houston Baker's suggestion in Singers of Daybreak that the bars of music from the sorrow songs "displace" the poetic epigraphs. According to Adell, instead of displacement, Du Bois "merely foregrounds the very complex system of interrelationships that makes up his (con)textual field:'34 Parsing the particulars of this system of interdependence is difficult, however, when the reader is hampered, like the author himself, by a lack of musical

training. DuBois writes, "What are these songs, and what do they mean? I know little of music and can say nothing in technical phrase, but I know something of men, and knowing them, I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world" (538). How, then, to convey that message in prose when its meaning is embedded in the sound and not just in the words?

The question to consider then is not whether Du Bois privileges music over poetry or vice versa, for a reading of "The Sorrow Songs" immediately makes clear his belief in the profundity of both. What becomes apparent, however, is the inadequacy of language to narrate a medium that performs feelings that arise in response to inhumane conditions.35 While one could argue that our understanding of the poetic verses is equally compromised because they too are removed from their context, the literate person can still read and interpret the fragments offered, an act which is virtually denied when we "read" musical notations that were meant to be sung or played. Thus, we are presented (at least until the final chapter) with only the "spirit" of the folk as represented by the untitled bars of music.36 Lacking the immediacy of the kind of performances offered by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the impact of the music can only be felt through the author's intervention.

Du Bois's mediating role, his impassioned explanation of the form and content of Black musical expression, opens up yet another site in which to

consider the complicated role of the native ethnographer. For even as he attempted to impress upon his readership the complexity of Black feeling, he battled against the perception that African Americans while abundant in their reserves of feeling and emotion, lacked the critical capacity for logic and reason. Many of his readers would continue to equate literacy with a civilized status, even as they expressed appreciation for Du Bois's articulation of a more pluralistic constellation of cultures. For example, an anonymous review published in The Nation in 1903 asserts, "The bar of music from one 'Sorrow Song' or another which stands at the head of each chapter is a hint (unintended) that what follows is that strain writ large, that Mr. Du Bois's thought and expression are highly characteristic of his people, are cultivated varieties of those emotional and imaginative qualities which are the prevailing traits of the uncultivated negro mind. Hence one more argument for that higher education of the negro for which Mr. Du Bois so eloquently pleads:'37 The writer's application of an evolutionary trajectory to the narrative's use of a presumably more sophisticated emotional rhetoric to explain an emotive music betrays his misapprehension of DuBois's point that the enigmatic sorrow songs were well equipped to articulate a complex-and universal-set of experiences and emotions; that the "primitive" music of a rough and rude

folk was paradoxically sophisticated in its ability to express a range of emotions and human experiences, and that this artistic form was comparable to that produced by the most celebrated of European writers.

If we think of modernism as a movement fueled by the impulse to conceive of a once unimaginable future while standing on the brink of an era fraught with uncertainty, then it becomes clearer how Du Bois was able to discern complexity in cultural formations that his education and Northern inclinations could easily have led him to disdain. Writing and working at a point of social, historical, and disciplinary flux, DuBois treated Negro culture, embodied by the sorrow songs, as not just a set of material artifacts, but as a humanist engagement with feeling and experience. He treats them, in other words, as living culture. Working from this assumption enabled him to advance theories of cultural pluralism and racial equality before a formal discourse had emerged fully to frame these terms and ideas.

The impressiveness of this achievement rests in the fact that Du Bois conceived of what Zamir describes as the "lyrical science" that characterizes The Souls of Black Folk just a few years after he had begun to employ the scientific empiricism in which he was trained as an undergraduate at Harvard in the service of conceptualizing and articulating a new scientific method for the study of racial groups. 38 The imaginative realm of fiction and the impressionistic realm of memoir which he enters in Souls offered DuBois opportunities not available in other genres, opening up spaces for self-examination of his views, values, and positions on himself and the world. For example, the

reflexivity that characterizes "Of the Coming of John;' the sole work of fiction in a collection of mostly nonfiction, focuses the narrative on the racist conditions that compelled Du Bois to demand equal access to education for the most talented members of his race, and on the tensions between the upwardly mobile and working classes that threatened to create new social rifts within Black communities.39 Indeed, DuBois uses generic hybridity to articulate multiple, interlocking commentaries on race matters in a modernist mode of theorization. Multiple points of view signal his refusal to locate an authoritative voice and hegemonic gaze in a single subject or language. Du Bois's concern with the dislocation of knowledge and peoples in the modern world marks him as firmly situated in the twentieth century even though he had yet to relinquish the style and tone of a Victorianist.

Raising the Veil 63

"Of the Coming of John": Homecoming and Reflections on the Black Intellectual

In "Of the Coming of John;' Du Bois reflects on the place of Black intellectuals in their communities, meditating as it were on the factors that hinder or facilitate their manipulation of the Veil. The story explores a number of themes running throughout the collection, including transcendent knowledge, double-consciousness, and leadership in Black communities. It is also a story of homecoming that considers the possibilities for return of the native son made prodigal by a transformational encounter with the world of Western thought and ideas. Zamir has identified as "the problematic of Du Bois's work" the relations of his European and Euro-American intellectual formations and the "concrete particulars of a life lived and understood historically"; in other words, the relation of theory to experience (2). In thenarrative, Du Bois represents the Black intelligentsia, of which the native ethnographer is not only a part but also an emblem, as a problem for both his community and the larger society by dint of an educational experience that renders him profoundly outside his circle of intimates, as well as the more hostile world that surrounds them. Like the author, John too longs for the freedom made possible by living a cultured life of the mind: "A deep longing swelled in his heart to rise with that clear music out of the dirt and dust of that low life that held him prisoned and befouled. If he could only live up in the free air where birds sang and setting suns had no touch of blood!" (527). The concert hall, symbolic of the best of European art and culture, temporarily transports John from the reality that his racial identity determines and constricts the possibilities for his life. He resents the intellectual, cultural, and social narrowness assigned to him because of his race. But John's migration from rural to urban spaces and his transformation from illiterate to literate individual allows him to acquire the sensibility that fosters his appreciation of Western art and culture. That he is molded from a rough, boisterous, countrified child into a dignified, educated, and refined adult is

meant to stand as proof of the inherent capability (as opposed to the assumed inferiority) of all Negroes.

Du Bois's eulogy of Alexander Crummel in chapter 12 can be read as a meditation on the subject of literacy and knowledge facilitating the Black subject's transcendence of racial barriers. According to Adell, DuBois depicts Crummell as dwelling above the Veil because of his education. He exemplifies DuBois's ideal of "book-learning" as the path "leading to heights high enough to overlook life" (Adell24). For DuBois the most advantageous and

empowering position to aspire to is that of the observer/scientist whose goal is to "overlook life." But unlike Crummel, John falls victim to social obstacles ·that impede his attainment of transcendent knowledge because he fails to consider how experience informs the production of knowledge. According to Adell, John's "mode of thinking ... is initially epistemological: why is a circle not square; why does this Greek word mean this and not that, and so on? What he learns is that there is no relation between this kind of knowledgeacademic literacy-and freedom. The myth of the quest for literacy and freedom is nothing more than a myth for John Jones" (25). While there is no correlation between academic literacy and freedom for John, the narrative suggests that a strong connection can still be made among the acquisition of knowledge, the cultivation of a critical consciousness, and the pursuit of social justice. Ontology and epistemology could be mutually constitutive modes if John had been able to discern the relation between the two. Certainly, his story hints at the potential for this connection to exist, even as its trajectory heads inexorably toward the failure of that union being realized.

John's migration from home and exposure to Western art and culture initiate his awareness of racial difference and racism. With education, "he grew slowly to feel almost for the first time the Veil that lay between him and the white world; he first noticed now the oppression that had not seemed oppression before, differences that erstwhile seemed natural" (525). This passage implies that a formal education is necessary for individuals to have the capacity to recognize their own oppression. The conclusions critics draw from this assumption are revealing.

For example, Lewis suggests that double-consciousness, symbolized by John's awareness of the presence of the Veil, may be a formulation that has more relevance for acculturated Blacks who embraced "the values of the dominant class of the dominant society" (Lewis 282). Less privileged Blacks, Lewis writes, may have "had a simpler self-concept, one uninfluenced by Hegel and more fixed by a common identity based on color and raw oppression" (282). He makes explicit DuBois's implied notion that an educated and acculturated mind is enlightened, and this state is a necessary prerequisite to recognizing that racial differences "that erstwhile seemed natural" are actually mechanisms for social control.

Accepting this presupposition, Ross Posnock argues that cosmopolitanism-the identification with things outside of one's particular local, or national, communities-is absolutely necessary for acquiring the means of political engagement. He writes that Du Bois conveys

an idea of the political as civic participation by those whose qualifications are severed from family, tribe, class, and caste. This understanding of citizenship recalls a Hellenistic sense of the political. The politicos referred to those men permitted and willing to leave the private household for the polis, where men of various origins and social standing engaged in rational debate as they attempted practical problem solving for the community, an activity requiring intellectual improvisation in the face of uncertainty. In the polis one had to cope with pragmata, the contingencies of unsettled circumstances. According to one commentator, those outside political life, excluded from speaking the language of politics, were called ethnos, the root of ethnic. These provincial idiots, also known as barbaros, are embedded in nature, confined to a tight circle of blood relations, reliant on the habits and folkways of forefathers, and resigned to the monotony of time endlessly unfolding. 40

Posnock underscores the fact that it is by leaving home for the "polis" that Black intellectuals acquire the qualifications and credentials to assume the position of race men and women who represent their peers within dominant cultural institutions. The irony is, of course, that it was precisely Blacks and women who were prevented by law and tradition from participating fully in the political life of the nation, which renders problematic the notion, embedded in this argument, that those confined to the "tight circle of blood relations" are incapable of full engagement in a democratic and modern society.

Privileging the migrating or cosmopolitan subject as the knowing, thinking, more complex individual runs the risk of reinforcing the "historical effacement of blacks from public political life" by identifying reason and agency only in the experiences of the relatively few privileged eliteY When Du Bois writes in "The Atlanta Conferences" about the "evolution of a vast group of men" (reprinted in Green and Driver 54) in the South, he implicitly rejects his own view set out in Souls that progress is inextricably yoked to migration, and the privileged status that facilitates such movement. He is, in other words, a cosmopolitan subject who argues for the citizenship rights of those who are not. In fact, more than in any other pieces in the collection, John's story encourages the reader to speculate on the possibility that a "simpler selfconsciousness:' based on raw oppression can indeed lead to the desire for and movement toward larger societal participation and political intervention.

DuBois's fiction, even more than his ethnography, reveals his unwillingness to accept the notion that "the folk" as primitive subalterns, cannot speak.42 This unwillingness is illustrated by his depiction of the tension existing between literate and illiterate, cosmopolitan and tribal, representative and represented. The conflict comes to a head during the festivities organized to welcome John home and celebrate his ascension into the role of commu-

nity leader. John's speech on the role "Negroes of this land would take in the striving of the new century" is met with a violent response:

> Then at last a low suppressed snarl came from the Amen corner, and an old bent man arose, walked over the seats, and climbed straight up into the pulpit. ... He seized the Bible with his rough, huge hands; twice he raised it inarticulate, and then fairly burst into words, with rude and awful eloquence .... John never knew clearly what the old man said; he only felt himself held up to scorn and scathing denunciation for trampling on the true religion, and he realized with amazement that all unknowingly he had put rough, rude hands on something this little world held sacred. He arose silently, and passed out into the night. (530)

The old man's denunciation signals the collective rebuff of John as leader. He and John end up mutually rejecting what each stands for. Although they stand for opposing values, Du Bois uses similar descriptions for them. Both are "rough" and "rude:' Each is inscrutable to the other. The elder's words move the congregation, but they remain unarticulated in the story. This clash signals the break between the Altahama community's conviction that the exceptional individual endowed with a classical education can be their negotiable currency in a racist society and their realization that the individual's encounter with outside values can radically vex the association of the "I" with the"we."

While this exchange offers support for Posnock's reading of provincial, folk spaces as pre-modern and subject to exclusion from mainstream society, it simultaneously resists the suggestion that the answer to this dilemma resides in the infusion of select individuals into spaces designated as modern.

The passage points to a failure of communication between John and the congregation due not only to the "folk's" lack of sophistication, but also to John's refusal to recognize their capacity for reason. While it is true that the narrative asserts that they cannot follow his argument for secularization and industrialization because "he spoke an unknown tongue;' it also stresses their conscious refusal (as opposed to simple ignorance) of his logic because it flies in the face of the values central to their self-definition. They denounce him not simply because they cannot understand him but because his agnosticism has "[trampled] on the true religion;' calling into question his right to represent their interests. The dynamics between John and the elder underscore the masses' grasping for an active voice in social and political discourse through the conscious cultivation of a responsive leader. This desire, half articulated by the old man's rough utterance, undercuts the notion that literacy and social mobility necessarily precede political consciousness.

"Of the Coming of John" functions as a cautionary tale for Black intellectuals, native ethnographers among them, warning them to tread carefully in their negotiation of the dynamics between individual and collective. The

importance of these ties being carefully cultivated is made against a backdrop in which White society views the educated Black as a threat to its continued subordination of the race. A literate John has no place in a White supremacist society despite his mastery and admiration of its culture. Likewise, John fails to articulate a mutually satisfying place for himself in Altahama's Black community. For example, he is abruptly fired from his post as schoolmaster when Altahama's ruling class determines that he possesses an "almighty air and uppish ways"; even more threatening is the rumor that he has been instructing his impressionable students on "the French Revolution, equality, and such like" (532). At this juncture, John finds himself caught between an intolerant society and a needy and demanding community, neither of which know what to do with him. He stands at the hyphen between Black and American, paralyzed by his inability to function fully in either world, unable to communicate effectively with the multiple audiences with which he attempts to engage. John's only recourse is to strike out violently at the conditions that constrain him by bludgeoning a White man who is in the midst of assaulting his sister. Words and book-learning fail him because they offer no adequate model for alleviating his and his people's pain and suffering; yet violence leads him to an abyss. The narrative ends with his impending death by lynching as he hears Richard Wagner's Lohengrin sounding in his ears, the lyrics expressing his longing for spiritual, if not actual, material freedom. This image speaks to the universality of music on the one hand, as did Du Bois's discussion of the sorrow songs; yet it also reinscribes John's entrenchment in Western civilization on the other; a possibility that is ironically and tragically refused by the White men coming to lynch him. This powerful image captures the acute irony of John's situation, lauding on the one hand art's universality; yet on the other hand implicitly condemning his classical education for not equipping him with the means to navigate the treacherous waters of the racist and uncivilized Southern society to which he returned.

Zamir 2.rgues that, for Du Bois, "the self is mediated by power and terror, but also by positive social location among others. At the heart of the book is an exploration of the dilemma of the black intellectual and artist caught between communitas and solitude, between the necessities of political activism and the requirements of the contemplative life. This is not a polarization between passivity and activity, as [William] James would assume, but

a dialectics of two different kids of activity" (13). This insight underscores John's failure to achieve a positive social location among others, and locates that failure at the nexus of his inability to successfully merge political activism and intellectual activity. Yet, despite the double bind that he imagined trapping John, Du Bois unequivocally championed the role of education in Negro uplift. That conviction is voiced through John's earlier response to his sister's asking whether he is glad he studied despite the unhappiness it has

brought him: "'Yes; came the answer, slowly but positively" (530).
Yet at the same time that DuBois advocated increasing the access of talented young Blacks to a classical education, his portrayal of John demonstrates it was not always feasible or desirable to transcend social and political
situations through the acquisition of dominant cultural literacy, particularly
if that knowledge was attained at the expense of acquiring or retaining the
kind oflocalized cultural literacy that would have enabled John to better navigate the politics of the Black church. Du Bois makes apparent in The Souls
of Black Folk his belief in the necessity of the Black intellectual to accept the
role of mediator between two worlds. And yet, his engagement with and examination of ethnographic methods of observation and narration illuminates the conflict, paradoxes, and challenges that result from the meeting of
two, often conflicting, worlds. The next generation of culture writersJohnson, Brown, Dunham, and Hurston-will experiment with different
ways of addressing these conflicts, employing genres as wide ranging as autoethnography, fiction, poetry and dance, and strategies like irony and reflexivity, to comment critically on and expand the possibilities for Black
intellectuals and the communities with which they affiliated themselves.

7. **Lott, Eric. "Back Door Man: Howlin' Wolf and the Sound of Jim Crow." *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011): 697–710. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41237572**

Like the entire genre it exemplifies, the music of"Back Door Man" is defined by beating- the creeping Howlin' Wolf and the Sound of Jim Crow I 705 snare drum, Wolf svoice pounding against the microphone s membrane, the steady guitar downstrokes, the somewhat hysterical background piano, and in this song itreaches as well into the grim fiick-or-be-fucked defiance of the lyrics. Ifwe necessarily consider post-African musics as a percussive field, with every instrument, as Albert Murray implies in Stomping the Blues, involved in a transformational grammar of drumming, beating becomes the organizing frame for the handling of experience, and in this case, I argue, ittakes in quite a sweep of urban experience: the beating of black bodies in and by the urban setting, the repetitive monotony and oppressive noise of Fordist assembly-line or factory labor, everyday interracial as well as intraracial violence, the psychic subjection that thinkers from Friedrich Nietzsche to Judith Butler have shown to be constitutive of selfhood (including its later phantasmic extensions in beating fantasies), and the repetitive ruminations and instrumental bangings that arise in New World black musicking.15 Langston Hughes famously quipped that bebop or bop music got its name from the "bop!" of the policemans nightstick on black heads. What may seem merely a bon mot probably contains a profound understanding of the relation between black subjection, black subject-formation, and the music that issues from it.

The urbanness ofurban blues is in this sense so much more than a narrowly sociological matter of the music having been produced by city dwellers. It involves, rather, as Mowitt writes, "the

surface that forms between and among subjects and urban structures."16 That surface is strictly speaking the skin, what bodies share with drums. In a remarkable passage, Mowitt speaks of the drum as a "richly catachrestic instrument." Not only must itbe abused to be played, but also, in possessing a body, a skin, a head, and a voice, the drum "has long represented the expressive intcrioritythat we call the subject, the human being insofar as itintones 'I,'"17 or in Wolfs case "I am." Conversely, the body itself has long served as the site of percussive beating, from medical taps and reflex hammerings to slaves patting juba on their own bodies once drums had been outlawed in North America forfear of their efficacy in facilitating slave uprisings. Manifold registers of experience and expressiveness thus cluster around the site of beaten skin; not fornothing is Howlin' Wolf's back door man "shot full ofholes," pores become wounds made over through violent sound, "soul" saved through singing as howling, howling a near-sublimation of screaming that does not tame itsdisruptive- or seductive- force.18

8. Robin D. G. Kelley. "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South." *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 75–112. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2079698

Second, I am indebted to scholars who work on South Asia, especially the political anthropologist James C. Scott. Scott and other proponents of subaltern studies maintain that, despite appearances of consent, oppressed groups challenge those in power by constructing a "hidden transcript," a dissident political culture that manifests itself in daily conversations, folklore, jokes, songs, and other cultural practices. One also finds the hidden transcript emerging "on stage" in spaces controlled by the powerful, though almost always in disguised forms. The submerged social and cultural worlds of oppressed people frequently surface in everyday forms of resistance- theft, footdragging, the destruction of property- or, more rarely, in open attacks on individuals, institutions, or symbols of domination. Together, the "hidden transcripts" that are created in aggrieved communities and expressed through culture and the daily acts of resistance and survival constitute what Scott calls "infrapolitics." As he puts it, "the circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups is, like infrared rays, beyond the visible end of the spectrum. That it should be invisible ... is in large part by design - a tactical choice born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power."7 (77)

Much of southern black working-class culture falls outside "conventional" labor history, in part because historians have limited their scope to public action and formal organization. Part of the problem is that those who frequented the places of rest, relaxation, recreation, and restoration rarely maintained archives or recorded the everyday conversations and noises that filled the bars, dance halls, blues clubs, barbershops, beauty salons, and street corners of the black community. Nevertheless, folklorists, anthropologists, oral historians, musicians, and writers fascinated by "Negro life" preserved cultural texts that allow scholars access to the hidden transcript. Using those texts, pioneering scholars and critics, including Amiri Baraka, Lawrence Levine, and Sterling Stuckey, have demonstrated that African-American working people created an oppositional culture that represents at least a partial rejection of the dominant ideology and

that was forged in the struggle against class and racial domination. The challenge for southern labor historians is to determine how this rich expressive culture -which was frequently at odds with formal workingclass institutions -shaped and reflected black working-class opposition. (84)

We need to recognize that the sacred and the spirit world were also often understood and invoked by African Americans as weapons to protect themselves or to attack others. How do historians make sense of, say, conjure as a strategy of resistance, retaliation, or defense in the daily lives of some working-class African Americans? How do we interpret divine intervention, especially when one's prayers are answered? How does the belief that God is by one's side affect one's willingness to fight with police, leave an abusive relationship, stand up to a foreman, participate in a strike, steal, or break tools? Can a sign from above, a conversation with a ghost, a spell cast by an enemy, or talkin~g in tongues unveil the hidden transcript? If a worker turns to a root doctor or prayer rather than to a labor union to make an employer less evil, is that "false consciousness"? These are not idle questions. Most of the oral narratives and memoirs of southern black workers speak of such events or moments as having enormous material consequences.29 Of course, reliance on the divine or on the netherworlds of conjure was rarely, if ever, the only resistance or defense strategy used by black working people, but in their minds, bodies, and social relationships this was real power- power of which neither the CIo, the Populists, nor the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) could boast. With the exception of Vincent Harding, no historian that I know of since W. E. B. Du Bois has been bold enough to assert a connection between the spirit and spiritual world of African Americans and political struggle. Anticipating his critics, Du Bois in Black Reconstruction boldly considered freed people's narratives of divine intervention in their emancipation and, in doing so, gave future historians insight into an aspect of African-American life that cannot be reduced to "culture": "Foolish talk, all of this, you say, of course; and that is because no American now believes in his religion. Its facts are mere symbolism; its revelation vague generalities; its ethics a matter of carefully balanced gain. But to most of the four million black folk emancipated by civil war, God was real. They knew Him. They had met Him personally in many a wild orgy of religious frenzy, or in the black stillness of the night." (88)