

Ira Katznelson

Du Bois's Century

In March 1900, William Edward Burghart Du Bois addressed the third annual meeting of the American Negro Academy on “the present outlook for the dark races of mankind.” He cautioned, though

It is natural for us to consider that our race question is a purely national and local affair, confined to nine million Americans and settled when their rights and opportunities are assured. . . . a glance over the world at the dawn of a new century will convince us that this is but the be-

Social Science History 23:4 (winter 1999).

Copyright © 1999 by the Social Science History Association.

ginning of the problem—that the color line belts the world and that the social problem of the twentieth century is to be the relation of the civilized world to the dark races of mankind. If we start eastward tonight and land on the continent of Africa we land in the center of the greater Negro problem—of the world problem of the black man. (1996 [1900]: 47–48)

Du Bois's own journey began three years after the Civil War and concluded in Africa at age 93, only a day before the Civil Rights Movement's high point at the March on Washington. It is no wonder that his scholarship and outlook proved changeable, often contradictory, or that his remarkable gifts of expression at the edge of both the black and white experiences sometimes generated jarring, and, to late-twentieth-century ears, condescending locutions. Over the long course of his productive life, Du Bois's perspectives oscillated. He wrote in different voices and deployed shifting theoretical tools. Across the range of his scholarship, however (including the 16 empirical Atlanta University Studies of which he was principal author between 1898 and 1914, and his sustained histories, oratory, journalism, biographical sketches, even novels), and across the span of his analytical tools from positivism to Marxism, key features of his writing remained steady: the master theme of the color-line, an insurgent incorporation of mainstream language and concepts, and a quest to rescue the legacy of the Enlightenment from its own worst properties.

In pressing his claim to the American Negro Academy that race defined the central axis of inequality for the whole world, not just for the United States, the globe's most extended and vicious single-country racial order, Du Bois heralded one of the most notable sentences in our lexicon: "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line." These are the words he used to end the opening paragraph to the brief "Forethought" to *The Souls of Black Folk*, his stunning 1903 collection of essays oriented to reveal "the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century." The importance of the color-line sentence is marked by its precise repetition. Chapter 2 of *Souls*, called "Of the Dawn of Freedom," also starts and ends with these exact words: "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line" (1996 [1903]: 1, 13, 35).¹

These three formulations vary in meaning and valence. The first usage

invokes the volume's central metaphor of the veil, an image to which Du Bois often returned, most notably in his 1920 volume, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, which grappled with the intersection of struggles for civil rights in the United States and anticolonial impulses in Africa after World War I. At the start of *Souls*, Du Bois felt compelled to justify his efforts as a legitimate "sketch" of the "spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand Americans live and strive" by an insider who, despite personal privilege, shared Afro-America's extended history of pain.

This was not a straightforward assertion. Du Bois had been raised in Great Barrington, the Berkshire town in western Massachusetts where he had experienced an integrated, nearly all-white, primary and secondary education. His parents had been removed from slavery by more than two generations. His physical countenance was sufficiently ambiguous for him to be mistaken both for a Jew and a Gypsy in German- and Polish-speaking Europe. After taking his first degree from Fisk, he earned a second B.A. from Harvard, graduating cum laude. He addressed Harvard College's 1890 commencement in the presence of the governor of Massachusetts and the First Lady of the United States. Later, he returned from graduate study at the University of Berlin to become the first African American to earn a Harvard Ph.D., writing a thesis titled "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870." In Berlin, he studied with Gustav von Schmoller, Adolf Wagner, and Georg Simmel and heard lectures by Max Weber. In Cambridge, he was a guest at the home of William James and other luminaries. While teaching at Wilberforce, he was invited, in 1896, to direct a research project at the University of Pennsylvania that consummated in his landmark study, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899).

Du Bois's decision to enter and engage the heart of black America thus was self-conscious and willful. "Leaving, then, the world of the white man," he wrote, "I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses. . . . Need I add," he closed this introduction, which had begun with the problem of the color-line sentence, "that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?" (1996 [1903]: 2). Du Bois thus presented something of a limiting case. Having moved as completely into white America as then was possible for an African American without passing, he utilized his often painful encounters with the

confines he experienced even in the academy, the most putatively meritocratic of the country's major institutions, to incorporate suppressed black perspectives into his searing portraits of American politics and society.

The second appearance of the color-line formulation is quite different. Returning to the theme of the American Negro Academy talk, it concerns not personal or group identity but the larger context of the American experience: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (ibid.: 13). This global dimension continued to be a major element in Du Bois's work. An example is his May 1914 *Atlantic Monthly* article, "The African Roots of the War." Its powerful line of analysis, which underscored the colonial and racial grounding of Europe's twentieth-century catastrophes, anticipated by some three and a half decades Hannah Arendt's stress on imperialism in her landmark *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) as a source of dark times. Unless "European civilization," he predicted, could learn to extend the "democratic ideal to the yellow, brown, and black peoples" of the world, "the War of the Color Line will outdo in savage inhumanity any war this world has yet seen" (quoted in Lewis 1993: 505).²

The contextual location and meaning of the "color-line" sentence altered once again the third time Du Bois proffered it. Now, at the end "Of the Dawn of Freedom," it had become an elegiac call to action. He wrote:

I have seen a land right merry with the sun, where children sing, and rolling hills lie like passioned women wanton with harvest. And there in the King's Highway sat and sits a figure veiled and bowed, by which the traveller's footsteps hasten as they go. On the tainted air broods fear. Three centuries' thought has been the raising and unveiling of that bowed human heart, and now behold a century new for the duty and the deed. The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line. (1996 [1903]: 35)

By the time he composed these formulations at the start of the twentieth-century, Du Bois already was in his early thirties, a mature, learned, accomplished author whose own opportunities, despite his unusual access to white America, had been conditioned and, at times, contained by the fate of Afro-America after the failures of Reconstruction, the withdrawal of federal forces

and the Republican Party from the South, and the rise of the totalitarian system of Jim Crow. Certainly, no white university or college was prepared to offer him a regular academic post when he finished at Harvard. After applying to Fisk, Hampton, Howard, Tuskegee, and other black universities, he accepted an appointment teaching classics at Wilberforce University in southern Ohio before moving to Philadelphia (Lewis 1993: 150–51).

It was in this period of engagement and exclusion that Du Bois first advanced the themes he entwined with the thrice-repeated color-line formulation in *Souls*—the double consciousness characteristic of black identity at the individual level; race and colonialism as structural, global constructs; and activism to transform the racial situation—which, together, defined his mordant reading of America's century at its outset. Ultimately, Du Bois himself grew ever more removed from the promise of liberal America. In his 10th decade, he chose exile in Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana. It was not just this decision to exit but also Du Bois's late-life Bolshevism, even his ironic approbation of Stalin, that signify just how bruising America's racial order and Cold War persecutions proved to be even for an African American beckoned for a time into some of the country's leading institutions of higher education. Du Bois's early liberalism did not, perhaps could not, survive 93 years of persistent racism, not least the many denials of entry tickets into the center of American academic life.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois's study of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward, where blacks were more concentrated, and poorer, than elsewhere in the burgeoning city. There is more than one way to read this considerable book. It composes a hinge between Victorian moralism and progressive realism. It broke with the dominant racism of white scholarship on black America and with a then ascendant black speculative style. Written at the moment the various social sciences were starting to professionalize, it adapted Schmoller's inductive empiricism to a distinctive American subject. Standing on the shoulders of the early volumes of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1892–97) and the emergent interplay between settlement work and social research in such studies as the *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895), *The Philadelphia Negro* is sociology's first full-scale empirical community study and the first instance of ambitious academic survey research in the social sciences.³

Though composed after the University of Chicago had established the country's first sociology department under the leadership of Albion Small (a scholar who, like Du Bois, had imbibed empiricism from Schmoller in Germany), the book was completed well before the founding of the Chicago School of urban and community studies represented in the work of such leading figures as Robert Park and Louis Wirth, which itself was committed to induction and social investigation.

Combining ethnography and statistics based on interviews with over 2,500 households—interviews that Du Bois conducted himself, without sampling or research assistance—*The Philadelphia Negro* deployed a cool, methodical mode of inquiry to advance awareness of the delayed urban effects of servitude and the continuing presence of white supremacy. Du Bois wielded facts to force his readers to see people and situations that literally had been hidden from view, behind the veil.

Beneath its moralisms and settlement house language, *The Philadelphia Negro* unsentimentally portrayed the discomposed mores, fragile families, and wounded culture of the Seventh Ward's residents. Even more central is its causal story pivoting on wage labor. Du Bois showed how Philadelphia's blacks had been confined to an artificially small number of occupations and how they had been pushed out of the niches they had occupied in the service sector before the period's unprecedented immigration from southern and eastern Europe. Du Bois called for a "radical change" in the city's employment attitudes and practices. "There is no doubt," he wrote,

that in Philadelphia the centre and kernel of the Negro problem . . . is the narrow opportunities afforded Negroes for earning a decent living. Such discrimination is morally wrong, politically dangerous, industrially wasteful, and socially silly. It is the duty of whites to stop it, and to do so primarily for their own sakes. . . . the same incentive to good, honest, effective work [should] be placed before a black office boy as before a white one—before a black porter as before a white one; and . . . unless this is done the city has no right to complain that black boys lose interest in work and drift into idleness and crime. (1899: 394–95)

This book can be treated as a primary source, as a pioneering methodical social inquiry, an early policy study, and a visionary observer of trends later chronicled by St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's *Black Metropolis* (1945),

the study located on Chicago's South Side as World War II was coming to a close, and, in our time, by William Julius Wilson in *When Work Disappears* (1996). But it also demands to be read for its, and its author's, reception in white scholarly America, beginning with the University of Pennsylvania, Du Bois's scholarly home. In the introduction to their fine volume on *The Philadelphia Negro*, editors Michael Katz and Thomas Sugrue take note of his anomalous presence. They have written:

With a strictly research appointment, Du Bois did no teaching. . . . Almost certainly as a concession to Professor Samuel McCune Lindsay, who had hired Du Bois, his presence merited one brief mention in the University's *Catalogue* during the second year of his appointment. In 1897, Lindsay had complained to the secretary of the University, Jesse Y. Burk, about the omission of Du Bois from the *Catalogue*. Burk responded lamely that he had not reported Du Bois' appointment to the editor of the catalogue because "it was not considered one which placed him on the staff. . . . Indeed, I should not have known where to place or what to call him for the purposes of a circular of information." Although his name appeared the next year as assistant in sociology, a 1930–31 history of the sociology department at Penn by one of its professors, James H. S. Brossard, made no mention of Du Bois's presence or work. (1998: 17–18)

Katz and Sugrue thus conclude, "The most significant research in the history of the department still remained invisible" (ibid.: 18).

At Penn, Lindsay was the only member of the faculty to interact in a collegial manner with Du Bois (Lewis 1993: 179). His appointment was peculiar and his stay temporary, both of which we know were sources of enduring resentment. This microlevel experience of marginalization proved a harbinger of a larger pattern of dismissal. Academic sociologists paid no heed to *The Philadelphia Negro*. It became a nonbook. The flagship of the Chicago School, the *American Journal of Sociology*, did not review it, and, so far as we know, the volume never made its way into their curricular or scholarly references.⁴ This disregard by oversight was paralleled by the history profession. To be sure, the *American Historical Review* (AHR) did review *The Philadelphia Negro*, but the journal's anonymous reviewer explicitly deployed racist criteria, complaining that "Dr. Du Bois does not give more knowledge of the

effects of the mixing of blood of very different races, and of the possibilities of absorption of inferior into superior groups of mankind. . . . We believe the[ir] separation is due to differences of race more than of status” (quoted in Katz and Sugrue 1998: 26). Later, Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction in America*, his great 1935 revisionist treatment that rejected and overcame the tendentious, white supremacist historiography then dominant among American historians, never was reviewed in the *AHR*. His earlier paper on this theme, a 1910 *AHR* article on Reconstruction (Du Bois 1910), had no discernible impact on the historical profession’s mainstream. It simply was ignored.

Du Bois, of course, became a large figure in public life as one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the editor of its magazine, *The Crisis*, and he continued to write a slew of occasional and major essays, studies, and books. Notwithstanding his distinction and achievement, the white academy set most of his ideas aside. Outside historically black colleges, he had no academic options before and after his brief stay at the University of Pennsylvania; nor did he think other African Americans possessed them. Writing about “the field and function of the American Negro college” in 1936, he asked, “Is not this a program of segregation? . . . It is and it is not by choice but for force” (1996 [1936]: 421). Because racial inequality was the natural order of things and barriers to entry on a racial basis were enforced as much by convention as by precept, Du Bois never did return to Penn or Harvard or to other institutions peopled by America’s talented tenth. “There are certain northern universities,” he commented,

where Negro students, no matter what their ability, desert, or accomplishment, cannot get fair recognition, either in classroom or on the campus, in dining halls and student activities, or in common human courtesy. It is well-known that in certain faculties of the University of Chicago, no Negro has yet received the doctorate and seldom can achieve the mastership in arts; at Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, Negroes are admitted but not welcomed; while in other institutions, like Princeton, they cannot even enroll. (1996 [1935a]: 424)

An irony is at work here. The price of Du Bois’s exclusion and enforced marginality—he could not even persuade the country’s largest liberal foundations to support his exceptional research on black life and culture—was

borne more by the white academy than by Du Bois, whose sharpness of perspective and commitment, willingness to push beyond convention, and combination of activism and scholarship might all have been blunted had he been at the core of white academic life, at least as it then was composed.

Curiously, it is the world of exclusivist higher education in which Du Bois and his work could find no steady place that is recalled so fondly by some of today's universalists who rail against the particularism of affirmative action. More than a half century after Du Bois had completed *The Philadelphia Negro*, America's best, most famous universities still functioned as discriminatory preserves actively advantaging children of the educated, mostly Protestant, white elite. Quotas against Jews operated in virtually every major university's undergraduate college and professional schools. Most of the great institutions were closed to undergraduate women and admitted only a tiny handful of nonwhite people. Substantively, the university's horizons were cramped. The West, conceptualized as a civilization in a hierarchy of civilizations, was celebrated as much as seriously studied. Large zones of the globe were not considered domains for serious scholarly attention. At its best, the postwar university—nourished by the influx of refugee scholars deeply grateful for its zone of comparative freedom—was deep, serious, inventive, and vastly more interesting and challenging than it had been when Du Bois's academic ambitions had been so rudely rebuffed at the University of Pennsylvania. But these universities also were parochial and riddled with unwarranted privilege. We rightly remember the great figures and books of this epoch but too quickly forget the period's miasma of mediocrity. The ethos in our leading institutions was that of a gentlemen's club, intolerant of variety not only in race but also in dress, culture, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and gender. The setbacks to knowledge fashioned by the shunting of Du Bois and other leading African American scholars to the periphery of that university system did more than expunge first-rate work from the mainstream. It denied American social science and history access to the perspective of people relegated to the outer limit or edge of social standing. This proved a source of intellectual conformity and normative bankruptcy.

Taking note that "there is almost no community of intellectual life" between whites and blacks and "little or no intellectual commerce," Du Bois (1996 [1903]: 149) observed just after the start of the century, "They go to separate churches, they live in separate sections, they are strictly separated

in all public gatherings, they travel separately, and they are beginning to read different papers and books.” Arguably, Du Bois himself suffered no such epistemic separation. He read the journals and the literature of the mainstream and incorporated it in his own terms. Outside the academy, he was attached to exceptional multiracial ventures, most notably the NAACP and the Communist Party. Precisely because he wished it to be otherwise, and even as he advocated some forms of separate development under the conditions on offer in early- to mid-twentieth-century America, he keenly resisted the consequences of the fact that even in scholarly life, blacks and whites could travel together, as it were, only in the Jim Crow cars of black institutions of higher education.

“There will be no objection” to white inclusion, Du Bois (1996 [1903]: 93) observed when writing of an actual journey by rail south of Atlanta to Macon and Albany. “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.” Operating in the shadows of racism, reputedly universal university disciplines drew a line almost impossible to cross even outside the South, where its demarcation and confines were nearly invisible. Du Bois’s own experiences in America’s century thus mock the narrative that treats self-conscious attempts to promote heterogeneity on our campuses and departments today simply as mischievous inflictions on universal standards and practices.

Du Bois recently has reentered the primarily white academy as a kind of icon, an emblem of diversity. This is better than the prior record of exclusion, but this kind of incorporation underestimates the richness, multidimensionality, missed chances, and unresolved conundrums we should associate with his life and work.

Of course, Du Bois focused more on the smugness and self-satisfaction of America’s regime than on the limits of higher education, and he did so by altering the vantage point from which it ordinarily is viewed. He lifted the veil of race to challenge the standing of the country as an open liberal political and social order. “America,” he declared at the start of the century in the age of Ellis Island, “is not another word for Opportunity to *all* her sons” (1996 [1903]: 118).

At the height of the left-liberal New Deal in 1935, the year of the Wagner

Act and Social Security, Du Bois (1996 [1935b]: 431) described the plight of “a Negro nation within the nation” this way:

No more critical situation ever faced the Negroes of America than that of today — not in 1830, nor in 1861, nor in 1867. More than ever the appeal of the Negro for elementary justice falls on deaf ears. Three-fourths of us are disfranchised; yet no writer on democratic reform, no third party movement says a word about Negroes. The Bull Moose crusade in 1912 refused to notice them; the La Follette uprising in 1924 was hardly aware of them; the Socialists still keep them in the background. Negro children are systematically denied education; when the National Education Association asks for federal aid to education it permits discrimination to be perpetuated by the present local authorities. Once or twice a month Negroes convicted of no crime are openly and publicly lynched, and even burned; yet a National Crime Convention is brought to perfunctory and unwilling notice of this only by mass picketing and all but illegal agitation. When a man with every qualification is refused a position simply because his great-grandfather was black there is not a ripple of comment or protest.

Black America, as he had been noting for some three decades, still suffered a police state marked by surveillance, control, and keen barriers to participation in politics and free labor markets. Jim Crow's “shadow of a vast despair” functioned, he wrote, “simply [as] an armed camp for intimidating black folk” (1996 [1903]: 9, 88).

In such circumstances, the white car of scholarship did more than exclude individuals located behind the veil of color. By eliminating their vantage point, it also evacuated the substantive gains that distinctive experiences and perspectives can bring. Du Bois, of course, knew well that scholarship and vantage point are not reducible one to the other. But the systematic barring of distinctive voices, positions, and outlooks mocks the desirable intellectual liberalism of provisional truth so brilliantly articulated by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*. For such a liberalism of free inquiry, as Mill, alas, did not understand, cannot be forged by erasing cultural and group pluralism. Even as dangers of relativism rear their head, we do well to remember that these are less perilous than the hazards of artificial homogeneity.

The academy's failure to incorporate, let alone welcome, Du Bois's con-

tributions to intellectual plurality has cost it—that is, us—quite a lot. His emblematic internal, then external, exile produced deficits from which we have only begun to recover and produced absences we often scarcely remember. These include his efforts to favor neither a simple embrace nor a simple rejection of the project of Enlightenment.⁵ During his most fertile years, Du Bois's various voices, styles, and methods, ranging from low-key empiricism to his own prose sorrow songs, sought to discover a deeper and darker Enlightenment by incorporating the perspective of an excluded people who had lost all innocence yet who remained, as he put it, “woven . . . with the very warp and woof of this nation” (1996 [1903]: 215). To pursue this goal, he deployed multiple theoretical and empirical tools that he drew from a kit bag of social scientific and humanistic instruments in order to pierce the veil of race and pioneer new means of social and historical investigation.

This was one of the bequests Du Bois offered social scientists and historians: the gift of inquiry based on a willingness to deploy multiple tools and vantage points for analysis to deepen understanding, promote sober and systematic social research, challenge complacency, prevent cruelty, and advance the promise of Enlightenment. Working this way, Du Bois endeavored to uncover liberalism's range and contradictions: what, in another context, I have called its crooked circle (Katznelson 1996). Chastened by a sober awareness of the dark side of the human condition and utterly incapable of innocence, Du Bois's social science of shadow and sorrow did not so much challenge the Enlightenment and its liberal offspring or denounce them as hypocritical as seek to rescue their possibility and to straighten, as he put it in his “Afterthought” to *Souls*, the “crooked marks” of race on “fragile leaf” of liberal America (1996 [1903]: 217).

Much like the scholarship produced by such émigrés as Hannah Arendt and Karl Polanyi, who fled fascism and sought to grapple with the origins and meaning of Europe's catastrophic decades spanning the two world wars (Arendt 1951; Polanyi 1944), Du Bois fashioned social and historical studies geared to advance while darkening the legacies of Western Enlightenment. His continuous parsing of the color-line, his own position with respect to it, and his concern for exclusion in a presumed liberal, open, regime produced a distinctive orientation to this lineage that was far more attractive than the familiar stances toward the Enlightenment now common in our culture wars, where credulous endorsements confront foundationless rejections. He pro-

ceeded by righting the historical record of such pivotal events as Reconstruction and by breaking with mainstream silence and omissions about race or naked expressions of racism.

Du Bois reminded his readers that the liberal political tradition, dating from Locke, is promiscuous, betraying a disposition to bond not only with egalitarian partners but with other far more narrow and preclusive world-views, not least racist ones. He held up for examination painful processes of group extrusion, showing that the direction charted in 1948 by T. H. Marshall as a sequential elaboration of civic, political, and social citizenship could be reversed. Much as emancipated German Jewry later was to lose its social, political, and civic rights in the 1930s, so the guarantees of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments and the promise of American incorporation for blacks were steadily retracted as Du Bois grew to adulthood. He made this parallel explicit after World War II both in an account of how his discovery of the Jewish question had produced an “enlarged view of the Negro question” and in his advocacy of Zionism as the legitimate equivalent of Pan-Africanism.⁶ Du Bois sought to understand, and act on, this social, political, and legal process of casting out. To this end, he insisted that American history must become less parochial and that it should draw on a relational sensibility about the global embeddedness of the United States in large-scale patterns of ideology, stratification, and power, exemplified at the extreme margin by the slave trade. Despite his occasional tropes of racial backwardness, he consistently resisted shifting the burden of oppression to its victims, even as he enumerated the cultural costs of domination and persecution, focusing instead on how the strategic action of marginal people might effectively turn their liminality to advantage.

It was the task of the educated elite from among the dispossessed, Du Bois believed—in this sense he certainly was an elitist—to harness combinations of analysis and action drawn from their indigenous and particular worlds and from the more commonly believed, sometimes actual, universal domain of Enlightenment reason to counter strong existing currents of ignorance and brutality. Du Bois opened each chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* with epigrams from mainstream Western culture, including Schiller's poetry and the Bible's Song of Solomon, followed immediately by bars of music drawn from the sorrow songs of slavery, “the articulate message of the slave to the

world . . . the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment” (1996 [1903]: 207). Refusing to choose between America’s two cultures, he sought a syncretism in which whiteness and blackness were not arrayed in opposition one to the other. Inspired by these sorrow songs to cheer the weary traveler, he also famously announced his ease with, and edification from, the classics of Western culture: “I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color-line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the care of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension” (1996 [1903]: 90). No simple identity politics for Du Bois, then, but something far more complex and challenging.

We know Du Bois was right about the century of the color-line. Alas, as we count the casualties of this century’s race wars, we also know he understated its potential horrors and perverse extensions. And today, Africa remains, as Du Bois put it in 1900, “the center of the greater Negro problem — of the world problem of the Black man.” More positively, we now can say that he also underestimated prospects for redress. But inside America’s academy, the twentieth century has not been Du Bois’s century. As an individual who struggled against odds too great and resistance too unyielding, his accumulated defeats and disappointments ultimately produced dark disillusionment and the disenchantment of exile. Surely, if our social science and history are worth having — indeed, if our political and social order are to deserve our allegiance — the next century had better belong to Du Bois.

Notes

Ira Katznelson is Ruggles Professor of Political Science and History at Columbia University. His most recent book is *Liberalism’s Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). His *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after the Holocaust, Totalitarianism, and Total War* will be published by Columbia University Press in 2000. A version of this article was presented as the presidential address to the Social Science History Association annual meeting in Chicago on 21 November 1998. He wishes to acknowledge debts to Thomas Sugrue and Richard Valelly, who coordinated the program under the rubric “Du Bois’s Century,” and to David Lever-

ing Lewis and his excellent biography, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993).

- 1 Du Bois returned to this locution yet again years later, in 1925, in a *marxisant Foreign Affairs* essay, “World of Color,” where he announced that “the proletariat of the world consists . . . overwhelmingly of the dark workers of Asia, Africa, the islands of the sea, the South and Central America. These are the ones who support a superstructure of wealth, luxury, and extravagance. . . . The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line” (quoted in Sundquist 1996: 6–7).
- 2 See also Du Bois 1996 [1943].
- 3 I owe this insight to Professor Lynn Sanders of the University of Chicago.
- 4 The only mention of Du Bois’s sociology is a very brief treatment of his later Atlanta University Studies in 1903.
- 5 I treat this impulse in post–World War II social science and history in the United States in Katznelson forthcoming.
- 6 Du Bois wrote about his “enlarged view” after his visit to the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto in “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto” (1996 [1952]: 472). He discussed Zionism in “The Case for the Jews” (1996 [1948]: 461–64).

References

- Arendt, Hannah (1951) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Booth, Charles (1892–97) *Life and Labour of the People of London*. 10 vols. London: Macmillan.
- Drake, St. Clair, and Horace Cayton (1945) *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1899) *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- (1910) “Reconstruction and its benefits.” *American Historical Review* 15 (July): 781–99.
- (1920) *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe.
- (1935) *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- (1996 [1900]) “The present outlook for the dark races of mankind,” in Sundquist 1996: 47–54.
- (1996 [1903]) *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Penguin Books.
- (1996 [1935a]) “Does the Negro need separate schools?,” in Sundquist 1996: 423–31.
- (1996 [1935b]) “A Negro nation within the nation,” in Sundquist 1996: 431–438.
- (1996 [1936]) “The field and function of the American Negro college,” in Sundquist 1996: 409–23.

- (1996 [1948]) "The case for the Jews," in Sundquist 1996: 461–64.
- (1996 [1952]) "The Negro and the Warsaw ghetto," in Sundquist 1996: 467–73.
- (1996 [1943]) "The realities in Africa," in Sundquist 1996: 653–63.
- Katz, Michael, and Thomas J. Sugrue (1998) *W. E. B. Du Bois and the City: The Philadelphia Negro and Its Legacy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Katznelson, Ira (1996) *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (forthcoming) *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after the Holocaust, Totalitarianism, and Total War*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Polanyi, Karl (1944) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. New York: Rinehart Books.
- Lewis, David Levering, ed. (1993) *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Residents of Hull House (1895) *Hull House Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago, Together with Comments and Essays on Problems Growing out of the Social Conditions*. New York: T. Y. Crowell.
- Sundquist, Eric J. (1996) *The Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, William Julius (1996) *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.