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# Du Bois and Political Philosophy



# W. E. B. Du Bois

## *Black Radical Liberal*

*Charles W. Mills*

The distinctive features of the black experience in modernity—the original categorization of blacks as a “slave race,” Ham’s grandchildren, and the continuing post-Emancipation imprint of this stigma on the black body in Africa and the African Diaspora—raise a challenge for the inherited categories and frameworks of Western political theory. Can an apparatus generally presuming free and equal citizenship and, even more fundamentally, equal recognized moral status, be adapted to the political agenda of those humans so differently related to both? Can it be adopted as is, or does it need to be fundamentally modified, or should it simply be rejected outright?<sup>1</sup>

Varying in its answers to these questions, what has come to be called “Afro-modern political thought” covers a wide range of political alternatives, united on the mission of overcoming racial subordination—the regimes of white supremacy—but divided on the diagnoses of its workings and the most effective prescriptions for its elimination. Michael Dawson’s well-known taxonomy offers the following listing: radical egalitarianism, disillusioned liberalism, black Marxism, black nationalism, black feminism, black conservatism. Of course, divergences in the interpretation of these positions (even without the qualifying adjective) necessarily introduce a significant element of uncertainty and boundary fuzziness in determin-

ing their content, which is only exacerbated when the “black” is brought into the semantic equation. How does racial subordination modify the crucial terms and theoretical logics of political ideologies predicated on racial equality, or “racelessness”? Is what is produced by the synthesis still going to be recognizable by its genealogy as legitimately liberal, Marxist, nationalist, feminist, conservative? So the investigation into what a “black” political philosophy would be will necessarily have ramifications for the cartography of “white” political philosophies also, perhaps producing seismic shifts in our perception of the terrain they have been claiming to be mapping.<sup>2</sup>

W. E. B. Du Bois was the Afro-modern incarnate, and he is uncontroversially its greatest and most accomplished representative. “Talented Tenth” elitist, democrat, Eurocentric snob, celebrant of the folk tradition, integrationist, separatist, Marxist, black nationalist, Stalinist, radical democrat, prophetic pragmatist—the list of possible and actual descriptions of Du Bois’s political identity is long and contradictory. Throughout his extended and extraordinarily productive activist and scholarly life, he engaged critically and increasingly radically with white liberalism and white Marxism, black nationalism, black conservatism, and early black feminism. In Michael Hanchard’s characterization of one main purpose of black political thought, Du Bois “situate[d] racism and race-making at the core of the projects associated with Western modernity . . . [that] consequently have affected many societies and civilizations, not only black peoples. . . . [thereby exploring] the implications of racial domination for the epistemic frames, definitions, and modes of classifications for politics, polity, and society in the vocabulary and lexicon of the Western political tradition.”<sup>3</sup>

In the process, Du Bois developed a comprehensive worldview with multidisciplinary sources and multidisciplinary implications that even now, more than a half a century after his death, the American academy, as Cornel West points out, is “just not ready” to “assimilate,” “incorporate,” and “render intelligible,” because they so profoundly challenge scholarly orthodoxies. Ironically, Du Bois may be both “the most contemporary figure in the twenty-first century for us” and the one who for that very reason has until lately been most thoroughly ignored by mainstream scholarship.<sup>4</sup>

Fortunately, things are changing. Aldon Morris’s recent *The Scholar Denied* makes the strongest case yet for the long-standing claim of many black sociologists that Du Bois should be seen as the real father of American sociology, not Robert Park. Historians Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds

acknowledge his influence in their entry in Cambridge University Press's Critical Perspectives on Empire series, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, as do "critical" international relations theorists Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam in their coedited *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*. In addition, the new body of work on slavery, American capitalism, and the global economy by such writers as Walter Johnson, Edward Baptist, and Sven Beckert surely vindicates Du Bois's line of analysis, even when he is not explicitly cited.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of this essay and this volume—along with two recent important books by Robert Gooding-Williams and Lawrie Balfour—is to catalyze a comparable recognition of Du Bois's theoretical achievements in political philosophy. I will begin by establishing the racialized nature of Western political philosophy—certainly modern political philosophy, but possibly including the classical tradition also—and the consequent need for the black rewriting of its "epistemic frames, definitions, and modes of classifications." I will then turn to an overview of some of the key themes in Du Bois's version of this rewriting to make a case for Du Bois as being—at least for a significant stretch of his long intellectual and political career—a black radical liberal, simultaneously engaging with and critiquing the most successful ideology of modernity, and the one that has been the most consistent reference point for black political thinkers.

## Racism and Western Political Philosophy

Philosophy, the oldest of the Western humanities, has—perhaps more than any other discipline—presented itself as a dialogue among "talking heads," an image literalized in the iconography of white marble busts of the classical Greek and Roman figures who are its founding fathers. Elsewhere, the body might make a difference, but not here in the world of pure thought and supposedly disincarnate thinkers. But as the pioneers of the second wave of feminist theory showed, these heads were indeed solidly attached to male bodies, and "fatherhood" was not a gender-neutral parenting but a patriarchal one. Such early texts as Susan Moller Okin's *Women in Western Political Thought* and Lorenne Clark and Lynda Lange's *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory* documented the routinely sexist assumptions in virtually all the canonical male philosophers, stretching back to antiquity,

and the relegation of women to a functional reproductive role. As a result, gender bias in the putatively sexless world of philosophy is today a far less contested notion than it was thirty years ago.<sup>6</sup>

But if the maleness of the founding fathers has been grudgingly established as relevant, the significance of their whiteness remains more controversial, and there are far fewer texts on philosophy and race. One obvious explanation of this asymmetry is demographic: the whiteness of the profession (about 97 percent) is more pronounced than its maleness (about 80 percent). Gradually, however, a growing body of work has focused on race, attaining sufficient quantity and visibility to have earned an official designation: critical philosophy of race. This literature has explored various issues—the metaphysics of race, race and social epistemology, race and ethics, the phenomenological and existential realities of race, and others—but for our purposes its most crucial research focus has been on race and the history of philosophy, especially political philosophy. Its central question has been: Assuming that race is constructed, when does race enter the world and how does it affect Western philosophy?<sup>7</sup>

Two main competing answers have emerged. One, a short periodization, argues that race and racism are products of modernity or, at the earliest, of the late medieval epoch. Of course, this view does not maintain that the premodern world was free of human bigotry and prejudice of various kinds—for example, ethnocentrism, color prejudice, xenophobia, religious hostilities, etc. But these did not, it is asserted, take a “racial” form, since race as a social category did not yet exist. Thus, racism as a body of thought or a set of discriminatory institutions and practices did not exist either. Nell Painter’s *The History of White People*, for example, begins: “Were there ‘white’ people in antiquity? . . . People with light skin certainly existed well before our own times. But did anyone think they were ‘white’ or that their character related to their color? No, for neither the idea of race nor the idea of ‘white’ people had been invented, and people’s skin color did not carry useful meaning.”<sup>8</sup>

Du Bois himself endorsed this short periodization of race. In his famous essay “The Souls of White Folk,” he writes: “The discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples is a very modern thing,—a nineteenth and twentieth century matter, indeed. The ancient world would have laughed at such a distinction. The Middle Age regarded skin color with mild curiosity; and even up into the eighteenth century we were hammer-

ing our national manikins into one, great, universal Man, with fine frenzy which ignored color and race even more than birth.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in *The Negro*, he claims:

The world has always been familiar with black men, who represent one of the most ancient of human stocks. Of the ancient world gathered about the Mediterranean, they formed a part and were viewed with no surprise or dislike, because this world saw them come and go and play their part with other men. . . . The modern world, in contrast, knows the Negro chiefly as a bond slave in the West Indies and America. Add to this the fact that the darker races in other parts of the world have, in the last four centuries, lagged behind . . . Europe, and we face to-day a widespread assumption throughout the dominant world that color is a mark of inferiority.<sup>10</sup>

So according to Du Bois, racism and antiblack prejudices are modern phenomena, rooted in racial slavery and imperial European domination. Although sexism and male gender domination can be argued to have shaped and distorted Western philosophy, including Western political philosophy, from its inception, the same cannot be said of racism and white racial domination, since they did not even exist in the period.<sup>11</sup>

However, this short periodization has had its challengers. Even if “races” were not demarcated by skin color in antiquity, Denise McCoskey points out, this does not mean that races constructed by some other criteria did not exist. Benjamin Isaac contends in his *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* that the conventional scholarly wisdom on this subject is quite wrong (in part because of a problematic initial formulation of racism); he argues that the belief in hierarchically ordered groups with “physical, mental, and moral” “collective traits . . . which are constant and unalterable by human will” should count as racism. By this criterion, he judges Aristotle to be the progenitor of Western racism, given that his “natural slaves” are ethnically marked as non-Greeks. So even if we do not yet have a white/nonwhite racial hierarchy, we do have a Greek/non-Greek racial hierarchy, which becomes a more general civilized/barbarian racial hierarchy that influences other famous writers in Greco-Roman antiquity. Insofar as Aristotle was and is regarded as one of the towering figures in the Western political tradition, Isaac’s verdict, if vindicated, would demonstrate



that racism in some sense, if not the color-coded modern sense, does indeed shape Western political philosophy from the start.<sup>12</sup>

Nor do all historians of the subject believe that there was no specifically antiblack racism before modernity. In a later conference volume edited by Isaac and other like-minded (that is, long periodization) scholars, David Goldenberg argues that the negative associations of blackness in Greco-Roman color symbolism were the source of a differentiated antipathy—deeper and more enduring than that targeting other groups—toward “Ethiopians” (the term used at the time for Africans in general). And from the third century onward, he notes, Christianity was marked by “the identification of the devil and demons as Ethiopians.” Goldenberg concludes: “Anti-black sentiment seems to be different from the hostile thinking encountered against other peoples. Against others, it is for what they do; against Blacks it is for what they are. And what they are, that is their blackness, is found to be objectionable because (a) it most visibly indicates their otherness, their somatic dissonance, and (b) its symbolic value connotes a host of negative notions. . . . The disparagement of black skin color began in classical antiquity, reached a height in Christian literature and in the literature of Christian societies.”<sup>13</sup>

Contra Du Bois, then, medieval Christendom had a long history of negative imagery of “Ethiopians” (along with Jews, Muslims, and Mongols), who were among the “monstrous races” routinely depicted in medieval art. In her *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art*, Debra Strickland comments on the “interchangeability of demons and Ethiopians” in the iconography of the period: “[Ethiopians] were in fact a conflation of all Blacks living in sub-Egyptian Africa, a practice that began during the Classical period. . . . In effect, the blackness of the Ethiopians obliterated their humanity, paving the way for the abstract understanding necessary for ethnic stereotyping. That is, Ethiopians were transformed from living humans into symbols, setting a dangerous precedent for the mind-set that ultimately helped justify the social discrimination and intolerance of not only dark-skinned people but also other enemy groups within medieval Christian society.”<sup>14</sup>

These issues (whether the “monstrous races” were close enough to modern conceptions of “races” to establish at least a partial continuity) remain debated and contentious, with no scholarly consensus on the matter. But the existence of the long periodization paradigm does at least raise the

possibility that Du Bois and others who locate racism and antiblack sentiment solely in modernity may have too sanguine and abbreviated a view of its longevity in the West and may be failing to appreciate how profoundly it was formed by Greco-Roman thought and the inherited iconography of Christian eschatology. Even if the European peoples we now call “white” would not formally have had that identity in the ancient world, there is still sufficient continuity over two thousand-plus years within a light-skinned Euro-descendant population identifying themselves as the heirs to ancient Greece and Rome and sharing a religion stigmatizing blackness to justify concerns about how deeply these sentiments may be rooted. Du Bois writes: “We must, then, look for the origin of modern color prejudice not to physical or cultural causes, but to historic facts. And we shall find the answer in modern Negro slavery and the slave trade.” But the “material” historic factors privileged as generative in such Marxism-influenced explanations (racism as the ideology of expansionist capitalism and racial slavery) may only have been reinforcing theologico-cultural representations already deeply engrained. At any rate, with that cautionary word, let us move now to the modern period, which is, of course, the period whose ideologies are of primary and uncontested relevance for Du Bois’s “Afro-modernity.”<sup>15</sup>

The case I will briefly recapitulate here is one I have made in greater detail in a number of books and essays, starting with *The Racial Contract*. Just as feminists have shown liberalism—the dominant political philosophy of modernity—to be patriarchal, so I have suggested that we also need to see it as racial, at least in its dominant incarnations. The hedge is because Jennifer Pitts has argued that liberalism in Britain and France becomes consistently an “imperial liberalism” only after 1800 and that before that period one can find both anti-imperialist and antiracist liberals.<sup>16</sup>

Until recently, mainstream accounts of liberalism and the views of its leading theorists have tended to marginalize this history, either by refusing to talk about racism at all or by representing it as unfortunate “prejudice” that should not be located on the same conceptual level as the terms and apparatus of the liberal ideology itself. Racism, when acknowledged, has been depicted as an “anomaly” to a generally inclusive normative European order. But my suggestion is that we should instead see racism as so penetrating and reconstituting the rules and principles of this order that race becomes symbiotically determinant of its boundaries of inclusion and exclu-

sion. George Mosse insisted many decades ago that “racism as it developed in Western society was no mere articulation of prejudice, nor was it simply a metaphor for suppression; it was, rather, a fully blown system of thought, an ideology like Conservatism, Liberalism, or Socialism, with its own peculiar structure and mode of discourse. . . . [Indeed it was] the most widespread ideology of the time.” However, Mosse himself does not take the further step I think is warranted, which is to point out that under the circumstances, these ideologies will not remain hermetically sealed off from racism. So we will get a *racialized* conservatism, liberalism, and socialism.<sup>17</sup>

In her book on the Enlightenment, Dorinda Outram writes that “this contradiction between support for supposedly universal rights, and the actual exclusion of large numbers of human beings from the enjoyment of those rights, is central to, and characteristic of Enlightenment thought.” But I think it would be more accurate, and more theoretically illuminating, to recognize that there is no actual “contradiction” here, since the excluded humans, even if conceded to be biologically human, were not deemed to be full persons, but *subpersons*, whether on grounds of race or gender or some other stigmatizing and morally diminishing characteristic. Acknowledging this internal historic structuring of liberalism and most other Enlightenment ideologies would both give us a more accurate picture of the recent past and sensitize us to the legacy it has left—the ways in which it is not past at all—that needs to be self-consciously corrected for.<sup>18</sup>

Let me illustrate this point with a quick overview of some central modern Western political philosophers, figures unquestionably canonical.

As an absolutist, Thomas Hobbes is obviously a problematic forebear for the liberal tradition. But what is commonly taken to make him an important precursor to it nonetheless is his radical individualism and (putative) egalitarianism. Unlike Aristotle and the medieval “schoolmen” he repeatedly mocks throughout *Leviathan*, he starts from the physical and mental (not moral) equality of all “men” in the state of nature. Then, on the basis of their rational self-interest in exiting the life-threatening war of all against all to which their self-seeking desires lead, he argues that they will devise rules to govern the polity that are likewise egalitarian, such as the ninth “law of Nature”: “*That every man acknowledge others for his Equall by Nature.*”<sup>19</sup>

So it would seem that we have here an uncompromising egalitarianism, if prudentially rather than morally based. And yet Hobbes also de-

scribes Native Americans (“the savage people in many places of *America*”) as real-life inhabitants of the state of nature who apparently lack the minimal threshold rationality to perceive the cooperative path out of it. How is this reconcilable with what we have just been told about the equality of all “men”? Obviously, the implication is that these are “men” of such a different and cognitively inferior sort that they belong in a different category: “savages” rather than (civilized) men in the standard sense. As Richard Ashcraft comments, “men are not recognizably different from other animals by virtue of divine creation (which may leave them, as the ‘savages of America,’ still in the state of other animals, i.e., the state of war); they become different only because they themselves *create* a political society.” So their humanity notwithstanding, American savages are clearly not to be included as equals in the ninth of the laws of nature intended to regulate the commonwealth. They cannot be treated as persons, but rather (best-case scenario) as wards of the state or (worst-case scenario) as threats to the security of the absolutist polity who must be exterminated. The Hobbesian image of American “savages,” wild subpersons, would shape not merely the British colonial project but, extrapolated to native peoples elsewhere, European expansionism in many other lands.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike Hobbes the proponent of absolutism, John Locke is classically its opponent, though the version he is targeting is primarily Sir Robert Filmer’s biblically grounded rather than Hobbes’s prudentially based kind. So Locke is indubitably central to liberalism, and, through his influence on Thomas Jefferson, he was a foundational inspiration for the property-based democracy of the young American polity. Moreover, the freedom and equality enjoyed by his “men” in the state of nature do not rest on comparative “threat advantage,” as Hobbes thought, but on objective moral law, natural law in the traditional (non-Hobbesian) sense. But though all men should be self-owning, and thus possessed of equal standing in Locke’s proprietary moral universe, Native Americans seem once again to be located in a separate category, as do the Africans in whose enslavement he was earlier an investor. In the *Second Treatise*’s famous chapter 5 on property, Locke makes clear that humans are under the divine imperative to demonstrate their “industriousness” and “rationality” by appropriating the world, which in his opinion native peoples do not, so that an English day laborer lives better than an Indian king. Thus as various theorists have pointed out—including Barbara Arneil, James Tully, and Carole Pateman—Locke

provides a justification for colonial appropriation of indigenous land. Nominally equal in theory, native peoples' deficient rationality makes them in practice unequal.<sup>21</sup>

Locke's earlier (pre-*Two Treatises*) investments in African slavery and contribution to writing the Carolina Constitution, which gave masters absolute power over their Negro slaves, also pose an obvious problem for the transracially inclusive interpretation of the *Second Treatise's* scope. Chapter 16 does justify enslaving (or killing, if one wishes) the prosecutors of a war of aggression because they have violated natural law. But even if Locke had somehow managed to convince himself that all the captured Africans brought to the New World were in fact guilty of such crimes, he explicitly rules out hereditary enslavement of their children in that same chapter. So we have a seeming inconsistency that has generated a large body of secondary literature but that, in my opinion, can most easily be resolved by recognizing that blacks were not, for Locke, full persons in the first place. Self-ownership is legitimately denied to them because they are subpersons appropriately owned by others.

But it is in the third representative of the social contract tradition—Immanuel Kant—that the case for the philosopher seeing at least some people of color (here blacks and Native Americans) as subpersons is both most easily made and most dramatic in its theoretical repercussions. Hobbes is, as noted, not really a liberal, and his self-interest-based conception of morality locates him as the progenitor of the morally less attractive “contractarian” strain of the social contract tradition, as against the “contractual” personhood-based conception. Moreover, though Locke too (as a natural rights theorist) is part of the contractualist version, and thus with Kant central to the liberal mainstream (“deontological”/rights-based liberalism), his unqualified emphasis on the protection of property rights, while endearing him to the political Right, is rejected by ethicists concerned about society's vulnerable. Kant's prescription of respect for the “personhood” of all rational beings has seemed to them a more inspiring normative vision, arguably qualifying his own proprietarianism, and making Kant in many eyes the most important moral theorist of modernity and liberalism.<sup>22</sup>

Yet it turns out—shockingly, and still rejected as untrue by many mainstream philosophers—that Kant should also be considered one of the fathers of modern “scientific” racism. (“Scientific”/biological racism is usually seen as distinctively modern, as against—assuming the truth

of the long periodization—the theological or cultural racism of premodernity.) His writings in anthropology and physical geography—known at the start of the twentieth century but somehow obliterated from Western consciousness after World War II—outline in detail a racial hierarchy of white Europeans/yellow Asians/black Africans/red Amerindians, a hierarchy based on the differential development of *Keime* (germs, seeds) in these different branches of the human race. So here it is not a matter of reconstructing his possibly racist views from a few scattered sentences here and there, or inferring it from his racist practice, but of an extensive body of material focused *specifically and explicitly* on the subject. Kant judged blacks and Native Americans to be natural slaves, and for most of his career countenanced African slavery and European colonialism, thereby making it difficult, at least for some of us, to see any “contradiction” here. Rather, the simple, elegant, and obvious solution is to infer that personhood as a category was racially structured for him, and that though his monogenism meant that all races were human, not all races achieved the person threshold.<sup>23</sup>

But Western philosophical racism is not peculiar to contract theorists; it traverses the divide between contractarian liberals and utilitarian liberals. David Hume, sometimes characterized as a proto-utilitarian, observes in a footnote to his essay “Of National Characters”:

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. . . . Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity.<sup>24</sup>

Or consider John Stuart Mill, leading Enlightenment theorist and nineteenth-century humanitarian utilitarian reformer, whose famous antipaternalist “harm principle” is usually taken as a cornerstone of liberalism’s commitment to the individual’s freedom to make his/her own life without

interference. Once again, it depends on who gets to be counted as an individual. Mill, the colonial employee of the British East India Company, quickly specifies that “this doctrine is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties,” not children, obviously, nor what could be thought of as child races, “those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage”: “Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end.”<sup>25</sup> Mill’s racism is not just a matter of philosophical opinion, but a position he intended to guide public policy. As Uday Singh Mehta points out, referencing Mill’s text on representative government: “Representative institutions are appropriate for Europe and its predominantly white colonies and not for the rest of the world. The bracketing of India, among others, is not therefore the mark of an embarrassing theoretical inconsistency, precisely because at the theoretical level, the commitment to representative institutions is subsequent, and not preventive, to considerations of utility. . . . [For backward nations] alternative norms are required to remain consistent with the progress associated with utility.”<sup>26</sup>

British colonial policy must therefore maintain colonial rule, given the backward state of these nations. So what needs to be appreciated is that the person/subperson divide, the racialization of the liberal apparatus, cuts across standard demarcations between natural rights liberalism, deontological liberalism, and utilitarian liberalism, or the contrast between biological racism and cultural racism. Mill’s racism is cultural, a doctrine of advanced and retarded races, as is made clear in his famous debate with Thomas Carlyle (*The Nigger Question/The Negro Question*). But while more “progressive” than the overtly reactionary Carlyle, he is still an agent of Empire, no more calling for an end to European colonialism than the biologically racist Kant did. And the same could be said for other theorists less central to the Anglo-American philosophical canon. Georg Wilhelm Hegel was not a biological racist either, but his oddly hybrid “environmental-cultural” racism, in the diagnosis of Teshale Tibebu, nonetheless provides, in the planetary itinerary of the World-Spirit, a clear demarcation between prehistorical, ahistorical, and world-historical peoples that apotheosizes Europe and the civilizing mission. Nor should we assume that the radicalized, materialistically inverted version of this story in revolutionary Marxism escapes the taint of Eurocentrism. Marx may have located primitive capitalist accumu-

lation in “the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of [Amerindians and] . . . the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins.” But this brief acknowledgment should not be read as grounding any distinctive vision of a *racial* exploitation different from that exemplified in white working-class wage-labor, or a sense of the specifically *racial* dimensions of global Euro-capitalist domination and its creation of a global “whiteness.” As John M. Hobson concludes, Marx’s theory of history rests on “paternalistic-Eurocentric foundations” that “faithfully reproduce the teleological Orientalist story” except that now “the Western proletariat [rather than the Western bourgeoisie] is global humanity’s ‘chosen people.’” Transformative agency, now in its revolutionary form, still inheres in whites, here the white working class of the Global North, whose mission it will be to liberate the Global South.<sup>27</sup>

Whether springing up only in modernity, then, or originating much further back in Aristotle’s anti-Persian distinction between those who are slaves only contingently and those who are slaves by nature, Western racism deeply shapes Western political theory, becoming the demarcation in a modern world between those humans who do actually attain “person” status and those who do not. This distinction is orthogonal to, cuts across, other theoretical divisions internal to the field. If this history has now been erased, if these political ideologies are now anachronistically read as being in their time racially inclusive, we will be disadvantaged not merely in understanding their actual historical logics of development but handicapped in the necessary task of reconstructing them (to the extent that they can be) as genuinely rather than merely nominally racially inclusive. W. E. B. Du Bois, I suggest, needs to be recognized as the most important thinker in the Africana tradition undertaking this task, identifying both the liberalism and the Marxism of his day as racialized, and seeking, at different times and in different ways, to rewrite both.

## W. E. B. Du Bois as Black Radical Liberal

In the pages that follow, I want to make a case for W. E. B. Du Bois as being—at least for a significant stretch of his long and self-reinventing life—a “black radical liberal.” This will be an unfamiliar phrase that might seem, *prima facie*, to be a contradiction in terms, which is part of my reason for taking up the challenge. (That Du Bois was for many years a black Marx-



ist—perhaps the preeminent black Marxist—is old news, certainly not something that needs to be established or refuted at this point.) *Black radical liberalism* is obviously meant to be contrasted with *black liberalism*, but what is the contrast supposed to be?<sup>25</sup>

Let me try to explain. Black liberalism in the mainstream unqualified sense, as I interpret it, is a liberalism that operates within a conventional liberal framework of individualist assumptions and then tries to bring race into the picture. Race and racism are not seen, as in the black radical liberalism for which I am arguing, as necessitating a fundamental rethinking of that framework. Black radicalism, usually regarded as subsuming two main variants, black nationalism and black Marxism, is taken to be categorically opposed to black liberalism. Whether individually or in attempted synthesis, the theoretical commitments of these political ideologies (either presupposing an analytic framework of white supremacy or an analytic framework of capitalist class domination) are viewed as requiring a foundational rejection of liberalism's assumptions.<sup>29</sup>

But what I am claiming is that this judgment is mistaken and that the most valuable elements of black nationalism and black Marxism can indeed be incorporated into a suitably revised liberalism. A liberalism whose traditional social ontology has been reconceptualized to admit the centrality of racial and class domination to the making of the modern world is not merely possible, but desirable, enabling us to mainstream into the dominant political discourse of modernity the traditionally marginalized perspectives and demands of black radicals. Black radical liberalism is a liberalism informed by the realities of *racial capitalism* and self-consciously oriented accordingly by the need to rethink white liberal theory in that light. So it is not merely a matter of arguing for a left/social-democratic/"socialist" liberalism, mindful of the failures of both free-market/neoliberal capitalism and Stalinist "socialism" (a familiar enough project by now), but of taking into account liberalism's historic complicity with white supremacy, both nationally and internationally. As such, it is, I am contending, a liberalism better equipped than mainstream liberalism, whether black or white, to carry out an emancipatory racial agenda. For in claiming above that the dominant varieties of liberalism in modernity have been racialized, I meant to refer not merely to racist representations of people of color in the theory's vocabulary but to a racialized logic in its conceptual and normative apparatus. Originally, this will have been a logic of overt racist exclusion; today, it will present itself

as a nominally “color-blind” inclusion that, by failing to acknowledge the legacy of the past (and ongoing practices in the present), will guarantee its perpetuation. A black radical liberalism will therefore need to undertake a deracializing reconstruction of liberalism.<sup>30</sup>

Let me begin by clarifying how I understand “liberalism” as a concept. I will draw here on a characterization by the well-known British political theorist John Gray:

Common to all variants of the liberal tradition is a definite conception, distinctively modern in character, of man and society. . . . It is *individualist*, in that it asserts the moral primacy of the person against the claims of any social collectivity; *egalitarian*, inasmuch as it confers on all men the same moral status and denies the relevance to legal or political order of differences in moral worth among human beings; *universalist*, affirming the moral unity of the human species and according a secondary importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms; and *meliorist* in its affirmation of the corrigibility and improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements. It is this conception of man and society which gives liberalism a definite identity which transcends its vast internal variety and complexity.<sup>31</sup>

Against collectivist political philosophies, then (as Marxism and black nationalism are often represented as being), which subordinate individual rights to a putative greater social good, liberalism affirms the moral centrality of the individual. Against racist and other discriminatory political philosophies (as black nationalism, again, is often represented as being), liberalism endorses egalitarianism and universalism. And against conservative political philosophies pessimistic about the possibilities for progressive social change, whether because of religious skepticism or biologically determinist fatalism, liberalism holds out the hope of a better world, a vision that is this-worldly rather than otherworldly.

Now as an articulation of an *ideal* liberalism, Gray’s account is a very attractive picture, but it obviously bears no correspondence whatsoever to *actual*, real-world liberalism. As Domenico Losurdo summarizes things, the sordid (and therefore, understandably, usually airbrushed) history of actual liberalism reveals that it has been “illiberal” for most of humanity throughout its reign. Even the white male working class did not get the rights we as-

sociate with modernity and the Enlightenment (such as the franchise) until well into the modern period, while for white women and people of color the exclusions were even more dramatic (and arguably endure to this day). Nonwhites were not generally seen as “morally equal” “individuals” but, as I suggested above, as “subpersons” whose unqualified membership even in “the human species” was sometimes questioned, and whose “improvability” was either denied altogether or deemed to be achievable only under white tutelage. So actual liberalism was illiberalism, when class, race, or gender are taken into account. Any race-sensitive liberalism needs to acknowledge this history if it is to be accurate and effective in diagnosing and trying to eliminate social injustice.<sup>32</sup>

Let us appropriate some language from John Rawls to mark this distinction. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls distinguishes between the principles of justice appropriate for ideal, “well-ordered” (perfectly just) societies of “perfect compliance” with its rules and norms, and nonideal (imperfect) societies of only “partial compliance.” The former principles come under ideal theory; the latter, under nonideal theory. I suggest the distinction is more generally useful and can in fact be applied, more globally, to liberalism itself. Most discussions of liberalism historically have presupposed ideal or near-ideal conditions and then asked what form liberal rights and freedoms should take in this context. But even under liberal modernity, which is supposed to usher in the age of individualism, oppression is the norm for all but a small minority of the population. My claim will be that a liberalism forced to face the realities of group domination in putatively liberal societies would be very different from the liberalisms familiar to us, in part because—at the meta level—a revisionist liberalism of this kind would need to critically engage with *existing* liberalism’s complicity in this domination. A white-supremacist society, such as the United States has historically been (and some would say continues to be), is obviously not a well-ordered society, and the liberalism appropriate for guiding us in institutional reform and institutional reconstruction needs to reflect this radical difference in its identity. One simple way of bringing Du Bois into the realm of Rawlsian discourse, then, is to categorize him as a political philosopher centrally focused throughout his life on *nonideal theory*—that is, the world of sociopolitical oppression and the challenge, in the United States in particular, of how to overcome illiberal white supremacy in what was supposedly a liberal democratic state.<sup>33</sup>

## Black Radical Liberalism

Against this background, then, let us turn to the details of what I am claiming can illuminatingly be seen as Du Bois's reconstruction of a nonideal-theory liberalism shaped and theoretically oriented by the experience of black racial subordination: a black radical liberalism. Unlike mainstream black liberalism, black radical liberalism views race and racism as symbiotically incorporated into the liberal body politic, not an anomaly to it, thereby requiring a deep rethinking of crucial liberal categories and framings—its social and moral ontology, its marginalization of the reality and significance of exploitation, and its consequent failure to theorize the implications of these inequitable relationships for social and political transparency. So we will look at Du Bois's reconstruction job under these four categories: the descriptive and moral metaphysics of the society, racial exploitation, and racial opacity.

### *The Racial Descriptive Metaphysics of the Social Order*

To begin with, Du Bois has to work out the metaphysics of the social order, given that races are entities central to that order and perforce entities to be categorically recognized in theorizing about it. The crucial question is whether this metaphysics is compatible with liberalism or not. I will contend that it is indeed compatible and that in fact once we recognize how dramatic a difference the self-conscious location of liberalism in a nonideal-theory oppressive context makes, we can appreciate that many of the criticisms historically directed against liberalism as such are really targeted at ideal-theory liberalism.

Consider the Gray quote. The “individualism” he highlights is supposed to be one of the crucial demarcating features of liberalism, and indeed it is routinely critiqued by the Left for its atomistic individualist ontology. But even for mainstream liberalism, this accusation is unfair. It is most true for a contractarian liberalism based on Hobbesian individuals in self-seeking conflict with each other in the state of nature. It is less true for Lockean liberalism, which, though also contractarian, assumes a state of nature that is virtually “social,” with extensive human commercial intercourse even before the formal decision to create a community. And it is not at all true for utilitarian liberalism, which grounds the basic moral imperatives on so-

cial welfare, or for the “communitarian” liberalism of the British Hegelians T. H. Green and his colleagues, which conceives of individuals as fundamentally shaped by their communities and social identities.<sup>34</sup>

What liberalism is really committed to is *moral* individualism, the individual as the locus of moral value (as in the Gray quote). But this is quite separate from—neither coextensive with nor implying nor implied by—*descriptive* individualism, the individual conceptualized as extracted out of her social identity and sociohistorical setting. We can affirm from a normative standpoint that the liberal bottom line should be the flourishing of individuals, with the flourishing of collectives being valuable only insofar as it is instrumental to that end. That affirmation does not at all necessarily commit us to understanding individuals in a desocialized and dehistoricized way.

Once we disambiguate terms, we should see that even mainstream liberalism has the resources to accommodate a “social” individualism. The real problem, I suggest, is that the overarching commitment to the ideal-theory framing of liberalism (across these different variants: contractarian, utilitarian, and Greenian) has precluded the exploration of the ontologies of *oppressive* liberal societies (“liberal” in that they give at least lip service to liberal principles and norms). Whether in an atomistic individualist ontology or more socially informed ontologies, liberal theory has not made it a priority to understand how group domination within liberal polities necessarily shapes the human beings enmeshed in their relations. The populations of liberal theory may be portrayed as desocialized atomic individuals or as social individuals, but in both cases they are symmetrically positioned with respect to each other as equi-powerful. Either no sociohistorical background is recognized at all, or a common sociohistorical background is presupposed that can then be factored out precisely because it is a common factor. But for nonideal-theory liberalism—the liberalism of actual liberal states—individuals cannot be theorized in this decontextualized way, since structures of domination and oppression position them so differently in the society and the polity. Here it is *asymmetry* that rules, with correspondingly profound ontological consequences for the privileged and the subordinated.<sup>35</sup>

So a nonideal-theory liberalism will have to register these differences in its apparatus. Assuming that such a society is radically rather than slightly deviant from ideality, its ontology will be affected also. But far from such a metaphysics being incompatible with liberalism, as is standardly assumed,

it should be seen as a *prerequisite* for properly guiding it. A group ontology is not inconsistent with normative liberal individualism since it orients us to the structures that illicitly privilege and disadvantage liberal individuals and obstruct the latter's achievement of their individuality. What would be problematic would be a group ontology that elevated group flourishing *above* the individual, and/or that denied equal moral status to some individuals because of their group membership.

With these points having been made, let us turn to "The Conservation of Races" (1897), which can be argued to be Du Bois's first detailed attempt to spell out what the metaphysics of the social order are. The text is, of course, famously ambiguous, resulting in widely different interpretations of what the underlying ontology is supposed to be. On the one hand, we have reference to "families," "common blood," "physical differences of blood, color and cranial measurements," "the cleavage of physical race distinctions" that "play a great part" in dividing the "eight distinctly differentiated races" of the modern world. On the other hand, we are informed that "subtle forces," "spiritual" and "psychic," "infinitely transcend" the "physical [differences]," even if "based" on them, so that to understand them we need "the eye of the historian and sociologist." So is Du Bois offering us a biologically essentialist view of race, a socially constructivist view of race (and if so, is it culturally or politically constructivist), or a confused and inherently self-contradictory view of race?<sup>36</sup>

Obviously we have no time to enter and try to resolve this debate here. The point I want to make is that of all the different possible readings, none are *unequivocally* antiliberal in their implications. If a constructivist reading is ultimately vindicated—Du Bois as saying with confusing rhetorical flourishes in 1897 what he would later spell out more lucidly in 1940 in his classic epigram that "the black man is a person who must ride 'Jim Crow' in Georgia"—then clearly there is no tension here with liberalism, since most contemporary critical philosophers of race are both constructivists and liberals. It is true that Du Bois contrasts recognition of "the race idea, the race spirit, the race ideal" with "the individualistic philosophy of the Declaration of Independence." But in context, I suggest, this is just the racial equivalent of the Marxist rejection of the "Great Man Theory of History," the insistence that "groups [make] history," and that "the Pharaohs, Caesars, Toussaints and Napoleons" must be related to their sociohistorical milieu and the epochal forces at work within it. In other words, both are rejec-

tions of the idea that individuals are the prime movers of the social order. And note that the simultaneous invocation of the social and the biological, which might seem, *prima facie*, to be simply contradictory and incoherent, has been defended (if not in Du Bois's narrative) by such respectable contemporary figures as Robin Andreasen and Philip Kitcher.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, even if the biologicistic interpretation were correct, it would not necessarily be in contradiction with contemporary liberalism, since in the interwar years before World War II, the dominant liberal position on race would have been that races did indeed exist as biological entities, but that the races were morally equal. It is really only after the war, as the result of the Holocaust and the UNESCO declarations on race, that biologism was repudiated, and even today many theorists believe that such claims are decidedly premature. So if Du Bois thought that the races were natural, but of equal moral status, he would obviously be a liberal by our standards. And whatever his changes of position on other issues, he never wavered on human beings' moral equality. Thus in this essay he speaks of "the whole scientific doctrine of human brotherhood" (that is, racial differences scientifically proven to be less important than racial commonalities), and the duty of Negro Americans "to maintain their race identity until . . . the ideal of human brotherhood has become a practical possibility." Biological race would be inconsistent with (contemporary) liberal commitments only if it were taken by Du Bois to imply one or more of three alternatives. First, a moral hierarchy that lowers some races below the level of equal personhood. Second, a racial determinism of behavior that compels us to treat our fellow humans as less than equal (even if they are equal). Or third, a racial teleology that makes races themselves—rather than the individuals of which these races are composed—the bearers of moral value.<sup>38</sup>

Du Bois clearly did not believe the first two. What about the third? His language about each race having "its particular message, its particular ideal," and the "great races . . . giv[ing] to civilization the full spiritual message which they are capable of giving," via the "natural laws" that guide racial development may be read as valorizing a racial telos in itself. So if such a reading can be convincingly established, and the competing liberal interpretation refuted (racial advance for the sake of the well-being of the individual members *of* the race), then this 1897 Du Bois would be a nonliberal.<sup>39</sup>

But evidence for the correctness of the Du Bois-as-liberal interpreta-

tion can be found in “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” an essay written around the same time and reprinted as the first and most famous essay in his 1903 collection *The Souls of Black Folk*. In this essay, Du Bois explicitly declares his faith in the possibility “for a man to be both a Negro and an American,” affirms “the ideal of human brotherhood,” states that “there are to-day no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes,” and concludes that “merely a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic is the Negro Problem.” Since it can hardly be denied that the principles of that republic are liberal ones, this seems an unequivocal endorsement of liberalism, at least in its ideal (nondiscriminatory) form. Note also the clearly instrumental role Du Bois attributed to race and black racial organization: the “ideal of human brotherhood” is to be achieved “through the unifying ideal of Race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, *not in opposition to or contempt for other races* [my emphasis], but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic.”<sup>40</sup> This instrumentalist conception echoes his conclusion in “Conservation” that “we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities of development. For the accomplishment of these ends we need race organizations. . . . Not only is all this necessary for positive advance, it is absolutely imperative for negative defense.”<sup>41</sup>

I suggest that, read in context, passages like these undercut the notion that Du Bois held an antiliberal interpretation of races as entities whose teleological destinies are self-validating, independent of their consequences for the fates of the human beings who are their constituents. On the contrary, Du Bois is endorsing neither a racially differentiated personhood, nor hatred for whites, nor an ineluctable racial determinism, nor an antiliberal ideal. Rather, he is placing liberalism in its actual racialized context and recognizing what has to be done to realize liberal ideals in a society where white liberals fail to treat their black cocitizens with “color-blind” liberal respect. Black group organization to achieve these ends is not only not *prohibited* by a liberalism sensitized to these racial realities but (more strongly) it is arguably *mandated* by any objective apprehension of the actual racial dynamics of the society, one in which real-life liberalism—from the Founders on—has been deeply racialized.



### *The Racial Moral Metaphysics of the Social Order*

I turn now to what could be termed the “moral metaphysics” of the social order, as distinct from its “descriptive metaphysics.” If this concept is unfamiliar, it is, I suggest, because neither of the two main competing modern Western political traditions, liberal and Marxist, have felt the need to theorize critically about the moral status of the “persons” whose ontologies in modernity they are supposed to be mapping. In today’s sanitized versions of (originally racist) liberal individualism and Marxist class theory, these political philosophies’ history of racially differentiating among people is obfuscated, and the “individuals” in both theories are conceived of as morally equal.

But a white-supremacist society is demarcated not merely by the *material* subordination of the “inferior” races but by their *moral* derogation, a derogation not limited to individual prejudicial depictions and actions but socially embedded in practices and institutions. People of color will originally have been conceptualized in this racist optic not as equal “persons” but as “subpersons.” This does not, of course, literally *make* them subpersons—I endorse the morally objectivist position that moral status is socio-independent. But it does mean that, assuming the capacity of white power to bring into existence a racially hierarchical society, the failure to attain “socially recognized” personhood will have a profound effect on the psyches not merely of nonwhites but of whites also. Personhood and subpersonhood will become materially embedded in everyday transactions, in corporeality, spatiality, and institutionality, in such a way as to create a moralized topography of the social order, a relief map of dignity and indignity.<sup>42</sup>

It is the distinctive contribution of Du Bois and other thinkers in the black radical tradition to have recognized and pioneered the theorization of this aspect of a society’s social ontology. (Along a different axis—that of gender domination—feminist thinkers have, of course, also offered an innovative perspective not found in “masculinist” theory.) The psychosocial reality and consequences of this partitioned personhood would be a central theme in Du Bois’s writings for the rest of his life, applying not just to the United States but to the colonial world as a whole. In the conclusion of *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), he writes, “We grant full citizenship in the World Commonwealth to the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ (whatever that may mean), the Teuton and the Latin. . . . [B]ut with the Negroes of Africa we come to a full stop, and in

its heart the civilized world with one accord denies that these come within the pale of nineteenth-century Humanity.” In “Strivings,” he characterizes white prejudice as “that personal disrespect and mockery, the ridicule and systematic humiliation, the distortion of fact and wanton license of fancy . . . the all-pervading desire to inculcate disdain for everything black.” In *Dark-water* (1920), he states: “By reason of a crime [Atlantic slavery] (perhaps the greatest crime in human history) the modern world has been systematically taught to despise colored peoples. . . . [A]ll this has unconsciously trained millions of honest, modern men into the belief that black folk are sub-human.” Twenty years later, in *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), he reminisces about how he “knew from the days of my childhood . . . that in all things in general, white people were just the same as I,” “and yet this fact of racial distinction based on color was the greatest thing in my life and absolutely determined it” because of the “unending inescapable sign of slavery.” At the end of his life, he was still moved to describe how white civilization “taught the world that a black man was by the grace of God and law of nature so evil and inferior that slavery, insult, and exploitation were too good for him.”<sup>43</sup>

What Du Bois is diagnosing, then, is the social ontology of a nonideal world characterized not merely by material subordination (as in a Marxist class ontology) but by institutionally denied equal moral personhood. Marx’s white working class are systematically disadvantaged by the lack of material resources that constrains them (according to Marx) to sell their labor power. But their moral equality *is* recognized. Blacks, by contrast, are not just materially handicapped but in addition viewed as moral *unequals*. The social inferiority of blacks is not an intrinsic feature of their “race,” but the product of historical and current oppression. But in terms of intersubjective dynamics, this imputed biological inferiority does profoundly shape society and social interactions, not merely among races but within races. In ideal-theory liberalism, everybody’s Kantian personhood is respected. In nonideal-theory racial liberalism, by contrast, blacks and other people of color are seen by whites (and sometimes by themselves) as less than full persons. “Respect,” which is a race-independent moral relationship in ideal (as against actual) Kantianism, becomes racialized, with racial disrespect for nonwhites being the norm. The affirmation of self-respect and dignity, then—which Rawls sees as the most important primary good—will require a race-based rejection of white racial contempt, since one is being disrespected, dissed, not as an individual but *as* a member of an inferior race.

Hence the need—in our own time no less than in Du Bois’s—to insist that “Black lives matter!”

So what is a seemingly completely familiar liberal value, especially for deontological liberalism—respect—takes on unfamiliar racial dimensions when that liberalism has been racialized. And “the facing of so vast a prejudice” is likely to bring “self-questioning” and “self-disparagement,” resulting in a people “that laughs at itself, and ridicules itself, and wishes to God it was anything but itself.” The uncontroversial liberal value of self-respect taken for granted by white philosophers amnesiac about the past and obtuse about their racial privilege becomes the black radical liberal value of *racial* self-and-group respect in the actual racialized world. Correspondingly, the long tradition of historical “vindicationism” in texts from colonial/postcolonial Africa and the Africana Diaspora—the vindication of blacks as a race with historical achievements and important contributions to global civilization like any other race—which might seem puzzling to outsiders with a sanitized account of this past, becomes unmysterious once it is recognized how deeply respect/disrespect was tied to race. We are still solidly in the liberal normative universe but now forced to admit the coloring of concepts normally (today) represented as colorless.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, the theorization of this moral ontology is going to be crucial for explaining the moral psychology and patterns of motivation of the racially privileged. Equal raceless liberal individuals for whom reciprocal respect is the “default mode” may have pathological reasons peculiar to their life histories to need and crave a differential respect, but this will not be a general phenomenon. If whites are positioned by racial membership as the superior race, however, it is obviously a completely different story. Deference is their due *as members of this race*, and their moral psychology will be deeply shaped by racial entitlement, what we would now call white privilege: “Liberty, Justice, and Right—[are] marked ‘For White People Only.’”<sup>45</sup> And this racialized moral psychology will have implications for the analyses and prognoses of orthodox Marxist class theory also. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois would decry as fundamentally misguided the American Communist Party’s (CPUSA) mechanical “importation” of “Russian Communism” into the US context, refusing to recognize the reality of the country’s racialized social ontology:

This philosophy did not envisage a situation where instead of a horizontal division of classes, there was a vertical fissure, a complete separ-

ration of classes by race, cutting square across the economic layers. . . . [T]he split between white and black workers was greater than that between white workers and capitalists; and this split depended not simply on economic exploitation but on a racial folk-lore grounded on centuries of instinct, habit and thought and implemented by the conditioned reflex of visible color. This flat and incontrovertible fact, imported Russian Communism ignored, would not discuss.<sup>46</sup>

Whether in a white liberalism or a white Marxism, then, white sociopolitical theorists were failing to admit the centrality of race to the sociopolitical order, and its implications for white consciousness and self-regard. Originally Du Bois himself had famously thought that overcoming racism just required education as to what the facts were, as in his pioneering sociological work *The Philadelphia Negro*. In *Souls*, for example, he writes: “We may decry the color-prejudice of the South, yet it remains a heavy fact. Such curious kinks of the human mind exist and must be reckoned with soberly. . . . They can be met in but one way,—by the breadth and broadening of human reason, by catholicity of taste and culture. . . . the one panacea of Education leaps to the lips of all.”<sup>47</sup>

But what he came to realize is that white supremacy had far deeper foundations, both psychological and material. It was not at all a matter of an innocent ignorance, to be remedied by education, but a vested interest in the existing order tied up with one’s identity as a white person, and including unconsciously held assumptions about what conferred worth and self-worth upon persons. As he would later conclude in *Dusk of Dawn*: “My basic theory had been that race prejudice was primarily a matter of ignorance on the part of the mass of men. . . . All human action to me in those days was conscious and rational.” But now he saw that “not simply knowledge . . . will reform the world.” Rather, “The present attitude and action of the white world is not based solely upon rational, deliberate intent. It is a matter of conditioned reflexes; of long followed habits, customs and folkways; of subconscious trains of reasoning and unconscious nervous reflexes. To attack and better all this calls for more than appeal and argument.”<sup>48</sup>

White personhood becomes intricately interrelated with nonwhite sub-personhood, establishing deep psychic barriers to the achievement of racial equality.

## The Racial Exploitation of the Social Order

The material foundation of the white-supremacist social order is racial exploitation. Here again, as with the idea of a racialized social metaphysic, the black radical tradition, and Du Bois in particular, has arguably played a pioneering role in developing the concept. “Exploitation” is, of course, classically associated with the Marxist tradition, and as a result of Du Bois’s later encounter with and influence by Marxism, he would draw on Marxist framings from the 1920s onward. But my claim would be that the concept of racial exploitation in his work predates this influence, and even in his later more Marxist phase, he is always careful to demarcate its peculiar features. Moreover, it is not merely an exploitation local or national but *transnational*.

Marxism’s critique of wage labor is that though the white working class’s moral equality is recognized, seemingly fair and voluntary transactions at the level of the relations of exchange (labor power for a wage) are constrained by material compulsions at the level of the relations of production and based on the exploitative extraction of surplus value. But for blacks, not even their moral equality is recognized, and the relations whites establish with them are uncontroversially exploitative by straightforward liberal norms, without any need to invoke the now-discredited labor theory of value. So racial exploitation is not merely a form of class exploitation. Moreover, racial exploitation involves the participation of white workers as well as white capitalists and benefits the former as well as the latter. Liberalism could in theory take exploitation as a central theme, given its nominal commitment, especially in the social contract version, to a society founded on fair terms for the appropriation of the world. But the overwhelmingly ideal-theoretic orientation of contemporary liberalism—Rawls famously characterizes his ideal society as “a cooperative venture for mutual advantage” and later explicitly rules out the appropriateness to understanding such a society of any concept of exploitation—together with the sanitization of the historical record, and the guilt-by-Marxist-association of the concept, have marginalized exploitation as a topic in contemporary liberal philosophy. For nonideal-theory liberalism, on the other hand, society is *not* to be conceptualized as a cooperative venture but as a coercive and exploitative one: exploitation of the subordinated is precisely the unacknowledged (today anyway) underpinning of the social order.<sup>49</sup>

In *Souls*, Du Bois describes how in the postbellum period, “in well-nigh the whole rural South the black farmers are peons, bound by law and custom to an economic slavery, from which the only escape is death or the penitentiary.” In the concluding chapter of *The Negro*, he says of various European “solutions” to “the Negro problem” (in Africa and the Americas) that “back of practically all these experiments stands the economic motive—the determination to use the organization, the land, and the people, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of white Europe.” So racial exploitation is not merely domestic but transcontinental. In the famous “The Souls of White Folk,” this analysis is located in a more Marxist framework:

[By the time of the Boxer Rebellion,] white supremacy was all but world-wide. . . . The using of men for the benefit of masters is no new invention of modern Europe. It is quite as old as the world. But Europe proposed to apply it on a scale and with an elaborateness of detail of which no former world ever dreamed. . . . The scheme of Europe was no sudden invention, but a way out of long-pressing difficulties. It is plain to modern white civilization that the subjection of the white working classes cannot much longer be maintained. . . . The day of the very rich is drawing to a close, so far as individual white nations are concerned. But there is a loophole. There is a chance for exploitation on an immense scale for inordinate profit, not simply to the very rich, but to the middle class and to the laborers. This chance lies in the exploitation of darker peoples.<sup>50</sup>

As with Lenin’s *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Du Bois identifies the “inordinate profits” of colonial exploitation as a source for neutralizing the demands of the white “Northern” proletariat. But unlike the class-reductionist Lenin (who mentions “race” a grand total of two times in his book)—an analysis entirely typical of white Marxism—Du Bois recognizes that the ontology of such a world must recognize white supremacy as well as imperial capitalism, and not shy away from the collusion of white workers and their socialist representatives. Capitalism is not colorless but racial: it is *white-supremacist* capitalism. And race has its own causality, affecting the social identity of white workers and the supposed dialectic of proletarian internationalism:

Even the broken reed on which we had rested high hopes of eternal peace,—the guild of the laborers—the front of that very important movement for human justice on which we had builded [*sic*] most, even this flew like a straw before the breath of king and Kaiser. Indeed, the flying had been foreshadowed when in Germany and America “international” Socialists had all but read yellow and black men out of the kingdom of industrial justice. Subtly had they been bribed, but effectively: were they not lordly whites and should they not share in the spoils of rape?<sup>51</sup>

So the revisionism of the black radical tradition demands that we acknowledge the centrality to the social order (both national and global) of a kind of exploitation much broader in scope than class exploitation, benefiting white workers as well as white capitalists and providing a motivation for whites as a group to maintain the existing architecture of systemic unfair advantage that materially privileges them.<sup>52</sup>

## The Racial Opacity of the Social Order

And that brings us finally to what I have termed elsewhere “white ignorance,” but which—respecting Du Bois’s vocabulary—I am going to call here “white self-veiling.” As Donald Gibson points out in his introduction to the Penguin *Souls of Black Folk*, “the central metaphor of the book” is “the veil,” and blacks are, for whites, both veiled and invisible: “invisible to those who need them to be invisible, veiled to those who need them veiled.” Similarly, the subtitle of *Darkwater* is *Voices from within the Veil*. The veil is a cognitive barrier to whites’ veridical apprehension of the situation of blacks, a barrier erected not merely by particular white individuals but by a white society willfully ignorant in general. (James Baldwin’s essays can, in significant measure, be seen as a lifelong attempt to overcome white ignorance, which he often calls “innocence.” The continuing relevance of this insight is illustrated by Nicholas Kristof’s 2014 five-part *New York Times* series, “When Whites Just Don’t Get It.”) As such, the veil will have deleterious epistemic consequences not merely for whites’ perceptions of blacks but for white *self*-perception, their understanding of themselves.<sup>53</sup>

In a Marxist framework, of course, such distortions of social cognition on the part of the class-privileged are a familiar theme, explored through

the category of “ideology” and a society’s “dominant ideology.” But liberalism also has the resources to theorize this issue, once we recognize that we are starting from a nonideal-theory rather than an ideal-theory liberalism. The liberal commitment to what Rawls calls “publicity,” or what we would now term “transparency,” is necessarily going to be affected by these nonideal circumstances. Especially in the Kantian (“deontological”) tradition of liberalism that is now dominant in the West, it is taken for granted that the liberal state, the *Rechtsstaat*, should be guided by morality rather than *realpolitik* in its transactions, and as such should be unafraid of, indeed should welcome, public scrutiny. A liberal society genuinely composed of equally and equitably positioned individuals would have no need for cognitive misrepresentation, since its moral metaphysics and economic foundations are egalitarian. But a putatively liberal society that is really composed of differentially and unjustly positioned racial groups will necessarily have to avoid transparency, since its exploitative foundations must either be rationalized and justified (in the slave and Jim Crow periods) or denied altogether (in the post-civil-rights epoch). If nonracial liberal transparency is the ideal and norm for the former, racialized liberal opacity will (in practice) be the ideal and the norm for the latter. Nonideal-theory liberalism will thus be forced to overcome not just the standard obstacles to knowledge and research accuracy faced by all attempted investigations of the world, whether natural or social, but the far more daunting barriers that conceal and protect white interests in the established unjust order.

From an early stage in his life, in a passage earlier cited from “Strivings,” Du Bois recognized that white disrespect for and humiliation of blacks required “the distortion of fact and wanton license of fancy.” In *Darkwater*, he refers to “belief not based on science . . . [or] history . . . [but] passionate, deep-seated heritage, and as such can be moved by neither argument nor fact.” In *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), one of Du Bois’s main tasks is to expose, in the concluding chapter 17, “the propaganda of history,” the professional manifestations of these “distortions” and “fancies” in the work of contemporaneous white southern historians seeking to paint Reconstruction as a disaster and glorify the noble “Lost Cause”: “Herein lies more than mere omission and difference of emphasis. . . . We have too often a deliberate attempt so to change the facts of history that the story will make pleasant reading for Americans. . . . It is propaganda like this that has led men in the past to insist that history is ‘lies agreed upon.’” One of



the most famous passages in *Dusk of Dawn* seeks to dramatize through the metaphor of a cave the cognitive plight of blacks trying to communicate with their white overlords. But in a black inversion of Plato's Cave, in which the entombed, deluded, are locked in the world of shadows while the Form of the Sun illuminates the reality above, this is a cave whose black "entombed souls" are the ones illuminated as to the realities of their situation but unable to reach the conscience and awareness of the deluded white world above, indifferent and obtuse to black oppression: "It gradually penetrates the minds of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear; that some thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass is between them and the world. . . . [The passing white world] either do not hear at all, or hear but dimly, and even what they hear, they do not understand." In *The World and Africa* (1947), Du Bois extrapolates this insight to the global level and points out how the intercontinental domination and exploitation of the non-European world by Europe came to distort the sciences that, had they been uninfluenced by white group interest, would have indicted the existing order:

Even the evidence of the eyes and senses was denied by the mere weight of reiteration. . . . Education was so arranged that the young learned not necessarily the truth, but that aspect and interpretation of the truth which the rulers of the world wished them to know and follow. . . . To prove the unfitness of most human beings for self-rule and self-expression, every device of science was used: evolution was made to prove that Negroes and Asiatics were less developed human beings than whites; history was so written as to make all civilization the development of white people; economics was so taught as to make all wealth due mainly to the technical accomplishments of white folks supplemented only by the brute toil of colored peoples.<sup>54</sup>

These systemic distortions are disastrous not merely for objective cognition of the way things actually are but for perceptions of moral obligations and moral responsibilities also. The opacity of racial liberalism provides a veil to screen off from whites their moral complicity with a social order based on racial exploitation, generating the contradictory logics of self-deception that have been analyzed in the Western philosophical tradition since the days of Socrates, but that are greatly exacerbated here through a reciprocally reinforcing *group* dynamic of white ignorance:

Moral judgment of the industrial process is therefore difficult, and the crime [for those in Europe] is more often a matter of ignorance rather than of deliberate murder and theft; but ignorance is a colossal crime in itself. . . . How far is such a person [a young white middle-class woman in Britain] responsible for the crimes of colonialism? . . . [I]t may be true that her income is the result of starvation, theft, and murder . . . the suppression, exploitation, and slavery of the majority of mankind. Yet just because she does not know this . . . she is content to remain in ignorance of the source of her wealth and its cost in human toil and suffering. . . . The whole world emerges into the Syllogism of the Satisfied: "This cannot be true. This is not true. If it were true I would not believe it. If it is true I do not believe it. Therefore it is false!"<sup>55</sup>

Taking from liberalism its supposed commitment to transparency, a black radical liberalism will have to make one of its primary tasks the cognitive struggle against the opacities and mystifications, the racial veiling and self-veiling, of white racial liberalism. Du Bois's scholarship was *engagé* from the beginning of his career to the end of his life, but what he came to realize is that the obstacles to whites' understanding the social order for what it was were deeply embedded in the very nature of that order: its racial ontology and its foundation of racial exploitation both upheld and rendered invisible, veiled, by liberal political philosophy. It is an obstacle we continue to face to this very day.

## Conclusion: Toward a Just Society and a New Liberalism

Du Bois worked all of his adult life for a new society that would be able to achieve social justice. But his conception of this task and the appropriate political theoretical/political philosophical means to its achievement were very different from currently dominant understandings. Since I have been urging the importance of reclaiming his work for political philosophy, it makes good sense to compare him with John Rawls, who is widely judged to be the most important twentieth-century American political philosopher.<sup>56</sup> Rawls was uncontroversially a liberal, one whose achievement is generally seen to be the revival of Anglo-American political philosophy and its re-orientation away from the traditional question of political obligation to the question of social justice. Du Bois's liberalism is more controversial, but his

self-identification as a socialist is not incompatible with liberalism in the sense of left-liberal social democracy, which at least up to the 1940s is what he seems to have been espousing.<sup>57</sup> Long before Rawls, his primary concern was social justice, but his orientation was radically divergent from Rawls's. From his first publications on the African slave trade and the Philadelphia Negro through his Pan-Africanism and engagement with Marxism, in both his academic writings and his activist pamphleteering, Du Bois was seeking to understand and analyze and overcome social oppression, specifically racial oppression. So in the Rawlsian lexicon, he was unequivocally located in the realm of nonideal political theory.

In Rawls and the vast secondary literature on Rawls, “social justice” is conceived of in a way very different from its lay conception. Justice is not (as it is understood on the popular level) about correcting social injustices, but, as earlier mentioned, about delineating the principles for regulating a well-ordered, perfectly just society, a society of strict compliance with its rules. What Rawls calls “compensatory justice” is mentioned only in passing and is never discussed in any of his five books. But for societies characterized by systemic oppression rather than ideality or near-ideality, such a marginalization is, I suggest, clearly indefensible, even if it is taken for granted by the overwhelmingly white community of today's American political philosophers. The normative commitments of liberalism—the moral primacy of equal individuals highlighted by Gray, demanding the “correction and improvement” of social institutions where appropriate—should under the stipulated nonideal circumstances make *corrective justice* the liberal priority. In a white-supremacist state, the achievement of racial justice should be an imperative for social justice theorists, and the fact that it is not is a sad indication of the extent to which today's liberalism continues to be racialized, albeit in a fashion different from in Du Bois's time. The “black radical liberalism” I have attributed to Du Bois, with its explicitly revisionist social and moral ontology, and demystifying diagnosis of the centrality of racial exploitation and corresponding “white ignorance” to the making of the modern world, is a liberalism that—so far from being dated—is as relevant as ever. We need to reclaim it.

## Notes

I would like to thank Nick Bromell for his keen editorial eye, which has undoubtedly much improved the initial draft of this chapter.

1. David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse on Ham* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
2. Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 2–3; Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 14–23. I would subsume “radical egalitarianism” and “disillusioned liberalism” into a “black liberalism” that admits of different variants.
3. Michael Hanchard, “Contours of Black Political Thought: An Introduction and Perspective,” *Political Theory* 38, no. 4 (2010): 512.
4. Cornel West, in Christa Buschendorf, “‘A Figure of Our Times’: An Interview with Cornel West on W. E. B. Du Bois,” *Du Bois Review* 10, no. 1 (2013): 262, 263.
5. Gooding-Williams, *Shadow*; Lawrie Balfour, *Democracy’s Reconstruction: Thinking Politically with W. E. B. Du Bois* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Aldon D. Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, eds., *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic, 2014); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2014).
6. Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (1979; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange, eds., *The Sexism of Social and Political Thought: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).
7. See Paul C. Taylor’s edited four-volume collection of reprints of classic essays on the topic in Routledge’s Critical Concepts in Philosophy series, *The Philosophy of Race* (New York: Routledge, 2012); and the new (2013) journal *Critical Philosophy of Race*, housed at the Penn State Philosophy Department.
8. George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: Norton, 2010), 1.
9. W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk,” in *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (1920; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15.

10. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro* (1915; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

11. Cf. the conclusion of Frank M. Snowden Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970): “There is nothing in the evidence . . . to suggest that the ancient Greek or Roman established color as an obstacle to integration into society. . . . The Greeks and Romans counted black peoples in” (217–18).

12. Denise Eileen McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 23, 175–81.

13. David Goldenberg, “Racism, Color Symbolism, and Color Prejudice,” in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99, 104–5.

14. Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 81, 79, 86.

15. Similarly, in *The Negro* he seems (6, 10) to limit the influence of the Curse on Ham/Canaan story to the past few hundred years, whereas contemporary scholars like Goldenberg (*The Curse on Ham*) trace its impact back much further. Du Bois, *The Negro*, 64.

16. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Charles W. Mills, “Racial Liberalism,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1380–97; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

17. George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), ix, 231. The well-known distinction between the “anomaly” and “symbiosis” view of racism in American political culture can be generalized, I have argued elsewhere, to describe competing understandings of the political culture of the racialized states of modernity (see David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* [Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993]; Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997]; and Charles W. Mills, “Modernity, Persons, and Subpersons,” in *Race and the Foundations of Knowledge: Cultural Amnesia in the Academy*, ed. Joseph Young and Jana Evans Braziel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

18. Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 135.

19. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, rev. student ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 13, 107.

20. *Ibid.*, chap. 13; Richard Ashcraft, “Leviathan Triumphant: Thomas Hobbes

and the Politics of Wild Men,” in *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. Edward Dudley and Maximilian E. Novak (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 157.

21. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), *Second Treatise*, chap. 2; Locke, *Second Treatise*, §41; James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Barbara Arneil, *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Carole Pateman, “The Settler Contract,” in *Contract and Domination*, Pateman and Charles W. Mills (Malden, MA: Polity, 2007).

22. Stephen Darwall, ed., *Contractarianism/Contractualism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003).

23. For an extensive bibliography of recent English-language literature on the issue, see the first endnote of my “Kant and Race, *Redux*,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35, nos. 1–2 (2014): 125–57. Various theorists, such as Sankar Muthu and Pauline Kleingeld, have argued that Kant later changed his mind, either in the 1780s (Muthu) or the 1790s (Kleingeld); others, such as Robert Bernasconi and Mark Larrimore, have argued that he did not. Again, see my endnote for the relevant sources.

24. David Hume, “Of National Characters” (1754 version), in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudui Eze (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 33.

25. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* with *The Subjection of Women* and *Chapters on Socialism*, ed. Stefan Collini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 13–14.

26. Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 73, 90.

27. *Thomas Carlyle: The Nigger Question; John Stuart Mill: The Negro Question*, ed. Eugene R. August (New York: Crofts Classics, 1971); Teshale Tibebu, *Hegel and the Third World: The Making of Eurocentrism in World History* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1976), 915; John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 57 (italics removed from “Western”).

28. Cf. Kristin Waters’s “black revolutionary liberalism” as a characterization of the positions of nineteenth-century black American political activists David Walker and Maria Stewart: “Crying Out for Liberty: Maria W. Stewart and David Walker’s Black Revolutionary Liberalism,” *Philosophia Africana* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 35–60.

29. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

30. See, for example, Tommie Shelby's reconciliation of liberalism with certain strains of black nationalism in his *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

31. John Gray, *Liberalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), x.

32. Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2011); Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Mills, *Racial Contract*.

33. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Note that this is *not* the same as the contrast between normative theory and descriptive theory, or between moralized approaches and *realpolitik*. Both ideal and nonideal theory are normative theory, but the former presupposes ideal circumstances whereas the latter presupposes nonideal circumstances. What justice calls for in oppressive societies thus counts as nonideal theory, and (arguably) a nonideal-theory liberalism.

34. See Derrick Darby's *Rights, Race, and Recognition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) for an account of this neglected strain of the liberal tradition, and a case for bringing it back to theoretical centrality in contemporary liberal discussions.

35. Ann E. Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

36. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," in *The Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois Reader*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 40–41. For the distinction, see Chike Jeffers, "The Cultural Theory of Race: Yet Another Look at Du Bois's 'The Conservation of Races,'" *Ethics* 123 (2013): 403–26.

37. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 77; Du Bois, "Conservation," 40; Robin O. Andreasen, "A New Perspective on the Race Debate" (1998), in *The Philosophy of Race*, ed. Paul C. Taylor, 4 vols., vol. 2: *Racial Being and Knowing* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Philip Kitcher, "Does 'Race' Have a Future?" (2007), *ibid.*

38. Du Bois, "Conservation," 40, 46.

39. *Ibid.*, 42.

40. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York: Penguin, 1989), 11, 5, 11.

41. Du Bois, "Conservation," 44.

42. Mills, *The Racial Contract*; Mills, "Racial Liberalism." See my critique on this score of Darby, *Rights, Race, and Recognition*: Charles W. Mills, "Racial

Rights and Wrongs: A Critique of Derrick Darby,” in “Confronting State and Theory,” ed. Tommy J. Curry and Leonard Harris, special issue, *Radical Philosophy Review* 18, no. 1 (2015): 11–30.

43. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 269; Du Bois, *Souls*, 10; Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 35; Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 69; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Whites in Africa after Negro Autonomy” (1962), in *Oxford Du Bois*, ed. Sundquist, 668.

44. Du Bois, *Souls*, 10; Du Bois, “Conservation,” 44.

45. Du Bois, *Souls*, 168.

46. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 103.

47. Du Bois, *Philadelphia Negro*; Du Bois, *Souls*, 76.

48. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 141, 111, 87.

49. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1; Rawls, *Theory*, 4, 271–72.

50. Du Bois, *Souls*, 34; Du Bois, *The Negro*, 108; Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 21.

51. Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916; Chicago: Pluto, 1996); Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 23.

52. Admittedly, in a famous passage from his later *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 573–74, Du Bois seems to suggest, in keeping with orthodox Marxist analysis, that the “public and psychological wage” enjoyed by white workers was largely honorary and “had small effect upon [their] economic situation.” So I am placing greater significance here on those of his other writings that *do* recognize the substantial material advantaging of whites and that in the end are the ones that have been borne out by the social scientific literature on comparative black and white wealth (see, for example, Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*, 10th anniversary ed. [New York: Routledge, 2006]).

53. Charles W. Mills, “White Ignorance,” in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); Donald B. Gibson, introduction to *Souls*, xi, xiv; Du Bois, *Darkwater*; James Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998). For a valuable reconstruction of Baldwin as a political theorist, see Lawrie Balfour, *The Evidence of Things Not Said: James Baldwin and the Promise of American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

54. Du Bois, *Souls*, 10; Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 36; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 584–85; Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 66; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa* and *Color and Democracy* (1947, 1945; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15, 16, 23.

55. Du Bois, *World and Africa*, 26–27.

56. Samuel Freeman, *Rawls* (New York: Routledge, 2007).



57. I have phrased it in this vague way because in an already overlong essay, I decided there was no space to enter the controversy about whether some of his 1950s declarations and writings could be read as signaling a turn to Stalinist Marxism. As I said at the start, all I need for my thesis is that Du Bois can be categorized as a black radical liberal for a major part of his life.