The Souls of Black Folk Study Guide

The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. DuBois

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

W. E. B. Du Bois introduces *The Souls of Black Folk* with the forethought:

herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the twentieth century. This meaning is not without interest to you, gentle reader; for the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.

These succinct lines summarize the aim of the collection, which is to impress upon the world the particular experience of being an African American some forty years after the Civil War. The work consists of fourteen essays on various topics, from a history of the U.S. government's efforts at Reconstruction to a discussion of the role of religion in he black community. First published in 1903, it was reprinted twenty-four times between then and 1940 alone; it is easily Du Bois' most widely read book and is considered a masterpiece. Coined the Father of social science, Du Bois brings together a blend of history, sociological data, poetry, song, and the benefit of his personal experience to propose his vision of how and why color poses such a dilemma at the turn of the twentieth century. His assertion is fortuitous, and the collection continues to provide insight into the ways that the African-American culture is intrinsic to the larger American culture, and how history has made that relationship inherently problematic.

Author Biography

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was born on February 23, 1868, into a large white community in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. The racism he experienced as a child in New England formed the basis of his lifelong struggle for equal rights. Endowed with outstanding intellect, Du Bois traveled to Nashville, Tennessee to attend Fisk College on scholarship in 1885. His contact with the post-Civil War South in the capacity of student and teacher solidified his commitment to education and mobilization of African Americans. Following three years in the South, Du Bois completed his undergraduate and graduate degrees at Harvard, focusing on history and philosophy. He completed the bulk of his doctoral work during two years in Berlin, where he came to the understanding of racism as a worldwide issue, opposed to a national issue.

Following the completion of his doctoral thesis entitled *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in America,* Du Bois began his lifelong career as educator, researcher and social advocate. His studies embodied the first scientific approach to examining social issues, and as a result he is considered to be the father of social science. Du Bois worked for social reform through his study of all aspects of African-American life, in an effort to educate blacks and promote understanding between the relationship of blacks to white America. Du Bois was diametrically opposed to the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, the most popular black man in America, who espoused the idea that African Americans should accept their low social status and work for modest goals through technical training only (foregoing civil rights, higher education and political power). In 1906, Du Bois founded the Niagra Movement, an organization of black men aimed at aggressive advocacy for civil rights. The organization was joined by a group of white liberals to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For twenty-five years Du Bois edited the NAACP magazine The Crisis, strongly advocating that blacks lead themselves out of oppression, with whites serving only as support.

Trips to Africa and Russia in the 1920s resulted in a revision of Du Bois' ideology; he became convinced that integration in America was unrealistic, and that white capitalism was geared toward keeping minorities down. By 1933 he had left the NAACP and resumed teaching, writing and organizing the Pan-African conference. During WorldWar II and the beginning of the Cold War he became a peace advocate and spoke out strongly against the use of atomic weapons, resulting in his indictment as a foreign agent by the Department of Justice. Although he was acquitted, the incident served to further alienate him from the nation of his birth. In 1959, he moved to Ghana and became a Ghanaian citizen and a member of the Communist party. He died in Accra, Ghana, on August 27,1963, the day before the "March On Washington."

Plot Summary

Du Bois begins his work by stating his objective in no uncertain terms; his goal is to represent what it is like to be black in America at the beginning of the twentieth century because he is convinced that race is the central problem of the century to come. He states this in his forethought and follows with a loose thematic grouping of the essays to follow.

The first three chapters in *The Souls of Black Folk* address historical and political issues. He begins "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" with a provocative question underlying all other questions posed to him: "how does it feel to be a problem?" The essay addresses this fundamental question in a discussion of the contradictions inherent in the process of "striving." Here Du Bois discusses efforts made toward winning the ballot and literacy and outlines the topics to follow in what amounts to an extended prologue. "Of the Dawn of Freedom" is a straightforward history of the ways the U.S. government attempted to deal with the "problem" of African Americans just before, during, and after the Civil War, over the years 1861 through 1872. The essay amounts to an even-handed analysis of the policies of the Freedmen's Bureau, including both strengths and shortcomings, and the ways that its unfinished work laid an outline for the social and race problems to follow. "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" is an attack on the policies of the famous educator and speaker who at the time of the essay was Du Bois' philosophical opponent and rival. In the course of his essay, Du Bois suggests that Washington's work reflects his indoctrination in the most superficial of American value-systems, commercialism and materialism, and that his work is self-motivated. He goes on to analyze the historical precedents of Washington's policies of submission and technical education, and addresses in detailthe shortcomings and inevitable results of those policies.

In the next six chapters, Du Bois moves from the general to the specific, in his own words taking the reader "within the veil." In these chapters, he offers stories from his life experience in the South, presents portraits of actual people, and infuses them with his sociological understanding of them. He offers anecdotes about teaching school during his time as a student at Fisk College, details the conditions of workers in cotton mills, and describes the transformation of Atlanta and her outskirts from pastoral idyll to industrial wasteland. He narrates a drive through the black belt of Georgia and scrutinizes the legacy of slavery in the relationship between the races in the South in "Of the Sons of Master and Man." These stories expose the hardships of poor, uneducated black people and solicit compassion on the part of the reader. Du Bois' testimonial tales and picturesque depictions of the Southern countryside are balanced by his analyses of the development of black education, and his argument that intellectual training can only benefit the entire culture of the South.

The last five chapters entail African-American spirituality, both in analytic discussion and personal anecdote. In "The Faith of Our Fathers," Du Bois discusses the history and influence, power, and self-contradiction of religion for black Americans. He describes his own grief process over the death of his son in "Of the Passing of the First Born." In "Of

Alexander Crummel," he gives a biographical sketch of one man's efforts to uplift his people. "Of the Coming of John" is a short parable detailing the terrible potential outcome of the "veil." Finally, "Of the Sorrow Songs" discusses the history, power, and purpose of the music preceding each of the chapters.

Characters

Alexander Crummel

Alexander Crummel is the first African-American man ordained an Episcopalian priest.Over the course of his long life, he established his own parish, seeks counsel and inspiration in England, and ministers in Africa out of the ardent desire to uplift his people. As a man who strives to aid his people with very little support or recognition, his life is a great inspiration to Du Bois.

W. E. B. Du Bois

W. E. B. Du Bois is the author of *The Souls of Black Folk* and, because the essays reflect his own experience, the hero, he narrates the collection, moving from the third to the first person and back, in an effort to represent the fullness of the African-American experience by representing his own.

John Jones

John Jones is the protagonist in the fiction story "Of the Coming of John." He is a young black man from southeastern Georgia who is sent north to school in hopes that he will return home a teacher. Although at first he is a lax student, once he sets his mind to study he becomes committed to education and self-improvement. As he learns and gains exposure to the Northern culture, he feels more and more acutely the stigma of racism, and after being slighted at a New York concert on account of his color, he determines to return home to teach. Once home, he inadvertently offends the white community with what appears to be provocative ideas. Given his exposure to a better, more informed lifestyle in the North, John's resentment over the disparity between blacks and whites overtakes him. When he comes upon his former playmate (a white bigot also named John) trying to kiss his sister, he flies into arage and kills the friend of his youth. When the authorities come to arrest him, he throws himself into the sea, seeing no option for freedom aside from death.

Josie

Josie is a farm girl whom Du Bois befriends while teaching in Tennessee.She is a tireless worker and aspires to an education, but dies as a result of her difficult circumstances .As a victim of the hardships placed on African Americans, Josie's life is tragic in Du Bois' eyes.

Booker T. Washington

At the end of the nineteenth century, Booker T. Washington was considered to be the most popular black man in America, at least as far as whites were concerned. Longtime principal of the Tuskegee Institute, Washington is known for his 1895 compromise speech. In the speech, he urges African Americans to accept their position as socially inferior and strives for personal improvement through vocational training, foregoing political power and higher education. Du Bois was diametrically opposed to the politics and philosophy of Booker T. Washington, and he details the reasons for his opposition in "Of Booker T. Washington and Others."

Themes

Dualism

In "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," Du Bois makes reference to the experience of "double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others." This concept of dual identity appears throughout the text in nearly every essay and is central to the author's goal in making the African-American condition understood. Du Bois contends that African Americans experience a split in self-concept because they are regarded with "contempt and pity" by the majority of their fellow Americans. As both "Negro" and American, black people are organized into public and private identities, neither regarded as whole by mainstream, white America. This theme extends into the contradictory nature of American policies toward black people during the time the work was written. For example, although as an African American in New England, Du Bois was able to attend Harvard University and was afforded many of the privileges of any citizen, whereas when he lived in the South he was subject to Jim Crow laws. The United States is comprised of both the North and South, but race policy for the nation is split.

The "Veil"

Du Bois first mentions the "veil" in his forethought, and extends the metaphor throughout the text. The "veil" is a metaphoric film between black people and white America that obscures the true identity of black people. Du Bois attributes the confused dual identity of his people to the "veil," which makes it impossible for blacks to see themselves in entirety as well. According to Arnold Rampersad, author of *The Art and Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois,* however, the "veil" also "unites Black men. They are drawn together for reasons sprung 'above all, from the sight of the "veil" that hung between us and Opportunity.'" Du Bois extrapolates on his metaphor with extensive use of visual imagery, or the impairment thereof. Darkness, light, brightness, shadow, and haze appear throughout the text. In effect, according to Du Bois, difficulty in perception is fundamental to being African American.

Style

Form

The collection consists of fourteen chapters, an introduction, and an afterward. With one exception, each of the chapters (an essay or story) opens with a quotation of verse from a famous source in theWestern literary canon followed by lines of music from African-American oral tradition. The result is a frame for each essay, both from the recognized cultural establishment and from the unrecognized, yet widely known tradition of slave songs and spirituals. The effect is an impression of support, both from within the black community and from without, and puts the two formats on par with one another. The first essay, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," begins with verse depicting ceaseless yearning, and the final piece, "The Song of Sorrows," ends in song cheering the weary traveler with hope, effectively enclosing all of the essays in brackets of song describing the poles of black experience. These in turn are bracketed by the introduction, which makes an appeal to the reader to read with charity and patience for the author's cause, and ends with the After-Thought, a similar appeal in stylized, poetic form.

Point of View

Most of the work in *The Souls of Black Folk* takes the form of essay, written in third person prose. The tone is didactic, marked by formality and the long, classical sentence structure characteristic of nineteenth century prose. The lyricism of the prose and flexibility of form throughout the text suggest the influence of Romanticism, a period ending loosely around the end of the nineteenth century, blended with the rationalism of Du Bois' data, experience, and analysis. Arnold Rampersad, in *The Art and Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois,* notes that "devices of the traditional pastoral elegy are present in modified but distinct form," such as the depiction of withering roses in his essay about the death of his infant son. Occasionally, Du Bois uses the second person, particularly in the introduction when he states his objectives, urging the reader in how and why he should read the text. His tone in these instances is an appeal and is emphatic about the truth and importance of his work. "Of the Coming of John" is distinct from the other essays in that it is a parable; also poetry, both by Du Bois and by other authors, appears in the text.

Symbolism

Du Bois' primary use of symbolism revolves around vision. The "veil" is his main metaphor for the distance and misconception between black and white Americans, and is responsible for the way African Americans see themselves as dualistic and distorted. Darkness generally symbolizes ignoranceand despair, such as in the opening to "The Sorrow Songs"; enslaved black people in the past are termed "they that walked in

darkness." Similar use of imagery concerning impaired vision includes haze, dimness, dusk, shadow, and mist.

Historical Context

All of the essays in *The Souls of Black Folk* were written around the turn of the century, a pivotal time in United States history in regard to race relations. In response to the end of the war, the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments had been passed in 1868 and 1870 to recognize black Americans as U.S. citizens and to provide them with equal protection under the law. Despite these amendments, by the turn of the century, segregation was still intact, particularly in the South. Although the Southern states had received assistance during the Reconstruction period, the region was still feeling the effects of the Civil War by the end of the nineteenth century and racerelations reflected hostility on the part of whites for blacks. Limitations were placed on black employment opportunities and property ownership, interracial marriage was illegal in every state, and all public facilities, including schools, restaurants, hospitals, and public transportation were divided by race. At its most terrifying extreme, violation of the unspoken code of segregation resulted in murder; between the years of 1884 and 1900, two thousand blacks were killed by lynch mobs in the United States.

During this time, there were some organized attempts at legal challenge to segregation. For example, in 1896, a group of African-American and white citizens challenged the constitutionality of separate railroad cars for blacks and whites in the Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson.* The constitutionality of segregated cars was upheld, but the case marked the beginning of organized response to Jim Crow conditions. National trends tended toward policies limiting the rights of black people; in 1898, the Supreme Court, in the case of *Williams v. Mississippi,* approved a system of poll taxes and literacy testing as requirements for voters in an effort to keep African Americans away from the polls. At the turn of the century Booker T. Washington, the principal of the Tuskegee Institute for black education in Tuskegee, Alabama, was the most popular and powerful African-American man in the United States, at least among whites. In 1895, he delivered his famous compromise speech in which he advocated that black people accept low social status, forego political power, and pursue vocational education rather than higher education. Around the same time, Du Bois was coming into the public eye as a sociologist, activist, and spokesperson advocating equal rights and higher education for African Americans. The Industrial Revolution was underway in America, drawing more blacks to urban centers and exploiting them, resulting in poverty and ghettos; Du Bois was at work to prove that such conditions for blacks were symptomatic of the system rather than inherent to the group. He and other more militant African Americans publicly opposed Washington, and as individuals, they represented the philosophical division over race relations. In the next several years, Du Bois' work would result in the organization of the NAACP, an organization that would change the face of race relations in the United States forever.

Critical Overview

In his introduction to the 1989 edition of *The Souls of Black Folk,* Henry Louis Gates, Jr. asserts that the book "has served as a veritable touchstone of African-American culture for every successive generation of black scholars since 1903." He goes on to say that "Du Bois' contemporaries, and subsequent scholars, generally have agreed that two of the uncanny effects of *The Souls* are that it is poetic in its attention to detail, and that it succeeds, somehow, in 'narrating' the nation of Negro Americans at the turn of the century, articulating for the inarticulate insider and for the curious outsider .. . the cultural particularity of African Americans." Although at the time of publication some white critics were skeptical about the work, black critics were overwhelmingly enthusiastic for what Wendell Phillips Dabney, in the Ohio Enterprise, calls "a masterpiece."

The *New York Times* review from 1903 calls *The Souls of Black Folk* "sentimental, poetical, picturesque," and asserts "the acquired logic and the evident attempt to be critically fair-minded is strangely tangled with these racial characteristics and racial rhetoric." The reviewer concedes that the book "throws much light upon the complexities of the Negro problem." He is convinced that as a Northerner, Du Bois "probably does not understand his own people in their natural state" in the South. Not all of Du Bois' opponents were as even-handed in their criticism; Gates quotes the Louisville Courier-Journal, which took the book to be "crudely written" and "characterized by incoherent statements and disconnected arguments." Ten years later, however, in *The African Abroad,* William H. Ferris calls Du Bois' work "the most brilliant and suggestive book ever written by a Negro" and the "political bible of the Negro race." Gates echoes Ferris when he ventures to say "no other text, save possibly the King James Bible, has had a more fundamental impact on the shaping of the Afro-American literary tradition." These assessments reflect the consensus by African-American writers in the years since the book's publication; as Gates illustrates, from Langston Hughes to Ralph Ellison, *The Souls of Black Folk* has been a timeless influence and inspiration.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Lynch is a writer and teacher in Northern New Mexico. In the following essay, she examines ways that the text of The Souls of Black Folk *embodies Du Bois' experience of duality as well as his "people's."*

In Du Bois' "Forethought" to his essay collection, *The Souls of Black Folk,* he entreats the reader to receive his book in an attempt to understand the world of African Americans□in effect the "souls of black folk." Implicit in this appeal is the assumption that the author is capable of representing an entire "people." This presumption comes out of Du Bois' own dual nature as a black man who has lived in the South for a time, yet who is Harvard-educated and cultured in Europe. Du Bois illustrates the duality or "two-ness," which is the function of his central metaphor, the "veil" that hangs between white America and black; as an African American, he is by definition a participant in two worlds. The form of the text makes evident the author's duality: Du Bois shuttles between voices and media to express this quality of being divided, both for himself as an individual, and for his "people" as a whole. In relaying the story of African-American people, he relies on his own experience and voice and in so doing creates the narrative. Hence the work is as much the story of his soul as it is about the souls of all black folk. Du Bois epitomizes the inseparability of the personal and the political; through the text of *The Souls of Black Folk,* Du Bois straddles two worlds and narrates his own experience.

Du Bois expands on his reference to duality and the "veil" in "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" with the explanation, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." He goes on to describe "two-ness " as being "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body." The world of the African American, he asserts, is one split by perception from the exterior of mainstream America and in conflict with the experience of oneself. These conflicting selves result in an obscured sense of identity. Du Bois' use of the "veil" describes an obstacle that prevents white America from true perception of African Americans. The veil is mentioned at least once in each of the essays; Du Bois sees it asinseparable from African-American identity in that blacks live within it, yet also live in America, and thus lead double lives. Arnold Rampersad, in *The Art and Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois,* suggests that the word " 'souls' in the title is a play on words, referring to the 'two-ness' of the black American." His assertion supports areading of Du Bois' work as aimed not only at addressing the African American as a whole but at addressing his experience as an individual who is inherently divided.

As an active participant in two worlds, Du Bois embodies his assessment of life within the "veil"□ and to the extreme. Raised in New England and possessed of superior intellect, he completed his undergraduate, master's, and Ph.D. degrees at Harvard University and spent several years working on his dissertation in Europe. His extensive education makes him a renowned scholar and a man exceptional for his time; he was

the first African American admitted to Harvard. As a student of history and philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century, Du Bois was versed in the classics according to the traditional curriculum of the time. Hence, although the focus of his work is the liberation of African-American people, his academic life was necessarily steeped in Western, and largely white, culture. Because of financial limitations, Du Bois completed the first three years of his undergraduate education at Fisk College in Tennessee and spent his summers teaching deprived southern blacks each of those years, a period that comprises his main experience of the South. Because most of his life was spent in the North, critics of his work at the time called into question his ability to understand the lives of southern African Americans. For example, the 1903 *New York Times* review of *The Souls of Black Folk* asserts, "probably he does not understand his own people in their natural state." Such statements not only support Du Bois' interpretation of the way African Americans are viewed by white America but also reflect the way he himself was viewed as not a "natural" black man, and, in fact, divided from his people.

Several of the essays in *The Souls of Black Folk* are delivered in a third-person, rhetorical tone that calls to mind Du Bois' superior education and attention to the classics. "Of the Dawn of Freedom" and "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" in particular reflect Du Bois' intellect and ability as on par with white intellectuals, in the forum of white intellectuals. Other first-person narratives, such as "Of the Meaning of Progress," retain the previous essays' formality of tone and, in Rampersad's words, mark their "literary antecedents as clearly classical." Since the goal of the work is to convince mainstream America of the wholeness and humanity of a disenfranchised people, Du Bois clearly seeks to make his work viable in terms of the mainstream and thus uses the language of the mainstream. According to Rampersad,

In its variety and range *The Souls of Black Folk* indicates Du Bois' appreciation and mastery of the essay form as practiced in the nineteenth century ... Sensitive to the many purposes to which the form could be put, he used the essay to capture the nuances of his amorphous subject, the multiple disciplines involved in his explication, and the different and sometimes conflicting expressions of his temperament.

His writing is by turns romantic, didactic, passionate, qualitative, poetic and rational; he uses the popular styles of the times to his advantage. These styles do not so much represent the fullness of Du Bois' experience as an African American as his experience as a nineteenth-century scholar from a white institution. His more personal accounts, however, bridge the gap between his largely white audience and his experience as a black man. For example, in "Of the Meaning of Progress" Du Bois describes the harsh conditions of his students and ultimately the death of a prized pupil. Du Bois generates compassion on the part of the reader by narrating the story as a personal experience, rather than by listing statistics. Similarly, when he describes the impact of the birth and death of his son in "Of the Passing of the First-Born," he uses language that is stylistically grandiose and formal, atypical of African-American speech and writing at the time. However, he conveys a story that is both extremely intimate and illustrative of his highly developed human emotions. Thus Du Bois uses the personal narrative to bridge the gap between the white world he knows and wishes to inform and the black world of which he is also a part.

Du Bois' most explicit literary device for demonstrating the dual nature of his world, however, is his use of double epigraphs to begin each essay. With the exception of the last piece, which directly addresses the meaning of sorrow songs in the context of African-American culture, each essay begins with a line of verse from the Western literary canon, followed by a line from African-American song. The effect is double. On one hand, the placement of the contrasting lines puts the sorrow songs on par with the literary canon. On the other hand, the accepted verse appears in English and is easilyunderstandable, while the lesser known songs appear as music scores without lyrics, thus their meaning is less accessible than the lines that precede them. The meaning of the sorrow songs bears explanation, which is provided by Du Bois in the chapter devoted to them: it serves as a metaphor for black culture in general, which also requires an explanation to be understood by the mainstream audience. Of the songs Du Bois writes, "I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world." He attests to their artistic worth when he writes that the music "remains the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people." The contrasting lines of verse and song, although distinct and from separate traditions, are inextricably intertwined, as are the lives of black and white Americans.

Toward the close of "The Sorrow Songs" Du Bois wonders, "Would America have been America without her Negro people?" Apparently he concludes it would not. In his aim to represent the African-American people to mainstream America, Du Bois offers his own narrative, in a variety of voices, to represent the whole. His various means of expression represent his particular experience, which is in many ways exceptional and outside of the norm for his time. This sets him apart from the mainstream of black America, yet also highlights his experience of dualism as an African American. Despite the fact that as a cultured Northerner he has access to the resources of white America, his testimony shows that he is "bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil."

Source: Jennifer Lynch, Critical Essay on *The Souls of Black Folk,* in *Nonfiction Classics for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Herring examines The Souls of Black Folk *within a historical and cultural context, specifically focusing on the book's reaction to minstrelsy.*

W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* is not a book that can be read in ignorance of its historic milieu; to focus exclusively on the text would be to cripple it. First published in 1903, it was written in an America in which the white majority only grudgingly accepted the idea that black folk even had souls. The images most white Americans had of blacks were stereotypical; blacks were a demonized group which had to be controlled by terror or an idealized group of self-sacrificing Uncle Toms and Mammys; they were seen as embodying a sexual potency and promiscuity secretly envied by whites, or they were represented as primitive, laughable clowns. All these stereotypes were given form and (for many Northerners) largely brought into being by the century-old tradition of minstrelsy, in which white comics blackened their faces with burnt cork and performed an imitation of black life for a (usually delighted) white audience. It is this tradition and its effects that Du Bois seeks to subvert in *The Souls of Black Folk;* he removes what Houston Baker calls the "minstrel mask" from his entire race, taking back from the blackface theater the characteristic art form of his race, its music, which the minstrels had appropriated for their own purposes.

I read *The Souls of Black Folk* as a political text, embedded in its historical environment and at odds with the dominant culture□a reading shaped by some of the insights of new historicism. New historicists, such as Stephen Greenblatt, have posited "transactions" or "negotiations" between components of a society (Greenblatt's term is "exchanges" in his essay on Shakespeare and the exorcists, to which my title pays an oblique homage). This essay will use the term "appropriation" for the process of cultural exchange, because the exchange that motivates *The Souls of Black Folk* is less a transaction than a theft. The blackface theater appropriated black music and transformed it to suit its own ends, the fairly straightforward ones of getting laughs and making money. Not all but a significant number of whites adopted the images of the minstrel fiction and applied them to the African American reality, seeing in the streets characters from the stage; blacks very quickly learned, in their dealings with whites, to put on the mask. For Du Bois, the mask is a Veil to be rent. In *Souls,* he addresses two audiences: for white readers, he wishes to demonstrate the worth□even the humanity□of the race many have imagined the minstrel comedian to adequatelyrepresent; and to blacks, especially young black artists, he communicates the richness of their heritage. The latter project is accomplished largely by the re-appropriation and rehabilitation of the music that minstrelsy had deformed, music being a vital form of expression for a people only recently literate (and, in 1903, still only partly so). After considering some of the implications of minstrelsy's variegated appropriation and distortion of black culture, and popular response to it, this essay will examine Du Bois's project of retaking black American music.

The long, long run enjoyed by minstrel acts on the stages of America (comics blacking their faces with burnt cork to perform "darky" roles has been traced back at least as far

as 1975) is a phenomenon familiar to anyone reasonably conversant with the history of the nineteenth century, as is the great love of so many Americans for this curious distraction. What is not as well known is that this love affair is not a simple or straightforward matter; neither was the form itself consistent. Minstrelsy changed frequently throughout its evolution, starting as a forum for a single performer, most famously Thomas Dartmouth Rice, originator of the Jim Crow routine. It changed in the 1840s, after the advent of the Virginia Minstrels, to a highly ritualized two- or three-part show by four musicians/comedians/acrobats, shifting again in the 1850s with the popularity of "Tom shows" (minstrel versions of Uncle Tom's Cabin), and again after the war, with blacks entering the business and white troupes swelling to form massive traveling spectacles. It finally faded only after first penetrating the motion picture industry (Amos and Andy, played on radio by white actors, represent a strong late survival of the tradition). And while this evolution is clear in retrospect, it was surely less clear at the time; the various forms overlapped, co-existed, borrowed from each other, and were subject to great variability within individual acts, matched by a high variability in the reaction of the audience.

For instance, when one thinks of the minstrel stage, one may picture its characters as happy and carefree. However, the minstrel character was not always happy; from the 1840s on, tearjerkers were common on the blackface stage. "By focusing on farcical elements it is easy to overlook the fact that minstrelsy was a very sentimental art form," Gary Engle writes in his introduction to a reprint of the 1871 blackface lachrymatory Uncle Eph's Dream. He continues: "The minstrel show's first part invariably included mother songs or pathetic ballads which helped balance the comic songs and exchanges between interlocuter and end men. Numerous performers were renowned for their ability to leave audiences weeping." This sounds like a sympathetic broadcasting of the slave's (or, in 1871, freedman's) plight, of which Du Bois might conceivably have approved. Uncle Eph's Dream shows that this is not the case. Eph mourns his lost wife and children, but he also mourns the loss of Mr. Slocum: "He used to be my massa and a mighty good massa he was too-but we got no more massas now; de poor old slaves will hab to look out for demselves." Happy or sad, here is one aspect of minstrel characters which appears often: whatever their age, they have a tendency to be not fully adult. Despite the mutability of the form the minstrel show took during its century of ascendency, certain themes do emerge.

The variability of audience response is perhaps the most complex aspect of the minstrel phenomenon. A major attempt to sort out this complexity of both performance and response is Eric Lott' s recent Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class. In minstrelsy, he sees a dialectic play of opposites, not merely a putdown of blacks:

What I have called the social unconscious of blackface suggests that the whites involved in minstrelsy were far from unenthusiastic about black cultural practices or, conversely, untroubled by them, continuous though the economic logic of blackface was with slavery. As often as not, this involvement depended on an intersection of racial and class languages that occasionally became confused with one another, reinforcing the general air of political jeopardy in minstrel acts... At every turn blackface minstrelsy has

seemed a form in which transgression and containment coexisted, in which improbably threatening or startlingly sympathetic racial meanings were simultaneously produced and dissolved. Neither the social relations on which blackface delineations depended, the delineations themselves, their commercial setting, nor their ideological effects were monolithic or simply hegemonic.

Instances of this co-existence of transgression and containment abound; one example is the Tom show, which enjoyed such an extraordinary run from the 1850s until well into this century. Because "no laws existed copyrighting fictional material for stage use", Harriet Beecher Stowe had no control over the form her novel would take when dramatized; her only profit was a free seat when one of the many productions came to Hartford, during the performance of which she had to ask her companion to explain the plot. The 1850s saw a plethora of wildly variable versions of Uncle Tom's Cabin, some broadly abolitionist, some anti-abolitionist, with a few that contrived to be a little of both, the theatrical situation reflecting the broader political disintegration of the country. But despite the complexity of Lott's reading of minstrelsy, he does recognize certain broad features shared by many of its productions, from which he begins his "complication " of the phenomenon:

While it was organized around the quite explicit "borrowing" of black cultural materials for white dissemination, a borrowing that ultimately depended on the material relations of slavery, the minstrel show obscured these relations by pretending that slavery was amusing, right, and natural. Although it arose from a white obsession with black (male) bodies which underlies white racial dread to our own day, it ruthlessly disavowed its fleshly investments through ridicule and racist lampoon. For the present purpose□examining Du Bois's attitude toward minstrelsy-this essay will focus on these two tendencies in blackface: minstrelsy was an appropriation of black culture, and it deformed what it appropriated.

Its very beginning was an act of theft; Thomas Dartmouth Rice's famous Jim Crow routine was "borrowed" from a crippled stablehand of that name. That Rice had been the one who discovered and appropriated Jim Crow's song, dance, and name was established by the 1880 autobiography of Rice's employer, thus settling an old controversy. "The foggy folklore and apocrypha regarding the origins of 'Jim Crow' vary with the interpreter and with the time of retelling. Jim Crow has been authoritatively and geographically discovered in Louisville, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, New Orleans, and obscure outposts of the Great Southwest. Progenitors of 'Jim Crow' surfaced all over the land." Although scholars have traced the origins of the Jim Crow stage routine, separating Rice's valid claim from those resulting from faulty memory or worse, few have considered the deeper meaning of its vague etiology and multiple discoverers. In one sense, this "foggy folklore and apocrypha" is not constructed merely of falsehoods; rather, it represents accurately the relationship which developed between the minstrel theater and the innumerable, nameless black informants who gave the theater its material. Thomas Rice's appropriation of Jim Crow's song was a prototype from which thousands of copies sprang. Rice's stellar success led other performers to take up his technique of appropriation, mingling among the slaves and free blacks of antebellum America in search of ready-made routines. Robert Toll, who describes this process as

"primitive fieldwork," quotes a number of the early minstrel stars on the topic, like Billy Whitlock, who while touring the South would "steal off to some negro hut to hear the darkies sing and see them dance, taking a jug of whisky to make things merrier."

Such direct testimony is uncommon; "blackface performers rarely credited specific material to blacks because they wanted to be known as creative artists as well as entertainers." Creative they were; it would be a grave mistake to imagine that productions of minstrelsy adequately represented nineteenth century black culture. Indeed, after the Civil War, minstrel troupes began to include stereotyped German, Jewish, Italian, Irish, and Chinese characters, portrayed in blackface, in their shows, a move which Gary Engle credits to competition from the ethnic comedies of variety theater. Any connection with African American reality, in these shows at least, was stretched beyond the breaking point. The content of many blackface performances, however, reveals that minstrels did borrow heavily from black culture; they "used Afro-American dances and dance-steps, reproduced individual Negro's songs and 'routines' intact, absorbed Afro-American syncopated rhythms into their music, and employed characteristically Afro-American folk elements and forms." Plainly, a very one-sided exchange-an appropriation-took place. Black informants (there must have been an enormous number of them, during the long history of minstrelsy) surrendered bits and pieces of their culture to the minstrels, who proceeded to put them to use. Many of the latter grew wealthy, while the former got nothing (before Abolition, at least) and rarely survive even as names. But it is not merely the act of appropriation which is of interest here. Just as important is the use to which this appropriated culture was put, a use which had the final effect of hanging the minstrel mask on black America; it is this use which motivates Du Bois's work of re-appropriation in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

In the absence of any real communication between the races-an absence Du Bois seeks to fill-the minstrel show defined what blacks were for most of its audience. What was the black "reality" created by the average minstrel show? Its characteristics are still well known, perhaps because traces of the minstrel form survived so long in the motion picture industry and showed a remarkable resiliency in live theater. Ralph Ellison, in a recent introduction to a new edition of Invisible Man, reports witnessing a Tom show in Vermont during World War II, and Harry Birdoff writes that there were still a few Tom troupes scattered around the country as late as 1947. Again, this reality was a complex one, but often the black, as portrayed by the blackface theater, was a buffoon: "With their ludicrous dialects, grotesque make-up, bizarre behavior, and simplistic caricatures, minstrels portrayed blacks as totally inferior." For pre-war Northern audiences, minstrels frequently created fantasy plantations populated by fantasy slaves who-like Uncle Eph□were happy in their bondage, devoted to their masters, content to frolic like children all day. Beginning in 1853, Christy Minstrels produced one of the more popular inverted versions of Uncle Tom's Cabin. The following lyric, from the piece entitled Happy Uncle Tom, captures its spirit:

Oh, white folks, we'll have you to know Dis am not de version of Mrs. Stowe; Wid her de Darks am all unlucky But we am de boys from Old Kentucky. Den hand de Banjo down to play We'll make it ring both night and day And we care not what de white folks say Dey can't get us to run away.

When the (mistakenly) desired gift of freedom was granted the minstrel slave, it might be voluntarily surrendered, as in Stephen Foster's 1851 "Ring, Ring de Banjo!": Once I was so lucky, My massa set me free, I went to old Kentucky To see what I could see: I could not go no farder, I turn to massa's door, I lub him all de harder, I'll go away no more.

Lott sees in this a contradictory message, as one might expect, given that his project is-rightly-to complicate our perception of minstrelsy. He considers it as one of many minstrel songs that "briefly or obliquely kick against plantation authority"; later in the song, massa dies, a "death that may be a murder," but, he continues, "is just as surely an unfortunate orphaning." For all its complexity, it was very often the case that the "minstrel show's message was that black people belonged only on Southern plantations and had no place at all in the North. 'Dis being free,' complained one minstrel character who had run away from the plantation, 'is worser dem being a slave.'" Before it became the anthem of the white Confederacy, that characteristic example of Southern homesickness expressed in music, "Dixie," had been a minstrel song. Minstrelsy often created for its audience a black America which wanted only security and endless play-which could exist only in a state of arrested childhood.

The entry of freedmen into the theater did little to change this situation. Blacks were largely excluded from both the audience and stage of the pre-Civil War white theater. With Abolition, this situation changed rapidly, with many freedmen taking to the stage and adopting the minstrel forms unaltered. It is not surprising that this first black venture into theater was a venture into minstrelsy; the audiences of these new troupes were mostly white, and prewar minstrelsy had led them to expect nothing else. During the waning decades of the nineteenth century, a number of black minstrel performers became quite successful. Perhaps the most famous was Billy Kersands. Houston Baker, in Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, likens Booker T. Washington's "mastery of minstrel form" (Washington's ability, when needed, to selectively play the minstrel clown for the edification of white philanthropists) to that of Kersands; both took up "types and tones of nonsense to earn a national reputation and its corollary benefits for the Afro-American masses." It is a pragmatic attitude, and a very sane one. What else could Washington, or Kersands, or any other ambitious black person do in the hostile environment of late nineteenth century America? Besides, as Nathan Huggins notes, "some black performers attempted to achieve the distance between the stage character and themselves by the very extremities of the exaggeration." Kersands, for example, became famous for his ability to deliver a speech with a mouth full of billiard balls. "Grotesques, themselves, could allow black men, as they did white men, the assurance that the foolishness on stage was not them." Nevertheless, the common delusion that minstrelsy and African American reality were one could only have been strengthened by the presence of "the real thing" on stage.

After the war, partly in response to the competition of the new black troupes, white minstrel shows began to swell. By 1880, the United Mastadon Minstrels, to give only one example, "featured a 'magnificent scene representing a Turkish Barbaric Palace in Silver and Gold' that included Turkish soldiers marching, a Sultan's palace, and 'Baseball.' And that was just one feature of the first part of the show." It is a long way

from crippled Jim Crow to Turkish Barbaric Palaces in Silver and Gold, but by 1880, any minstrel show which relied on the old stereotypes-especially in the North, where the black population grew daily-was becoming an exercise in schizophrenia. The black minstrels who put on the old make-up and performed the old routines were, as one scholar has put it, "an imitation of an imitation of plantation life of Southern blacks." White minstrels had appropriated such elements of black culture as they thought would sell theater seats, ignoring some elements, highlighting others. When audiences exercised their economic power over the performers-their power, that is, to choose the most pleasing performance-the minstrel spectacle took another step away from the black reality. Between the black minstrel and his white audience there hung a veil of misunderstanding and make-believe: the black partially-selectively-silenced, the whites paying to see a cherished fantasy made briefly real. When members of the white audience left the theater, they hoped, often expected, sometimes demanded, that the minstrel play continue among the blacks they met in the street. Such was the environment in which *The Souls of Black Folk* was produced. In Du Bois's America, the color line had been partly drawn by the forward edge of the minstrel stage.

In their break with formalist criticism, the new historicists have perhaps been most radical in their insistence that, since all texts are embedded in the ideological discourse of their time, none are uninfluenced by ideology; all texts are political. While he is, of course, not a new historicist critic, Du Bois could hardly agree more with this insistence. "All art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of purists," he writes in "Criteria of Negro Art":

I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent. Much of Du Bois's career was devoted to breaking this silence. The main work of Souls is anticipated by his 1901 New York Times articles, in which he invites white readers to place themselves within the negro group and by studying that inner life look with him out upon the surrounding world. When a white person comes once vividly to realize the disabilities under which a negro labors, the public contempt and thinly veiled private dislike, "the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes"□when once one sees this, and then from personal knowledge knows that sensitive human hearts are enduring this, the question comes, How can they stand it?

When the question is finally asked by enough whites, he believes, social change for the better, for "the right of black folk to love and enjoy," will finally happen. This project is continued two years later in *The Souls of Black Folk,* which is thus first and foremost a political text; Du Bois speaks for the folk who, except for the unreal language of minstrelsy, had long been stripped and silent. Du Bois's fundamental design-his political agenda-is to subvert the color line which minstrelsy has helped to construct.

Du Bois aims to accomplish this end by offering convincing detail that black folk are just as human as any other folk. By focusing each chapter on a different aspect of black life, he demonstrates that "the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter

depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange rendings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts." Du Bois argues that, although they do not yet know it, whites have much to gain from black culture. Du Bois's enemy is ignorance, both the ignorance of poor, unlettered blacks and that of whites still enamored of the minstrel fantasy. His audience lies within both races, but his terms of address are pointed mostly toward whites. Thus, in his "Forethought," he explains that he has "stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses,□the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls." His ultimate goal is to arouse not pity, but acknowledgment of a shared humanity. In "Of Alexander Crummel," he writes of the nineteenth century as

the first century of human sympathy,□the age when half wonderingly we began to descry in others that transfigured spark of divinity which we call Myself; when clodhoppers and peasants, and tramps and thieves, and millionaires and-sometimes□Negroes, became throbbing souls whose warm pulsing life touched us so nearly that we half gasped with surprise, crying, "Thou too!"

Having entered the twentieth century, his goal is to extend this sympathy to African Americans until it is no longer occasional, a deviation from the norm.

Du Bois's dominant metaphor for the communicative impasse which exists between the races is the Veil. It is an image that has received considerable critical attention. For such African American critics as Houston Baker, the metaphor is comprehensive: it "signifies a barrier of American racial segregation that keeps Afro-Americans always behind a color line□disoriented□prey to divided aims, dire economic circumstances, haphazard educational opportunities, and frustrated intellectual ambitions." Keith Byerman sees the persona narrating "Of the Passing of the First Born"□who is consoled by the thought that his dead son will not grow up "choked and deformed within the Veil" as "a man robbed of his vitality and jealous of his son for dying. What he has been made to feel as a result of his skin color has left him only with a death-wish.

He has suffocated beneath the Veil." Jerold Savory identifies a possible Biblical source of the Veil image; the "most frequent Biblical use of the term, "he writes," is in reference to the Temple in which a large curtain (sometimes a double curtain) was hung to separate the 'holy of holies' from the public." Only high priests could pass within the veil; it is thus associated with power and oppression, and is "rent in twain" when Christ dies on the cross. Savory sees a connection with Du Bois's "conviction that the rending of the Veil must begin 'at the top' through the enlightened efforts of the 'Talented Tenth' of liberally educated Blacks qualified to assume positions of educational, economical, and political leadership." Arnold Rampersad sees an even more powerful connection between metaphor and actual oppression. According to Rampersad, Du Bois "links his image of the veil to the symbol of an ongoing slavery; at one and the same time, he records 'the wail of prisoned souls within the veil, and the mounting fury of shackled men.'" Into this single image, then, the color line and all the evils that flow from it are compressed.

Like the color line, the veil is insubstantial; it is much more a construct of perception and attitude than of any tangible difference. It is a creation of, among other influences, the minstrel fantasy. The fantasy itself is destructive (for instance, what banker would risk a loan to a black when he believes this person to be a happy, childlike clown?), and by showing black folk to be as human as white folk, Du Bois seeks to deconstruct both the fantasy and the color line. Although he does not often mention minstrelsy by name, he challenges the minstrel tradition quite clearly in his commitment to re-appropriating the Sorrow Songs.

Du Bois reveals that he is very much aware that an appropriation has taken place, and he specifically identifies the minstrel theater as a culprit. "Away back in the thirties the melody of these slave songs stirred the nation, but the songs were soon half forgotten. Some, like 'Near the lake where drooped the willow,' passed into current airs and their source was forgotten; others were caricatured on the 'minstrel' stage and their memory died away." He understates the popularity and staying power of the many hit songs minstrelsy produced, all based ultimate on slave music: "Turkey in the Straw," "Dixie," "Camptown Races," "Old Folks at Home," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Old Black Joe," "Beautiful Dreamer," all were minstrel songs. They also all exhibit key elements of the minstrel fantasy; when sung by the blackface performerthey expressed the sentiments of a simple, playful people, homesick for massa and the plantation. Along with other "debasements and imitations," Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* refers to the minstrel tradition as "a mass of music in which the novice may easily lose himself and never find the real Negro music. ..." In subverting the minstrel renditions by returning to the forgotten roots from which these songs sprang, his work of re-appropriation is partly a means to an end; showing black folk to possess a creative art form uniquely their own further rends the Veil. "They tell us in these eager days that life was joyous to the black slave, careless and happy. I can easily believe this of some, of many. But not all the past South, though it rose from the dead, can gainsay the heart-touching witness of these songs."

But Du Bois's re-appropriation is also an end in itself; his recovery of the Sorrow Songs is a project which underlies the entire book. We see this in those odd, enigmatic bars of music which stand as silent epigraphs at the head of each chapter. To the reader who cannot decipher music notation□which is to say, most readers today-they are as meaningful as the lines of poetry which accompany them would be to an illiterate slave. It is not until the final chapter that we learn the names of the songs to which these bars of music belong, and their lyrics. It is so by design. By the end of the book, the white reader has been introduced to life behind the Veil. If Du Bois's aim has been fulfilled, he or she will know that black folk possess souls as intricate as his or her own. If not thus prepared, the white reader might dismiss these slave songs as minstrel foolishness. *The Souls of Black Folk* is at least partly structured to enable such a reader to accept these songs as works of art.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the marginal status of the Sorrow Songs, from the time of their composition until Du Bois came to their aid. Most are religious in nature, but they were rarely permitted to be sung in church, especially before Emancipation. In the North, even black ministers disapproved of them as vulgar. Daniel Alexander Payne, for

instance, at different times a minister, historian, and bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, condemned the Sorrow Songs, calling them "cornfield ditties." In the South, religious gatherings of slaves, like all gatherings, were suppressed; but even in their secret gatherings, or in those permitted by lenient masters, "the slaves generally adhered to conventional forms of worship, " singing only psalms and hymns approved by the Methodist or Baptist churches. "Judging from the evidence, the singing of religious folksongs was not encouraged in formal services. [Plantation owner and memoirist R. Q. J. Mallard seemed to be proud of the fact that sometimes, when in a generous mood, he would let the slaves sing 'their own improvised spiritual' at church services." And while the success of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, among other touring black college groups, certainly lifted the status of the Sorrow Songs, such performances were no longer what they had been, by Du Bois's day.

When the spirituals were removed from the original setting of the plantation or the Negro Church and sung by persons who had not directly experienced slavery, these songs no longer served their primary function. Concert singers could present to the public only an approximation of how the spirituals had been sung by the slaves.

Independent of the liberties minstrelsy had taken with slave music, it enjoyed no great prestige when Du Bois took up its cause.

Du Bois communicates his sense of the cultural importance the Sorrow Songs possess in the first chapter: "there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave." This statement is reinforced by, again, Du Bois's dual chapter epigraphs. In this case, he plays a subtle and little noticed joke on the white reader. All fourteen of the slave song epigraphs are examples of "true American music," works of art belonging to a genre which is distinctly ours. But what of the poets whose works stand above those of the anonymous slaves? Byron, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (twice), Swinburne, Tennyson, Arthur Symons□the list is rather British. "The music of Negro religion . . . [,]despite caricature and defilement, still remains the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil."

But the importance of the Sorrow Songs does not lie merely in their ability to satisfy the literary nationalist; its potential role is too vital for that. As noted, Du Bois is confident that black folk have much to offer whites, and one of their latent gifts is their music. "Will America be poorer if she replace .. . her vulgar music with the soul of the Sorrow Songs?" Robert Stepto refers to this as Du Bois's "call for a truly plural American culture", involving "nothing less than his envisioning fresh spaces in which black and white Americans discover bonds beyond those generated by social-structured race rituals." The Veil is not merely to be lifted; positive cultural bonds are to replace it.

Du Bois's re-appropriation of the Sorrow Songs is not, however, a project aimed at rehabilitating them in the eyes of white Americans alone. Even more important is their rehabilitation in the eyes of the Talented Tenth of his fellow blacks.

The innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist; for the

beauty revealed to him was the soulbeauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people.

According to James Weldon Johnson, Du Bois succeeded. In *Along This Way,* Johnson refers to *The Souls of Black Folk* as "a work which, I think, has had a greater effect upon and within the Negro race in America than any other single book published in this country since Uncle Tom's Cabin." Du Bois was not the first to treat the slave songs as something more than the raw material for minstrel buffoonery. As noted, the Fisk Jubilee Singers had already brought the Sorrow Songs before the white public, and with considerable success, earning the astonishing sum of $150,000 toward the support of Fisk University. Du Bois, however, may be the first to argue that the Sorrow Songs are works of art as important-and really no different than the high poetry with which they share his chapter headings. In this way, Du Bois's project of re-appropriation anticipates in a surprising way□and by about eight decades□one of the central arguments of new historicism□that the border between the literary and non-literary, between high art and low pastime, is an artificial construct of the ideology that prevails at any given time, and that such borders are permeable. His violation of the boundaries between high and low art is a radical one; beneath each of his chapter titles, the very highest and very lowest mix as equals. It is not so surprising when one reflects that all cultures possess a literature. In an analphabetic culture, the literature will be an oral one. The legendary Homer, the anonymous Beowulf poet, the "Turoldus" who recites the Song of Roland (and who is to us, like Jim Crow, no more than a name)□all three, whoever they were, produced works regarded as great literature by Du Bois's America, and our own. Though the forms are different ("primary" epic versus folk song), they were engaged in the same cultural pursuit as the slaves who created the Sorrow Songs. Still, for Du Bois to equate the Sorrow Songs with the work of Byron, Tennyson, Shiller, and all the others is a subversive act indeed.

In so doing, he lays the foundations of the Harlem Renaissance, during which Alain Locke would declare black spirituals to be

thematically rich, in idiom of rhythm and harmony richer still, in potentialities of new musical forms and new technical traditions so deep as to be accessible only to genius, they have the respect of the connoisseur even while still under the sentimental and condescending patronage of the amateur.

The Renaissance would have happened without Du Bois, of course. However, his confident assertion of equality between native black forms of aesthetic expression and those of the white majority□ remarkably confident, at that early date□is an important precursor to Locke's very similar assertion. By re-appropriating the music which minstrelsy had debased, Du Bois provides the Harlem Renaissance with an example of an art form which is distinctively African American. His was the pioneering voice. As Johnson's Ex-Colored Man puts it, the future black novelist or poet will have an opportunity "to give the country something new and unknown, in depicting the life, the ambitions, the struggles, and the passions of those of their race who are striving to break the narrow limits of traditions. A beginning has already been made in that remarkable book by Dr. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*."

Source: Scott Herring, "Du Bois and the Minstrels," in *MELUS,* Vol. 22, No. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 3-16.

Adaptations

The Souls of Black Folk is available in the form of an e-book, available from Microsoft Reader.

The Souls of Black Folk is also available on four audiocassettes from Walter Covell.

Topics for Further Study

Consider Du Bois' and Washington's assertions about educational opportunities for African Americans. Given recent controversy over affirmative action policies, where do you think the two would locate themselves in this debate, and why.

Consider the role of song in the text. Given Du Bois' discussion of what he terms "Negro music" in *"The Sorrow Songs,"* how might he interpret the evolution of African-American music in the last century?

In *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois makes use of a blend of shifting tones and forms. Discuss how this versatility reflects and impacts the thematic material, and what the author's intent may have been.

Compare and Contrast

1900: At least two thousand blacks are lynched or burned to death in the fifteen years prior to the turn of the century. White murderers go unpunished.

Today: Racially motivated hate crimes are a rarity, but still exist, as in the case of James Byrd Jr. In 1998, three white men drag Byrd behind their car, resulting in Byrd's death. The men who committed the crime are convicted and sentenced to death.

1896: In the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson,* the Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of racially segregated railroad cars.

1955: In the case of *Brown v. Board of Education,* the Supreme Court rules that racial segregation of schools is unconstitutional. Despite the ruling, education remains largely segregated in the South.

Today: Despite disparities in some schools based on socioeconomic factors, no schools in the United States are segregated.

1903: In *The Souls of Black Folk,* Du Bois advocates equal opportunity and treatment for whites and blacks, including equal standards for competency.

1972: The Equal Opportunity Act of 1972 expands Title VII protections to schools, extending affirmative action policies to colleges and universities in the interest of aiding minorities.

1995: Governor Pete Wilson and the University of California vote to end affirmative action in both hiring and admissions statewide.

What Do I Read Next?

Black Reconstruction is Du Bois' refutation of the traditional historical view of the contributions of African Americans during the Reconstruction period.

Dusk of Dawn is Du Bois' 1940 book concerning his views on both the African's and African American's quest for freedom in the twentieth century.

Du Bois' doctoral thesis, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* (1894) is a definitive work about the social, economic, and historical reasons for the end of the slave trade.

Jean Toomer's 1923 collection of stories and poetry, *Cane,* is an eloquent and aesthetically beautiful representation of the many versions of African-American life. His layered use of form reflects the direct influence of *The Souls of Black Folk*.

James Weldon Johnson's novel *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) concerns one man's struggle with racial identity, and includes mention of Du Bois' influence over the protagonist.

The Souls of Black Folk is paired with Booker T. Washington's autobiography and James Weldon Johnson's novel in *Three Negro Classics: Up From Slavery, The Souls of Black Folk,* and *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* Mass Market Paperback, 1976.

Further Study

Broderick, Francis L., *W. E. B. Du Bois: Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis*, Stanford University Press, 1959.

Broderick, writing during Du Bois' lifetime, discusses Du Bois' life and achievements.

Gutman, Herbert G., *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925,* Random House, 1976.

Gutman provides the definitive sociological and his torical work on African-American life during and immediately after slavery.

Rampersad, Arnold, *The Art and Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois,* Harvard University Press, 1976.

Rampersand provides a thorough discussion of Du Bois' stylistic approach to writing.

Tuttle, William M.,*Great Lives Observed: W. E. B. Du Bois,* Prentice-Hall, 1973.

This is a collection of articles and essays concerning Du Bois' work in the context of his life.

Bibliography

Du Bois, W. E. B., *The Souls of Black Folk,* Library of America, 1986, pp. 3-191.

Ferris, William H., "*The Souls of Black Folk:* The Book in Its Era," in *Critical Essays on W. E. B. Du Bois,* edited by William L. Andrews, G. K. Hall & Co., 1985, pp. 125-27.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., Introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk,* by W. E. B. Du Bois, Bantam, 1989, pp. xiv-xvii.

Rampersad, Arnold, *The Art and Imagination ofW. E. B. Du Bois,* Harvard University Press, 1976, pp. 72-88.

Review in *New York Times,* April 25, 1903.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Nonfiction Classics for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Nonfiction Classics for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535