

W. E. B. Du Bois, 1868-1919: Biography of a Race Study Guide

W. E. B. Du Bois, 1868-1919: Biography of a Race by David Levering Lewis

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Plot Summary

This biography, published in 1993, concerns the life of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois from his birth in 1868 through the year 1919 with just a foreshadowing of his death in 1963. The book also serves as a valuable history lesson, explaining how many contemporary social movements came to be.

W.E.B. Du Bois's father, Alfred, abandons his mother when Willie (as he was called for short) is about three years old. His mother, Mary, raises him in Great Barrington MA, a mid-sized town where many free African American farming families mix with Whites.

A promising student, Du Bois flies through his primary school studies while living with his handicapped mother in very disadvantaged conditions. A helpful high school principal encourages him to try to get into college and others in the community help him buy books for a college preparatory study course. Du Bois begins to write for local magazines and meets and is impressed by his paternal grandfather a sophisticated mulatto man named Alexander. Du Bois's mother dies just in time for him to leave Great Barrington and attend Fisk University.

At this liberal arts school in the South, Du Bois meets intelligent and talented lifelong friends. He excels in college and earns money teaching poor black farming families during the summers. Du Bois's graduation speech receives great applause and thanks to winning a scholarship, he is able to go to Harvard in 1888. Although not very popular with other students and too poor to engage in their social activities, Du Bois enjoys himself. Harvard puts him in touch with thinkers like William James, an early philosopher and the founder of the modern study of psychology. Once he earns a Master's degree in sociology, Du Bois sets his sights on a PhD. He earns the money he needs to continue his education by writing insistent letters to Rutherford B. Hayes, who is in charge of distributing money from the Slater Fund, a cash award earmarked to send promising Black people to Europe to get a higher education. Du Bois, who now goes by W.E.B. instead of Willie, wins the money.

The school Du Bois chooses is Berlin University, a college where leading thinkers are developing revolutionary ideas, such as Marxism. Du Bois studies hard and backpacks around Europe but runs out of money before his PhD is technically granted. He returns home on a cheap boat and manages to get Harvard to award him a PhD for his thesis paper. He soon finds that it is difficult for even a very educated black man to find a suitable job. He settles for a position at Wilberforce University. The school is too religious for him, and the students aren't particularly ambitious. However, it is here that he meets his future wife, Nina. They marry, and soon Du Bois takes a job studying the problems of African Americans in Philadelphia's 7th Ward.

The detailed study he produces revolutionizes social science. Du Bois is then offered a job at a much better college, Atlanta University, where he completes important long-term studies of the African American life and racism in America. Du Bois and his wife have a son, but the child dies at age three. The couple grows apart as Du Bois works around



the clock and travels. Nina is left to live in Atlanta, a town very hot with racism at the time. Du Bois has made it his life mission to fight for civil rights and improve educational opportunities for African Americans so that the most talented blacks can lead the race to achieve their highest goals. Booker T. Washington, however, has made compromises with wealthy white financial donors and politicians to encourage black people to ask for nothing more than basic education and economic freedom. Money pours into Washington's Tuskegee University from these people. The President and influential white and African American people make it a habit to consult Washington for his opinion on every matter. Du Bois considers going to work for Washington at Tuskegee until Washington's jealousy of Du Bois's rising fame leads him to begin undercutting Du Bois's efforts. Around this time Du Bois has a second child, a daughter named Yolande.

Du Bois publishes a stunning book called *The Souls of Black Folk*. In 14 essays and beautiful fictional stories he brings a new awareness to the rights of black people and their experience of the white world. Du Bois becomes nationally famous and is soon requested as a speaker, author and conference organizer. Racial issues in America grow more desperate as the job competition heats up, unions form and the price of cotton goes down leaving farm workers in the South desperately poor. Whites in the South are encouraged by their leaders to fear African American competition by labor unions and political leaders hoping to control them, according to the author of this biography, Lewis. Lynching, discriminatory laws and mob violence is on the rise. To answer the need for equal rights, Du Bois invites intelligent black thinkers to Niagara Falls on the Canadian side to discuss solutions. The Niagaraites, as they are called, vow to work together to improve conditions. Washington is not a part of the group, but starts his own labor organization. While agreeing with racist whites in public, he secretly funds court battles for civil rights. Du Bois and Washington become locked in a lifelong feud.

In 1908 Du Bois leaves Atlanta University to become the editor of a magazine called *The Crisis* that supports the new NAACP. The NAACP is founded by white reformers who are fed up with the rising violence and most of whom disagree with Booker T. Washington's appeasement approach. The publication features controversial studies and arguments and soon gains huge popularity around the world. In *The Crisis*, Du Bois shows that the new so-called science showing blacks are an inferior race is false. He points out the achievements of great African Americans, condemns racial violence and narrow thinking on the part of reformers who only want a little freedom or a little education for blacks, and even criticizes the actions of political leaders, especially those who do nothing to stop growing violence.

Newspapers agree with Washington and his coworker Emmett Scott, who write angry, critical articles of *The Crisis*. In the meantime, radical reformers such as Monroe Trotter attack Washington's positions in public. Du Bois uses his power at *The Crisis* to sway people to vote for the Democratic presidential candidate, Woodrow Wilson, although he will later regret this. He fights against the movie *The Birth of A Nation*, which depicts blacks as dangerous rapists, and leads to violence against African Americans. He makes many attacks on Washington's way of ignoring problems. He scolds the white women who are fighting for the right to vote for not including black women in their



group, but he also believes in women's rights and works closely and respectfully with many white and black women during his career.

Du Bois is not as fair to his own family. He seldom sees his daughter but eventually insists his daughter should go to school in England. When Nina and his daughter Yolande arrive, World War I breaks out. Du Bois is having affairs with various women, according to Lewis, but he continues to support his family with large sums of money. Eventually the not-very-talented Yolande is sent back home to America.

The NAACP goes through many growing pains. The African Americans feel they should be at least equally represented on the governing board, but the whites have trouble giving up the control they are used to. Throughout all the squabbling, Du Bois always manages to keep complete power over *The Crisis*.

When Washington dies, Du Bois becomes the most influential African American in the world. Many in the government do not like Du Bois's bold attacks on the president and the military, and military intelligence starts to investigate him and the NAACP to see if the organization should be stopped. When a friend named Joel Spingarn gets a government job, he suggests that Du Bois should support a new training camp for black military officers, take a job with the government and stop writing such controversial articles. Du Bois agrees to do this. He believes World War I will mean the end of White European power over blacks. He feels that if African Americans become high ranking officials in the military they will gain power and respect. Du Bois does encourage African Americans to sign up for the military, but soon it is announced that no high level appointments will be given to black soldiers. Also, the job offer is withdrawn. Du Bois loses popularity with many who feel African Americans should not join the war effort. The book ends after the WWI when Du Bois goes to Europe and becomes a leading voice in something called the Pan African movement.

Throughout the book Lewis shows how Du Bois's ideas change, and how his writings change the world. First he is a Victorian type man who thinks that smart people working hard will be treated fairly. Then he sees poor Southern blacks who haven't had his advantages and will never be treated fairly, and he fights to help them. He still believes only a few smart people will lead the others, but becomes frustrated with the lack of educational opportunities for such people. As he studies the facts and learns about Marxism, he begins to see that economics, not just evil intentions, drive racism. He grows angrier about violence and those who pretend to help the black people but only want to go so far. This book says that eventually Du Bois will become a Marxist leader of the Pan African movement and will move to Africa to live and die.

The following summary will use the words *black*, *Negro*, *African American* and *colored* because these different words are used in the book itself to describe people whose ancestors hail from Africa within the past 100 thousand years or so. This document will not use a very offensive racial term often used by Du Bois to show outrage, but will replace this racist word with "N—."



Chapter 1, "Postlude to the Future"

Chapter 1, "Postlude to the Future" Summary and Analysis

The book begins with Du Bois's death and funeral. The time is August 28, 1963.

The executive secretary of the NAACP breaks the news of Du Bois's death to 250,000 people gathered around the Reflecting Pool in Washington D.C. during an important civil rights protest meant to get President Kennedy's attention. Rabbi Joachim Prinz interrupts his planned speech to tell a huge crowd of activists, leftists, civil rights leaders and freedom loving musicians that Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois is in a great part responsible for their gathering on this day.

The author, David Levering Lewis, lists Du Bois's many achievements over his lifetime. Du Bois is the first African American to win a Harvard PhD and serves as one of the founders of the NAACP. This great intellect writes 16 pioneering books of sociology, history, politics, multiple novels and a couple of autobiographies. In these books and in his essays published in *The Crisis* Du Bois foresees that the biggest disagreements of the 20th century will be problems of race. Later in life Du Bois tells Africans that the market economy developed in Europe is a bad direction for them because it will always make the weak weaker, which is an idea he adopts from socialist Karl Marx.

Lewis says that over his lifetime Du Bois's opinions change so drastically that it is confusing, and he implies that this book will help readers sort out why Du Bois's ideas change so much. The remainder of the chapter describes Du Bois's funeral in Ghana, his adopted homeland. Ambassadors, presidents, civil rights giants and heads of state worldwide mourn the fallen leader.

The point of this chapter is to show what a very important and popular man Du Bois becomes during his lifetime. Approximately 100 famous people are named as mourning for Du Bois. This chapter will serve as a stark counterpoint to his humble beginnings.



Chapter 2, "Mary Silvina's Great Barrington"

Chapter 2, "Mary Silvina's Great Barrington" Summary and Analysis

Du Bois is born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts a day after Washington's Birthday, February 23, 1868. He is of African and white background, and his light skin and European features possibly make his future success slightly easier in a post-Civil War America still torn by racism. Du Bois's Father, Alfred, is of Dutch, French and West African descent and was born in Haiti. Du Bois's mother is a free African American who grew up in the town of Great Barrington. Interesting photos of these people appear in the middle of the book. During his childhood Du Bois is known as Willie.

The author, David Levering Lewis, makes a great number of observations about Great Barrington because he says that later in life Du Bois will write proudly about his birthplace in several different memoirs. Great Barrington is clearly very important to Du Bois.

The mid-sized Massachusetts town has a history of African roots with around 30 black families living in the region when Du Bois is born. The first slave brought to town is named Tom, and he seems to have won his freedom by serving in the military. Tom has many free children with his wife, one of whom becomes Du Bois's grandfather on his mother's side. His grandfather's second wife, Mum Bett, becomes famous for suing her white owner for her freedom and winning. Willie, as he is called, fondly remembers hearing her sing an African song to him as a child. He later writes the words to the song down from memory, but none of his intellectual friends are ever able to figure out what African dialect is sung, or what it means.

The Burghardt family grows and prospers, working as farmers for many generations before Du Bois is born, but then like the other blacks in the community, the Burghardts start to lose financial stability when food imports to the area become cheap. Around 1,850 poor Irish immigrants start pouring into the town to work in mills. Many begin to take the better paying service jobs such as hotel cook or waiter that African Americans traditionally strive to win. Most of the region's African Americans are Methodists with traditional, conservative Republican Party values, but some evidence suggests that Du Bois's mother, Mary Silvina, breaks with traditional lifestyle and values when she goes to New York to work independently and to experience the exciting challenges of big city life. Du Bois remembers his mother only as a patient, quiet person, but in fact she has hidden depths and a rich past. Mary gives birth to a child out of wedlock, Adelbert, an older brother whom Du Bois never talks very much about. He even gets his half brother's first name wrong in published works. Mary meets Du Bois's father, Alfred, in upstate New York.



Alfred is the grandson of a British loyalist plantation owner in Haiti who brings his son, Alexander, to New York for school, then dies. Because Alexander is half white and half black, the prosperous white relatives in New York have nothing to do with him after his father's death. Alexander makes a meager living for a while then goes back to Haiti where he marries and fathers Alfred before abandoning his Haitian family. Du Bois describes his father as a handsome, adventurous man who comes to Great Barrington as a kind of hero. He imagines that his father simply has too much spirit to stay in the mid-sized town so he leaves Mary Silvina and later dies in the 1870s. Lewis' further research proves that Alfred does not die, but goes on to live a much longer life, illegally marry another woman, and join, then desert a Civil War unit before disappearing from all records.

This chapter seeks to separate the reality from the myths that Du Bois creates about his own background. The author, Lewis, doesn't judge Du Bois negatively for building a sense of importance about a father who is a bit of a failure or a mother who is probably a little wilder than he describes her. Lewis only wants to probe into the psychological factors that shape his subject. Like so many people born in the 1800s, the black leader takes pride in his European whiteness. Later this complex man will do much to help blacks take pride in their own African heritage.

Lewis says it's strange that Du Bois, a careful researcher, never learns more about his own half brother's history, and simply assumes his father has died when in fact, a small amount of research would have proven that Alfred ran off with another woman. Lewis believes this is because Du Bois feels it is very important that he is the legitimate child of married parents unlike many African Americans born into slavery. This belief that rules and religion are important is part of what Lewis calls Du Bois's "Victorian" attitude.

Readers are also supposed to appreciate the artistic way that Du Bois is able to re-create reality when he writes about himself, his family and his town in later years. Lewis quotes Du Bois's book, *Darkwater*, and calls the lovely lines about the town and people "mythopoetic."



Chapter 3, "Berkshire Prodigy"

Chapter 3, "Berkshire Prodigy" Summary and Analysis

Du Bois is born in a house owned by a person who has escaped slavery. After Alfred abandons his family when Du Bois is two, Mary loses this house and must move in next door with relatives. Du Bois remembers the home as good, square, sturdy, neat and large enough. He always defends his father by saying the darker skinned members of the Burghardt family never accept Alfred and practically drive him away. Lewis sees this as a misplaced pride on Du Bois's part in his white, European roots.

In later books, Du Bois says that Alfred always intends for Mary and his son to follow him. Lewis thinks that it is very important for a Victorian-era man raised in a proper religious home to believe he is legitimate and wanted by the father of his fine lineage. His older illegitimate brother must have cared for him in childhood, reasons Lewis, but Du Bois never talks about his brother. Brother Adelbert remembers that Alfred leaves home in a hurry one night when he hears the Burghardts shooting guns in the distance. Adelbert thinks Alfred is merely confused by a prank, but Lewis hints that the Burghardts may have found out about Alfred's other wife and that the shots are real threats. Later in old age and living on welfare, Adelbert asks him to come talk about their past, but Du Bois does not respond.

Mary sinks into depression when she is abandoned. The mother and son live with an aunt for a while but finally must take a home on Railroad Street, the poorest, dirtiest and most dangerous part of town. Du Bois always claims he enjoys his childhood, nevertheless. Mary shares their house with a very poor white family, and the wife, Mrs. Miller, is mentally ill. Years later Du Bois cheerfully recalls liking Railroad Street because he enjoyed looking at the trains. Mary suffers a stroke and becomes paralyzed, but her brother and various townspeople give them food and the type of jobs Du Bois's mother can still manage with her paralysis. Adelbert moves to Albany and sends money home. As soon as he can do so Du Bois begins working after school. He helps his mother hobble home from jobs after school. Lewis says that Mary locks up all her emotions inside herself, except for her love and hopes for her son Wille.

Mary is strict about drinking, using tobacco and seeing loose women, but unlike other people at the time, she thinks it's okay that Du Bois is left handed and she does not attempt to train him out of it. It gives her great pleasure to see that her darling son performs brilliantly in the non-segregated elementary school he attends. Du Bois comes to respect his own abilities to perform at a level always equal to and often far above white students. In short, he knows he is smart. No other Burghardts have gone to high school, but Mary insists her son push himself to the limits, and to help him she somehow finds a way to move them both off Railroad Street into a house in a more respectable neighborhood. For once in his life, Du Bois has his own room, and when he looks out at the golden river beyond his window, shaded that pretty color by logging mill pollution, he is thrilled.



For four years he works hard in what we might call middle school, each day doing an endless series of odd jobs after school to make money. Du Bois feels proud of the fact that he's making it on his own until one day in 1878 when a girl won't take a little business card from him because he's African American. Du Bois says this his first shocking understanding that no matter how hard he works some will slight him for his race alone, but Lewis doubts that he has had no inkling at all of racism in America until this point. By age 13, Du Bois admits shedding many tears over the fact that he is disliked for his color. When he steals some grapes from a vine in a wealthy person's yard, a white citizen tries to get him sent to reform school. Frank Alvin Hosmer, the high school principal, fights for him and he is allowed to admit his guilt and go.

Hosmer is a white man from a Congregational church background who understands the challenges Du Bois faces. Over his lifetime Hosmer works in Hawaii as a consultant to the provisional government, runs for the Massachusetts legislature and publishes a magazine. Now that he has become a school principal Hosmer is always looking for talented black leadership to go help rebuild the South during this era after the Civil War. Hosmer decides Du Bois should go to college and tells him to take college prep classes at Great Barrington High School. This is an amazing idea, because even local wealthy white citizens do not always hope to attend college.

Du Bois can't even afford the books needed to prepare for college, but gets work tutoring a wealthy white teen in exchange for the money he needs. He brags that he spends time with the upper classes of his high school, a snobbish attitude according to Lewis. The classes at Great Barrington High School include Greek and Latin, but the progressive school puts on plays too. A bookstore owner named Johnny Morgan lets Du Bois read new magazines and books for free. Morgan breaks the rules and allows Du Bois to buy a big five book *History of England* by Macaulay on the installment plan. It's a very pompous book favorable to Britain, but it makes a permanent impression on him.

The young scholar shows promise as a writer. He starts out distributing the magazine the *Globe*, then soon gets published in it. Du Bois writes many articles about the Negro Methodist Zion Church for the papers the *Globe* and *Freeman*, but later in life he becomes an agnostic and pretends he knows very little about church matters. Oddly enough for a young man, Du Bois becomes the secretary of the local Sewing Society and writes a newsletter about the community events, outings, dances and so on. Du Bois seems to be a sort of local celebrity.

Finally Du Bois goes to New York for his first chance to meet his grandfather, Alexander, who has upper middle class money and manners. Du Bois is very impressed when his grandfather performs a toast with wine because he has never seen such a sophisticated ritual before. The author tries to understand how Alexander arrived in Haiti years ago in order to father Du Bois's father Alfred. Lewis guesses that Alexander has been invited to Haiti by the nation's leader, Jean Pierre Boyer, under a phony scheme to get African Americans to settle in Haiti and maintain positive relationships with America. Alexander was probably disappointed with his childhood home, Haiti, which is why he, like other invited blacks, returned to America. Alexander must have fathered Alfred out of wedlock and left him in Haiti, abandoning the child to be raised by his mother. Nevertheless, Du



Bois respects his grandfather and says he "wasn't a negro; he was a man." Lewis thinks this is evidence that Du Bois feels conflicted about his father and his color. During the New York trip Du Bois experiences the British Emancipation Day festivities where for the first time he sees many beautiful free black people celebrating together.

The young Du Bois lectures at the First Congregational Church at about the same time controversy is beginning to surround the scientific basis of the *Bible*. Du Bois's schoolwork is outstanding, and many of his new ideas are based on what he has read about racial and economic progress for his classes. Du Bois's high school graduation speech earns repeated applause.

Young Du Bois has formulated a wild dream to go to Harvard, but has too little money and an ailing mother whom he must care for. Lewis thinks Du Bois must resent his mother in some way, although he never admits it. She isn't educated or successful which probably embarrasses a young man who is so dazzled by privilege and status. Nevertheless, Du Bois calls Mary his "good chum" and becomes a big advocate of women's rights in later years. Mary dies at just the moment to leave him free to go to college. Strangely, Du Bois doesn't seem to grieve and only says he's glad to see her at peace. His aunt takes him into her home, and a well connected African American newcomer named J. Carlisle Dennis who works for the widow of the railroad tycoon Mark Hopkins helps him get a job at the new mansion that the widow Hopkins is building. Du Bois pools the money he earns at this job with some money raised by local churches for him and finally has enough to earn his way into Fisk University, not Harvard. He doesn't show disappointment

Lewis demonstrated Du Bois's determined optimism in this chapter. He seldom dwells on things that may actually bother him such as parental rejection, poverty or his mother's death. Du Bois always defends his mulatto father, who abandoned him, and his grandfather who abandons Alfred. Perhaps this is because he is not really sure if belongs to a black or white world.

Lewis thinks Du Bois has a Freudian problem; in other words, he is a young man who never gets to bond with his father, so he becomes dangerously close to his mother. He can never really be the man of the house so he resents his mother secretly as much as he loves her. Lewis gives other evidence that Du Bois can't relate well to women in later chapters of the book. He is emotionally torn about a grandparent that has sophisticated manners and success he wishes he had, but Alexander basically ignores him. Lewis is building up the idea that all intelligent and ambitious black Americans of the time are striving to be accepted by an outdated European Victorian society that will never acknowledge them. Du Bois's special talent is looking back at the sad truth and rewriting it into a myth that helps other African Americans feel pride in their origins.



Chapter 4, "The Age of Miracles: Fisk and Josie's World"

Chapter 4, "The Age of Miracles: Fisk and Josie's World" Summary and Analysis

Great Barrington is a kinder place than the post-war South where Fisk University is located and where Du Bois goes to college. Fisk Free Colored School first opens in 1866 after the Civil War. Former slaves eagerly attend, desiring to learn to read and write. Principal John Ogden renames the school Fisk University so that it can be turned into a real college. Funding dries up soon, but the students form a singing group and tour the world making enough money to save the University. Du Bois arrives 13 years later when there is a new president named Erastus Milo Cravath who is an old army man and Congregationalist chaplain. The school turns out four-year degree students with a high-level liberal arts education. Many Southern leaders think that it is a waste of time and money to teach subjects like Latin, French, Greek, history and philosophy to black people since, in their opinion, African Americans should only be working in blue collar jobs.

Willie gets promoted to a sophomore as soon as he enters Fisk because of his great groundwork in high school. Du Bois's inspiring teachers include the first female professor at a college for men and women, Helen Morgan, who picks Fisk over Vassar for her tenure. Du Bois meets poor blacks who have seldom interacted with white people as well as the children of former slaves who have become respected middle class service people. The social standards of the school are set by wealthy African Americans, including mulattoes who receive money for school from their white fathers. Du Bois is inspired by their pride and sophistication.

Lewis quotes an editorial that says these people feel they will be fully part of government when they graduate because at this time before the Jim Crow laws have been enacted, some members of the African elite do get important leadership roles in congress. These Southern blacks are curious about Du Bois but not necessarily impressed by him. He is intrigued by the beautiful black women who surround him and writes all about them in his diaries, but he remains a little distant, possibly because he's quite short and a little shy.

Du Bois contracts life threatening typhoid fever, and when he gets well and comes back to school he is more popular than before. A mysterious disagreement with a church elder named "Pops" Miller over a dance that Du Bois is planning makes him start to doubt church policy, and religious narrow mindedness soon drives him to become agnostic. Lewis says he "calmly adjusts" to this big change in philosophy. Another shock that shapes Du Bois's thinking occurs one day when he accidentally brushes into a white woman on the street and she screams. It's just another incident that makes Du



Bois begin to feel sympathy for other black people who have had to put up with this kind of thing their whole lives.

After sophomore year Du Bois decides to visit the country and teach in country black schools. He loves the hardworking but undereducated students he meets, but he must be careful to ignore the rude words spoken to him by poor white farmers who are jealous of his education. He teaches two years in a row and later writes *The Souls of Black Folk* based on his observations. Du Bois is worried that the once hopeful ex-slaves are now giving up and sinking into poverty. He makes love to a woman for the first time, but she is only the lonely wife of a white man who seduces him. Du Bois says he first becomes a "real Negro" at Fisk, but Lewis thinks this heroic choice is actually thrust upon him because white Americans will not accept him. America is growing fearful of immigrants and their own blacks who seem different from the white majority.

By senior year Du Bois decides to make improving life for his race his lifelong mission. He lands a job as an editor of the local paper, *The Herald*, in charge of student publications and writes a column that earns great respect for challenging the slow progress allowed to blacks. Du Bois's graduation speech shows his ability to think about many different aspects of a problem. The speech glorifies the German second Reich (the German government before World War I) because the leaders reorganize the country under a strong main leader to bring progress, but Du Bois also criticizes the fact that truth and liberty are sacrificed in the process. Later in life Du Bois becomes the opposite of the conservative German second Reich, a liberal Marxist. However, he has never read *Das Kapital*, the book by Marx defining socialism. It has been translated into English, but like other colleges, Fisk doesn't teach it.

According to Lewis, Du Bois's experiences at Fisk lay the groundwork for many slow changes that will take place in his thinking over his lifetime. He enters college as a truly Victorian person, meaning he cares about old-fashioned royalty, privilege and breeding, and believes blacks should be uplifted to white traditional standards. Du Bois is deeply affected by the hostility of whites in the South because this is not something he experiences much in childhood. Being around blacks of all different backgrounds, he begins to truly see himself as black and to feel the pain others are suffering. He is also a man of great determination and flexible thinking. He works amazingly hard, takes in many new ideas, sees both sides of issues and can speak in an inspiring way about what he believes. Lewis thinks that his choice of an older woman as a first lover is proof of his Freudian complications in his feelings about his own mother.



Chapter 5, "The Age of Miracles: At But Not of Harvard"

Chapter 5, "The Age of Miracles: At But Not of Harvard" Summary and Analysis

Du Bois writes to Harvard to inquire about attending graduate school there. Fortunately, the current President Charles W. Eliot has decided to admit qualified black men and immigrants into the school in an attempt to get rid of the reputation that Harvard simply hands out diplomas to rich white people. Du Bois is accepted.

Du Bois needs money to go to Harvard, and he can only raise \$150 a year. The secretary of the college tells him to apply for a Price Greenleaf Stipend (gift of money) and to bring a high recommendation from Fisk in order to enter Harvard. Du Bois does these things, but is still short of funds and therefore takes a job waiting tables.

Customers are so rude that he walks off the job, leaving one man with his hand up asking for assistance. Du Bois has a beautiful singing voice and earns a little money booking performances for the Harvard glee club. His Greenleaf money arrives late, so he stays at boarding house. He stands out as one of two poor black men at Harvard.

Du Bois permanently changes his name to W.E.B when he goes to Harvard in 1888. Full of optimism, he thinks he can do anything and later makes it sound as if getting through Harvard cum laude is a snap. Lewis says the truth is different. Du Bois never mentions that Harvard students are primarily white, male, upper class and protestant, looking down on Catholics, Jews and blacks.

"It was a story he discarded in the interests of constructing the myth of the imperial self that he believed his people needed in order to take themselves as seriously as he took himself," Lewis writes.

Du Bois eventually gets a degree in history, but at first he is unimpressed with the history and economics departments at Harvard, so he goes into philosophy. Notable professors in this department include William James who says that the existence of God cannot be proven through science and Josiah Royce who believes in absolute truth. A Spanish professor named Santayana who later founds the Harvard Lampoon and Harvard Monthly begins to work closely with Du Bois, trying to prove that ideas are no more real than our feelings are; but as much as Du Bois enjoys their conversations, he still thinks there is a higher absolute truth behind everything in life.

William James makes friends with Du Bois and gets him into the Harvard Philosophical club. James begins to teach his students that the value of truth depends on what good it does for the individual, and that the human mind is constantly being influenced by the realities of the world. Du Bois is very impressed with this kind of thinking and struggles hard to help James answer troubling questions of ethics. What is right and wrong if ones



understanding of truth keeps changing? Surprisingly, Du Bois earns his worst grade ever in English Composition, perhaps because his professor doesn't like his new and powerful ideas. For English class Du Bois writes an essay influenced by William James entitled "The Renaissance of Ethics" which says duty helps us to decide "how to make the best of things in a world of unprovable ultimates." Du Bois thinks we can do better than trust to an uncertain future if we understand our duty to self and others. Later Du Bois follows James's new ideas presented in *Principles of Psychology* when Du Bois suggests that African Americans who aren't welcome in their own country suffer from a kind of split personality and from mental distress.

Du Bois is a tremendously dedicated student who gets a great deal of work finished, but somehow never stays up past nine o'clock to do his studies. Thanks to his mother Mary's teachings he never drinks. Through all this deeply difficult study, Du Bois must fight for additional money and even has to compete for a financial prize against Clement Morgan who later becomes his friend. Both African American men win prizes for theater at Harvard.

Another problem for Du Bois is that people seem to notice him but do not like him very much. According to Lewis, the brilliant young black man seems stuck up, but he's probably just protecting his sensitive feelings as he strives to make it in a world of snobbery against race, poverty, lack of connections and small town background. Even professors who are kind to Du Bois in one instance can be cruel later on. Nathaniel Shaler expels a white student for refusing to sit next to Du Bois but later writes that African American intelligence is in doubt. All over America important scientists and authors are predicting that the African Americans are at fault for their own suffering or soon will be extinct because of their supposed faults.

Du Bois competes for the Boylston Prize, which gives him the chance to tour Connecticut and Massachusetts giving lectures for money. He wins the prize and earns enough money lecturing to finish Senior year taking several difficult courses. Du Bois is next selected to give a graduation speech in which he imagines that the overbearing Strong Man white style of personality will be morally improved by the example of the weak man or Negro style and that this balance will lead to a better world. Lewis thinks this mixed message is Du Bois's way of making himself popular with the powerful white Harvard society.

After Harvard, Du Bois decides to dedicate the rest of his life to Social Sciences, possibly because his philosophy grades are only average. The academic council gives him an award of money to do graduate level work. Also, he gets an inheritance from his grandfather and with more money than he's ever had in his life, Du Bois takes some time off. He hangs out with influential black Bostonians on Charles Street and soon forgets all about his girlfriend from Fisk, Nelli. He begins to date Maud Cuney from a wealthy family. Lewis hints that Du Bois is never sexually faithful to women.

Du Bois gives an address to the National Colored League asking the African American leaders to help others get a liberal education, rather than forcing all African Americans to learn trades. Up until now Du Bois has always agreed with the ideas of free,



unrestrained capitalism that he has learned at Harvard, but now the world is changing around him. Lewis says that labor demands by the working class frighten the industry barons. There are more and more riots over jobs and Southerners are starting to vote for Democrats instead of Republicans. Lewis believes Du Bois starts to be effected by these conflicts and begins to see African American problems as having more to do with greed than with simple moral weakness. Du Bois begins to do careful, brilliant research for a paper that he will eventually write entitled "*Suppression of the African Slave Trade.*" The paper takes an economic view rather than an emotional view of the slave business.

Du Bois hears that John F. Slater, a wealthy Northern industrialist, has set up \$1 million in funding in 1882 to help "uplift" the emancipated slaves. Lewis says Slater gives this money because he is grateful for cheap cotton. Whatever the reason, Du Bois wants to get some of the funds to continue his education and build on his recently earned Masters degree to achieve a Doctorate.



Chapter 6, "Lehrjahre"

Chapter 6, "Lehrjahre" Summary and Analysis

Like Slater, many wealthy men at the time are leaving money grants to be used by Negroes who have "raised themselves up enough to deserve it." This is a catch-22 because African American schools are so poorly funded it's nearly impossible to get a good education no matter how hard one tries to "raise one's self up," says Lewis.

Taxes in the poor Southern states can't support good schools. A bill proposed to congress by Henry Cabot Lodge would give eight years of federal money raised from tariffs on imports to states where illiteracy is high. This insults the South where the leadership has segregated schools and can't get the blacks up to speed on educational issues even if they want to. The bill also says that the Federal Government can supervise state elections whenever a certain number of voters ask them to and this also angers the Southerners. The bill, nicknamed the "force bill," fails in the Senate because the Northern Republicans do not want to give federal dollars to illiterate Southerners and Midwest farmers, and the Southern populists don't want to pay high tariffs on imports. The idea of reconstructing the South has hit a wall. At this time in his life, Du Bois thinks that with the "right sort" of black voters this kind of legislation won't be necessary.

Booker T. Washington is an ex-slave who has become the president of Tuskegee University. A famous African American leader, he knows how to appeal to whites, although Lewis says Washington may not actually like, respect or trust them. Booker is invited to attend The Mohonkers' conference, which is a meeting of powerful white powerbrokers working on something they call the "Negro problem." With Washington's blessing these men decide the South has to do the educating of African Americans by itself and that the federal government should only help contribute to industrial education for blacks. This means trouble ahead for Du Bois who wants to get the Slater money for a PhD in the arts.

Ex-President Rutherford B. Hayes is in charge of the Slater fund, which is supposed to go to any African American for a European education if he has a talent for art or literature. Hayes says he doesn't believe any such Negro can be found. Du Bois begins a letter writing campaign to Hayes attempting to win the scholarship. He tells off the former president for insulting his race when Hayes says it would be impossible to find qualified black men. Hayes asks Du Bois to apply for the scholarship again the following year and when Du Bois does so he wins the prize.

Du Bois is thrilled to take a boat to Holland, then Germany and is shocked when white women actually invite him to join them on a short trip through Cologne to look at the old heart of the city. He visits famous German towns, and Lewis says he sounds more playful each week as he writes in his diary. He dances with a white woman named Dora Eisenach, and the other white women soon join in asking for a turn in his arms. Du Bois



and Dora fall in love but another white family discourages the union and Dora's parents separate the couple.

Du Bois presents himself at Friedrich-Wilhelm III University in Berlin. It is an important school that has recently taught Schopenhauer, Karl Marx, Max Weber and other famous thinkers. Du Bois is accepted and signs up for challenging courses. During his studies Du Bois writes short stories, which Lewis describes as lonely sounding. He sits alone and makes a sad little ceremony for himself on his 25th birthday. However, instead of wallowing in self-pity Du Bois simply makes himself busy, and even though he is again stretched for money he doesn't complain. He understands German well enough to know that one professor speaks ill of mulattoes to the entire class, but Du Bois does not hold a grudge against the professor for this rude statement.

During breaks, Du Bois travels outside the city and is treated to boozy fun in many villages. In one small town he is literally chased down the street by pointing peasants who have never seen a black man before. Du Bois hikes to Slovakia, a country considered by Europeans to be the edge of civilization, and he sees peasants working as hard as slaves used to work. Later, back in Berlin, he stays with a white American family for a while and then when his second year of funding comes in Du Bois rents a room for himself where he can study Goethe and Hegel.

Hegel's philosophy is too complicated to explain in a few paragraphs, but it concerns the idea of a World Spirit where the back and forth effect of master on slave will eventually raise the awareness of both people. As Hegel explains, "Just as lordship showed its essential nature to be the reverse of what it wants to be, so too bondage will, when completed, pass into the opposite of what it immediately is; being a consciousness repressed within itself, it will enter into itself and change round into real and true independence." Eventually Du Bois writes almost the exact same idea in a more poetic form.

Two of the professors who also influence Du Bois, Schmoller and Wagner, are fans of Marx's new socialist ideas. They think that big business needs to be controlled but mistakenly expect Germany's powerful Prussian intellectuals to make these needed changes. Socialism as described by Marx is quite an important and popular new movement in Germany and Du Bois attends a number of socialist meetings. Lewis sees this as a formative experience for Du Bois.

The young American student finishes his thesis to qualify for an economics PhD, but the Germans refuse to let him defend it. In other words, they refuse to hear his final discussion of his thesis paper in order to be formally granted a PhD. This may be because of pressure from Du Bois's financial sponsors at the Slater Fund who have decided not to give any more money to black graduate students who aren't specifically studying practical ways to help their race. With the funding over, Du Bois is down to his last 20 dollars.

He visits a British friend named John Dollar who gives him a little money so he won't have to ride in the cheap steerage compartment on the boat back to America. Du Bois



makes some negative remarks about the Jewish people traveling with him on the boat and does not associate with other Negroes on the ship. Lewis thinks this is because he has become prejudiced by exposure to wealthy white Anglo Saxon Harvard and Lutheran Prussian Germans and is a bit of a class snob.

Du Bois feels miserable upon spying the Statue of Liberty. He says he is "dropped suddenly back into 'N__' hating America."



Chapter 7, "Wilberforce: Book, Mentor, Marriage"

Chapter 7, "Wilberforce: Book, Mentor, Marriage" Summary and Analysis

Du Bois writes to Dollar that he feels out of place back in the U.S. He needs a job but is somewhat over qualified for the jobs whites are willing to give blacks and finally accepts \$800 dollars a year as a classics chairman at Wilberforce University near Dayton, Ohio.

Wilberforce University gets its start as a place where slave owners and their concubines and mixed race children go for vacations. The resort is driven out of business, then opened a few years later as a school. Now thanks to some tricky legislation, taxpayers support the church-based school, which is partly headed by a bishop Arnett of the AME (American Methodist Episcopal) church. Frequent revival meetings at Wilberforce University keep students out of class, and the student's emotional wailing at these meetings keeps Du Bois awake at night. He hates his job and coincidentally, he has already written a short fictional story about a character just like himself landing at just such a university and eventually becoming a socialist.

To pass the time Du Bois works on the thesis dissertation he started in 1889 in Berlin. It is approved and recommended to be published as a Harvard historical monograph. The work is called the "Suppression of the African Slave Trade," and it seems to prove that that the North and South overlooked importation of slaves for 50 years after this becomes illegal. Du Bois says the large number of living African slave descendents shows the law must have been broken.

Lewis says this idea is later disproved. Unlike island plantations where slaves are worked to death, U.S. "scientific" use and abuse of black slaves means they can "live longer and expand the labor force." Years later Du Bois writes an apology for his belief that pure evil and immorality lead to race problems and failing to see how economics and class struggle cause historic events. However, at this time in life, he is still thinking in the way other Victorians think and doesn't care much about Marx's socialist ideas he will later come to trust.

Someone named Alexander Crummell, an Episcopal priest who spent 20 years as a missionary in Liberia, comes to speak at Wilberforce University. Originally Crummell's mission is to try to raise money for African Americans to move back and to help Liberians build schools for the many groups of native people living in the country. This man, along with Edward Wilmont Blyden, is the first to think of the Pan African movement that Du Bois will later champion. At Wilberforce, Crummell gives a sermon called "The Destined Superiority of the Negro" which influences Du Bois tremendously. By 1887, Crummell no longer expects people to move to Africa, but still insists the tests



of history make Africans a kind of chosen people to lead the world. Du Bois later makes a hero of the man in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*.

In 1897 Du Bois energetically defends Crummell for the job of the president of the American Negro Academy against the more famous and powerful Booker T. Washington in a speech that offers a complicated view of race and ask the famous question "What after all am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both?" In this 1897 speech Du Bois also praises what he calls the Negro's sensitive nature but criticizes his own race as lazy and tells them to work harder. This kind of thinking earns him success with white leaders. On his 28th birthday, Du Bois sits alone and depressed at Wilberforce, longing for Berlin and the company of intellectuals.

Here Lewis goes back in time for a little history lesson. Just a few years earlier the Civil War ended and the era called reconstruction began. Troops from the North were sent to occupy the South and force whites to allow ex-slaves to vote and join in government. Many textbooks describe the Reconstruction as a failure, although Lewis seems to think that if properly handled and continued Reconstruction would have worked. Lewis says the end of Reconstruction came when the Southern congressional representatives eagerly agreed with the Northern Republicans to manage themselves. The Northern congress people see that more money will be left in the Federal budget for railroad and industrial funding in their Northern States.

At about this time Booker T. Washington, president of Tuskegee University, makes a speech suggesting that black Americans and white Americans should remain "separate as five fingers." A scholar who studies Washington interprets this speech to mean blacks should accept restrictions and stop demanding social equality and the Southern whites should let the blacks have more economic equality but possibly not higher education. This kind of statement by Washington makes him wildly popular with whites and Washington becomes the number one person they consult. Money flows into his Tuskegee University, and for a long time no move on black issues is made without consulting Mr. Washington first. A little more than a decade after Reconstruction, Washington has become known as the Wizard of Tuskegee. At this time in his life Du Bois agrees with what he understands of Washington's five fingers speech, but later Washington becomes an arch-enemy of Du Bois.

Du Bois begins to meet and socialize with important poets and other thinkers of the age whom he will call upon as allies in the struggle for civil rights. Du Bois's political life gets its start when he starts a strike to protest the fact that Wilberforce's Bishop Arnett has given the English professorship job to a family member. Du Bois wins and Bishop Arnett is forced out of his job. At the same time Du Bois falls in love with one of his students, Nina Gomer, a pleasant but not particularly brilliant, middle-class Northern African America woman. They marry shortly after.

Again, the contrast between the man Du Bois thinks he should be and the man he really is becomes quite clear in this chapter. He has written for various church publications and will talk about God many times throughout life, but when he's actually thrown into a religiously run school he can't stand it. He wants to dedicate his life to educating and



bettering black people, but those who are not intellectually inclined annoy him. Readers will come to understand that Du Bois is a bit of a snob, yearning to join a club that won't have him. On the other hand, his large ego sets a standard of excellence for other black people who have a right to feel proud of themselves.

Like the man he is writing about, Lewis seems to accept certain socialist ideas. He explains history not in terms of right and wrong but by examining how financial pressures influence people's lives. No matter how brilliant he really is Du Bois must take a job at a lesser school for low pay because no other job is available to him. The North and South agree to under educate blacks and under represent their needs for economic reasons. Later chapters will imply that Washington becomes the champion of lower education for blacks in order to get money for his university and himself.

Finally, this chapter introduces Nina as almost a shadow figure headed for a mismatched life with her brilliant husband.



Chapter 8, "From Philadelphia to Atlanta"

Chapter 8, "From Philadelphia to Atlanta" Summary and Analysis

Desperate to get out of Wilberforce, Du Bois accepts a temporary job assignment at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia where the largest black community in the North is located. This town has long accepted blacks in jobs as caterers and sail makers, and has treated African Americans with respect. However, mill work is now attracting unskilled whites, mostly Irish people into the region, and they are taking over traditionally African American jobs. Blacks are forced to ride outside the train cars where they used to hold jobs as conductors.

Many poor Southern Blacks have joined the Philadelphia residents in the city's 7th Ward alongside a smattering of rich white families. Progressive reformers disagree with conservative reformers about what to do about this situation. Many reformers look at the blacks like a plague to be quarantined. Some of the more right leaning reformers think the crime and poverty is a kind of virus that can rub off from bad people to good people.

It is Lewis's conclusion that these same right leaning white male progressives would like to have a study done on the area, but they do not want any liberal or feminist to handle the situation. They want a strong black man to come in to do the study and make recommendations and take the situation in hand. They also think a black researcher will give credibility to the study and this is why they hire Du Bois. He knows it is a sort of trap, but he takes the job anyway. He puts his scientific sociological skills to work on what will be called *The Philadelphia Negro*, a complex and detailed study based on lengthy interviews with people in the 7th Ward. Du Bois does the interviews himself and works with Isabel Eaton, a feminist woman doing a study about black domestic servants in the area.

Nina, his new wife, is happy. She goes back to Great Barrington to give birth to their first son, Burghardt while Du Bois spends much time in the 7th Ward neighborhood working. The couple is completely overjoyed with their new son. Once finished with the study, *The Philadelphia Negro* is received with great praise. It brilliantly shows that the poor suffer from changes in the economy more deeply than the rich do. The study also shows that the rampant greed of a few industrialists is compounding the post-slavery woes black people suffer. In speeches based on his findings in *The Philadelphia Negro* Du Bois explains that this kind of study gives a unique opportunity to science to learn about a whole a race of men. Money is tight, however, and his job contract has almost expired when he lands a temporary job at the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics doing more studies about the economic life of African Americans.



For these studies Du Bois travels to Farmville in Prince Edward County, a tobacco growing region that is falling into ruin. Most blacks here are the children of slaves leading a rural life. The growth of industry is causing problems for the area economically just as it is for poor farmers in Germany, Italy and France and other peasant strongholds. The African Americans in this region postpone marriage in the hopes of making more money before they wed and they frequently quit farming in order to migrate to cities looking for better jobs. Du Bois is the first to notice these trends and prove them with statistics.

Du Bois does many more studies of black economics, and writes for famous magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly*. He lectures about his work, identifying slavery as the cause of the problem rather than some supposed laziness on the part of blacks. Washington considers hiring Du Bois to work at his Tuskegee Institute but changes his mind. Lewis thinks that white trustees and financial supporters of Tuskegee do not approve of bringing Du Bois to the college for fear that he might influence other blacks to seek education in supposedly impractical matters like arts and literature. In the nick of time before his money runs out Horace Bumstead of Atlanta University invites Du Bois to his university. Nina hates going to live in the Deep South, but the couple has no choice.

What makes Du Bois nationally famous is an article titled "Strivings of the Negro People" which appears in *The Atlantic Monthly*. It boldly, bravely and personally gives voice to the frustration even the luckiest African Americans feel living in the U.S. Du Bois says, "It is a peculiar sensation, this sense of always looking at ones self through the eyes of others." He declares his determination to fight for equality even if the struggle is futile. Many readers are inspired or frightened by this bold piece.

The remainder of this chapter discusses the importance of Du Bois's writing during this period. His scientific fact gathering method of attacking the problem of race differs from others working in sociology at the time. He intelligently builds sympathy for blacks by adding up statistics before offering an opinion. He recounts black death statistics as compared to white life expectancy and lists heart rending interview quotes rather than asking blacks to give their opinions about the origin of their problem. Unlike others Du Bois doesn't believe an answer to people's behavior can be found in genetic differences or body chemistry or morality but in the ways they try to survive a challenging economy. At this time, though, Lewis thinks Du Bois is still an elitist, believing that the solutions for blacks will come from a few especially talented people from his own race. Many Whites appreciate that Du Bois places some of the blame on black laziness, although Lewis says this is not the intended point of his writings.



Chapter 9, "Social Science, Ambition, and Tuskegee"

Chapter 9, "Social Science, Ambition, and Tuskegee" Summary and Analysis

During 1897 the Du Bois family spends Christmas in the men's dormitories at Atlanta University. Nina seems happy with their home and their healthy, active son, Burghardt. Atlanta University teaches many mixed race students but has started to be passed over by white students, or "boycotted" as Lewis says. As soon as black students leave campus they find themselves in a very different and dangerous world of racism and segregation. Just at the time Du Bois comes to work at Atlanta University the Georgia legislature has cut funding to the school in order to punish the college for allowing race mixing in their dining hall says Lewis.

Du Bois stays out of the city of Atlanta and focuses on his work. He recalls this period of his life as a time when he becomes warmer and more human but his students remember him as proper, unfriendly, charismatic man with a cane, gloves who walks briskly around campus. Du Bois gets a reputation for reporting students who have broken rules, particularly those who smoke. The more advanced students admire Du Bois for his tennis prowess and his brilliant mind. Many of his best students eventually submit papers to something called the *Atlanta Conference on Negro Studies*, which is actually a yearly series of publications looking at the economic and social progress of the African American people.

Du Bois begins organizing these conferences in the third year of their publication. He calls on many old friends from Fisk to contribute papers to the collection. His own study called "The Negro in Business" amazes many whites by showing how quickly African Americans have bettered themselves educationally and financially in just the few years since slavery. Du Bois proves through statistics that the blacks are not lazy or of inferior intelligence and that many have gone against all the odds to attain college degrees. Even though great work is coming out of Atlanta University thanks to Du Bois, white philanthropists refuse to fund the school. Suspicion grows that the Tuskegee establishment is hatching a sort of plot against the school, according to Lewis.

Now Du Bois is achieving worldwide recognition. The government asks him to testify at hearings. International magazines ask him to contribute articles. Soon he is in as much demand as the famous Washington to give speeches. No matter how many good arguments he gives for advance education and more social and economic opportunities for blacks, however, Du Bois is surprised that nothing changes in American and money for such reforms doesn't arrive. What else can he do?

In 1899 a black farmer near Atlanta named Sam Hose gets into a scuffle with a white man over a debt and shoots him. Before Hose can go to trial a lynch mob forms. They



kill him and barbecue him and place his charred knuckle bones in a store window. Du Bois races to condemn this horrible act. At nearly the same time, Du Bois's son dies, probably of diphtheria. Du Bois is crushed, and his wife, Nina, will never fully recover. She comes to despise Atlanta.

Around this same Washington gives a speech saying that lynching actually harms whites more than blacks, an idea that appeals to the conservative white community and his financial backers. Blacks, however, begin to criticize Booker for always trying to look at things from the white point of view. Du Bois still thinks Washington has African American's best interests at heart. The two men discuss the idea of Du Bois coming to work at The Tuskegee Institute with Washington, but then Du Bois asks instead for a letter of recommendation from Washington for a different job that he has been offered in Washington D.C. as Assistant Superintendent of Colored schools. Pregnant again, Nina badly wants to leave the South so he hopes to get the Washington D.C. appointment.

Booker pretends to support Du Bois but he is also up for the same job. Fearing that he will lose power and influence in Washington D.C. if Du Bois goes to the capital and begins making friends, Washington actually does not support Du Bois with much enthusiasm. Du Bois does not get the job, and he becomes convinced that something called the "Tuskegee Machine" is out to get him. It's clear that the author, Lewis, agrees that Washington conspires against Du Bois. Lewis thinks Washington has all kinds of secret power and connections with newspapers, philanthropists and politicians, but he doesn't very clearly describe those connections in this part of the text.



Chapter 10, Clashing Temperaments

Chapter 10, Clashing Temperaments Summary and Analysis

Lewis explains that Washington knows how brilliant Du Bois is, but doesn't trust his methods. As a man from the Deep South who has grown up pretending to agree with more powerful white people, Booker has suffered more during his struggle to gain authority than Du Bois has. Washington starts out in slavery then works in a coal mine and finally manages to earn respect. He is even called upon to advise Theodore Roosevelt's White House. The concept of "separate but equal" is the rule in the South, and Washington does his best to appear to agree with this policy whether he really believes in it or not.

Washington has come to be called the Great Accommodator. During speeches Washington even makes racist jokes against his own people in order to fit in with white supporters and in turn they donate a huge amount of money to his college. Some buy newspapers and magazines to serve Washington's cause. He considers a proud, outraged, intellectual black man like Du Bois a threat to his strategy. Washington believes that the key to black success is economic power and influence in the South, not a few well educated leaders going to meetings and publishing papers.

Washington's supporters include Carnegie, Eastman, Peabody, William H. Baldwin, Rockefeller, Rogers, Schiff and the Villards—both father Henry and son Oswald. Lewis says many of these wealthy industrialists are relatives of abolitionists who want well trained and well-behaved black labor to keep down the threat posed by the new white labor unions currently making demands from industry bosses. William H. Baldwin, a railroad tycoon, and other big time philanthropists of the day him dislike the African American educated class and say that these are blacks trying to be White people.

Du Bois goes into a rage when he travels to Tuskegee on a mission to look at some items he wants to bring to the World's Fair because is forced to ride with other African Americans in a dirty, cold railroad train sitting car not a sleeping car. Lewis thinks Du Bois himself is a bit of a class snob. The fight against separating African Americans from whites, or segregation, as it is known, has been started by a small, tough black woman named Ida B. Wells. Ida lost a battle in state court against segregating trains, but now Du Bois wants to lead the national fight against segregation, and asks Washington to help. Despite all his connections with railroad supporters, Washington cannot and will not do anything to help, although he promises Du Bois he will. On the other hand, Washington gets a great deal of assistance from Du Bois in setting up an organization called The Negro Business Bureau. Lewis explains this situation to prove that Du Bois does not set out to undermine Washington.

In 1900, Du Bois leaves for Europe, bringing with him exhibits for the American Negro Exhibit. Even before all the items are unpacked, the judges award him a medal for his



help with the collection. Henry Sylvester Williams is an African descendant who has organized a pan African conference for the World's Fair. Thirty or so prominent black people from all over the planet get together with the Bishop of London to ask for assistance in developing the African homeland. They want to help improve life for African descendants living in poverty in former colonies of the Western empires. Du Bois is among the group, and in later writings he fails to give credit to Mr. Williams for setting up the event. Du Bois returns home in triumph while back in Great Barrington, Nina gives birth to their daughter Nina Yolande. Others notice that Nina begins to scrub and clean house neurotically, possibly to protect her baby from germs, but Du Bois doesn't see anything wrong with this behavior.

Back living together in Atlanta, the couple's social life improves. Du Bois makes close friends with George Towns, another proper, energetic professor who once attended Harvard and John Hope, a remarkable man who has been offered a chance to pass as White but refuses to do so. John is one of the first to complain bitterly about Washington's compromising attitude.

Lewis says that none of the others know it at the time, but no matter what Washington says in public, he is secretly funding some of the most important legal battles against racism of his day, often with his own money. Lewis thinks that Washington is resisting criticizing whites so he can ensure that the rich white Northern reformers and the more moral Southern leaders will leave the blacks alone to work and make money. Then, he believes, once the blacks have economic power through trade jobs they can begin influencing policy.

However, things are changing in the South. In former years conservative Southern leaders have used poll taxes and literacy laws to exclude up to one quarter of the poor whites and up to 60 percent of all blacks from voting, hoping they will not vote Republican or liberal. Now with the cotton economy in shatters, whites are splitting the parties and voting for populists, and blacks are starting to see how their votes can matter. The South has become a tinderbox.

So, while Du Bois is telling students graduating from Fisk that they have a right to expect jobs more important than train porter, Washington releases his autobiography *Up From Slavery*, which paints a rosy picture of progress and the slavery past. Du Bois reviews Washington's book harshly in a magazine article. He warns that just focusing on short term economic gain is a nearsighted and dangerous approach. He shows in this article that Washington's ideas are not new or visionary, and that not all blacks agree with The Wizard. This is the beginning of the battle between the so-called "Tuskegee Machine" and the great African American thinkers known as "The Talented Tenth."



Chapter 11, "The Souls of Black Folk"

Chapter 11, "The Souls of Black Folk" Summary and Analysis

Du Bois and Washington exchange letters soothing each other about their differences over education. The political situation between the two powerful black leaders matters a great deal, according to Lewis, because money is being distributed to African American schools in a new way. The Slater Fund and Peabody money have been folded into something called the Southern Education Board (SEB) and more money is going in the General Education Board, or GEB, started by Rockefeller. There are no significant government programs to help African American education. The big contributors to these GEB and SEB want to help blacks but also fear giving too much anxiety to Southern whites.

William Baldwin and Robert Ogden become chairmen of the GEB. Baldwin actually believes black people cannot be taught much beyond the basic reading and math skills, so his choice is to put money into Washington's Tuskegee projects. Other intelligent white reformers such as Mary Ovington, Francis Garrison and John Milholland criticize the funding plans and say disadvantaged people need even more education than the average student does. Ogden and Baldwin, however, continue to ignore the reality of the tough economic struggle going on in the South and the ruthless politicians who work blacks against whites to win votes. Lewis says the two wealthy philanthropists refrain from criticizing any white Southern policies. Like Andrew Carnegie, they believe their wealth holds a responsibility to better society because this in turn will lead to more money for their many businesses. Peace in the South with a hard working underclass seems to fit their dream, and so Baldwin and Ogden don't want Du Bois and other intellectuals raising dissatisfaction with their plans. They encourage blacks to stay on poor farms they don't own and to stay out of cities where opportunities lie but where race conflict may occur.

Every year Ogden takes a train into the South where colleges that are reliant on GEB money beg him to stop. He always stops at Tuskegee. Here he gives his blessings to Washington while the black servants entertain him and serve him dinner. Baldwin thinks a way to control Du Bois would be to hire him to work at Tuskegee. Washington invites Du Bois to dinner, then the two men take more meetings on the matter. At this time Du Bois is trying to be reasonable. Other black reformers like Edward H. Morris, a philosopher, Monroe Trotter, a firebrand lawyer and legislator and Ida Wells-Barnett (Ida B. Wells) who has helped start the world famous Settlement House, are all openly criticizing Washington. Washington uses his political pull to destroy opposition to his ideas about basic training for blacks. This seems very dangerous to Lewis who mentions that it is becoming accepted by the majority of whites at this time that blacks really are inferior people with little intelligence, little drive and too much sexual feeling.



In the early 1900s across the world, so-called scientists attempt to prove that blacks are closer to apes than people and have smaller brains than other humans. Up until this time Du Bois has believed current German theories that assign certain races certain qualities. Now he starts to see those ideas are being used to put African people on a lower rank. Du Bois writes articles criticizing new books like *The Mystery Solved: The Negro Beast* or *The Leopard's Spots* which paint African Americans as dangerous, lazy criminal sex maniacs.

Du Bois then writes a book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, which revolutionizes the self-respect of many African origin people around the world. In this book, 14 self-examining essays, fictional stories and also fact-based analysis are accompanied by lovely and traditional Negro spirituals as well as beautiful European poetry from Browning, Swinburne, Tennyson and others. Du Bois shows the connection between the races as well as the intelligence and sophistication of blacks by bringing art from Europeans and Africans together.

An emotional reworking of previous work, one essay again asks, "How does it feel to be a problem?" In an essay called, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," Du Bois boils down African history from the glory of the Pharaohs to the contemporary South in only a couple of brilliant paragraphs. Du Bois says that an African American is a divided person, living in a world where he is an outcast. However, Du Bois feels this division will give blacks a greater wisdom and insight once they begin to recognize their own greatness. Du Bois talks about this slow realization as a mystical consciousness raising and indeed a generation later this idea will appeal to radical black reformers.

Another essay supports an unpopular government attempt to help blacks called The Freedmen's Bureau. Lewis says the essay "Of the Sons and Master and Man" is a mishmash of elitism and racism against Jews combined with more progressive thinking about class. Two more essays give a realistic idea of the lifestyle of the rural black South. Du Bois analyzes black spirituals in a scholarly way then goes on to dissect the actions of Washington. He claims that change can never happen from the bottom up as Washington wishes, but must come from educated professionals at the top, whom he calls the "Talented Tenth."

Of course, when Du Bois says "The Talented Tenth" he refers to himself and his friends, mostly born in the North and college trained, well to do and with professional jobs. In reality, many of the people in this category do not support Du Bois's broad educational plans because they fear the power of Washington to "make or break their careers." Like other prosperous people in America, the upper class blacks generally fear the rise in prosperity of the lower classes of any color, according to Lewis.

Some book reviewers associated with Washington either ignore *The Souls of Black Folk* or call it a dangerous book. *Collier's Weekly* completely mocks the idea that black souls matter at all, saying "With sufficient food, drink and warmth, the Negro is happy, come what may." Du Bois directly attacks the editor of *Collier's* for this racism. On the other hand, many important intellectual whites learn something from Du Bois's work and people of all races find it resonates with them. Oswald Garrison Villard goes against the

other pro-Booker T. Washington papers and magazines to praise the book in his *Evening Post*. *The Independent* also points out the book's great value.



Chapter 12, "Going Over Niagara: Du Bois and Washington"

Chapter 12, "Going Over Niagara: Du Bois and Washington" Summary and Analysis

Du Bois has dinner with Washington and his third wife in their fancy home. This is surprising because Du Bois has so recently published *The Souls of Black Folk*, which contradicts Washington's position. Washington is rolling in money at the moment because he has recently come from a fundraiser at Madison Square Garden where ex-president Grover Cleveland has announced that laziness is the main reason for black problems. Washington has kept his mouth shut even if this offends him. Other famous people insult blacks, but Washington says nothing to argue with them.

Monroe Trotter and George Forbes have had enough of Washington's power and publish *The Boston Guardian* mostly to fight the Booker fans they call Bookerites. Trotter interrupts a Louisville African American council meeting to challenge Washington and is almost thrown out by force. Many criticize Trotter's shocking behavior. Du Bois stays out of this conflict because he likes his old Harvard chum Trotter and his wife, Pinkie. Later Trotter tries to disrupt Washington's speech at a National Negro Business League meeting. He boos the Tuskegee brains.

Soon fistfights and shouting break out and someone is stabbed. Reports of the unrest scare Northern white supporters. Thomas Fortune and others attack Trotter and try to destroy the *Guardian* magazine by hitting it with a libel suit. Trotter is sent to jail. Du Bois doesn't want to attack Washington directly but says the prisoner is being denied the freedom of speech to publish any opinions in the *Guardian* he pleases. Washington wants to appease Ogden and business supporters so he blames Du Bois for the attack by Trotter, although Lewis says Du Bois is not involved in any way.

Ogden believes Du Bois has orchestrated the infighting and even thinks Atlanta University is behind it all. For this reason Atlanta stands to lose all its funding. At the same time that he is stabbing Du Bois in the back, Washington tries to get Du Bois to agree with him on a list of people for a conference of African Americans to be held at Carnegie Hall to raise money to defend poor blacks in court. Lewis thinks Washington only wants Du Bois's support because he's afraid that now all the northern college educated blacks will turn on him. At first Du Bois agrees to work on the guest list, but Washington keeps trying to stack the deck with people who agree with him. Du Bois gets sick of his names being deleted by Washington and he leaves the Wizard guessing if he will even attend the conference himself. The ability to put together the Carnegie Hall meeting shows Washington's great power.

Now Du Bois comes right out and writes criticism of Washington for insisting on only basic education for blacks. He also writes "Credo," an article that talks in biblical terms



about his pride in his race. Du Bois sees a growing racial prejudice in America. He writes another article accusing Washington of bribing the press to reflect his own views. Oswald Villard, publisher of *The Evening Post*, believes this accusation but Du Bois can't prove it. The unsupported accusation turns out to be a big political blunder.

Du Bois holds a conference of 29 highly educated men and one teenage boy in Ontario on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. These men come together because they are annoyed with Washington's approach, though most are not as willing to go as far as Trotter in attacking him. Du Bois and Trotter write that the meeting's theme is a "Declaration of Principles". These principles state that African Americans deserve totally equal rights to education. The group of reformers is called The Niagara movement. Washington opposes their efforts, but supporters of The Wizard start to doubt if they should listen to him after all. When Washington's biggest fan, William Baldwin, dies other philanthropists almost skip Washington and Tuskegee on their annual train ride past his campus.

Edward L. Simon and Harry Pace spend all their savings to start a newspaper with Du Bois to spread the ideals of the Niagara movement. The *Moon Illustrated Weekly* is not a big success, but it does put Washington on the hot seat. Another meeting of Niagara movement in 1906 complains about Jim Crow laws that make voting hard and prevent growth of African American civil rights. Du Bois's words in summing up the goals of this Niagara meeting are, "We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn America, political, civil and social."

In 1906 race tensions are hot. President Teddy Roosevelt gives a dishonorable discharge to a whole African American military Battalion to punish them for the killing of a white person, even though these men have recently helped the President charge up San Juan Hill. In another incident, ten thousand white people who have read a newspaper article that suggests blacks are assaulting white women take to the streets and beat up every black person they see. Lewis thinks the article is intentionally published by wealthy White paper owners who don't want poor whites to join with poor blacks in cities and outvote the rural planters and politicians. Lewis argues that the race conflict is actually class conflict. Du Bois hurries back to Atlanta to guard his family from violence. He sits outside on the porch all night with shotgun. He also publishes a desperate prayer begging for peace and understanding.

The Moon Illustrated Weekly hasn't sold many copies. Du Bois starts another magazine called *The Horizon*. In it Du Bois says he starts to feel the poor are the best allies for African Americans, an idea that sounds socialist. In *The Horizon*, Du Bois makes bolder statements than ever before. He criticizes his old friend Thomas Fortune, now a heavy drinker and a person who is becoming part of the Tuskegee Machine. Cotton prices are falling, tension against blacks is growing and mobs are starting to attack African American business owners. Angry at how Roosevelt ignores these problems, Du Bois urges African Americans to vote Democratic, not Republican. This is a big change for former slaves who had been liberated by Abraham Lincoln, a Republican.



Chapter 13, "Atlanta: Scholar Behind the Veil"

Chapter 13, "Atlanta: Scholar Behind the Veil" Summary and Analysis

Du Bois continues to organize conferences and fight with Washington. He's worried about Atlanta University failing to get the money it needs because of his controversial work. Du Bois is full of energy, writing from morning to night every day, but the thing that's most frustrating is that he is not allowed in to use the brand new public library to do his work simply because he is African American. When she has to do household shopping, Nina refuses to take the segregated bus and when she does go to buy groceries, she has to wait until all whites are served before she can buy her food. Du Bois sends Nina and his daughter to Great Barrington so they can get away from all this racism, but his family grows apart.

The 1905 Atlanta University study conference starts at the end of May. Du Bois's ambitious goal is to create a bibliography of everything blacks have produced so other scientists in the future can go back and review the progress being made by African Americans studies over time. Mary Ovington arrives for the conference. This blonde white woman is trying to help improve the lives of working black women, but she's having trouble get her studies published because her honest reports anger conservative magazine owners.

Ovington and Du Bois flirt like lovers but Lewis thinks they are not ever romantically involved. The two people bravely traipse around together in a town where one can be arrested for race mixing. The conference attracts more and more intellectuals of both races. Theodore Roosevelt speaks at Hampton University, encouraging blacks not to try to achieve a higher education, and Du Bois criticizes this position. Because he has gone against the president, Lewis says, Du Bois is unable to find anyone to give him money or support for writing a biography of Frederick Douglass or another subject he wants to write about, Nat Turner. Opinion is turning against Du Bois and working at Atlanta is becoming increasingly stressful.



Chapter 14, "NAACP: The Beginning"

Chapter 14, "NAACP: The Beginning" Summary and Analysis

Du Bois resigns from Atlanta University to take the job of Director of Publicity and research for the new National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP. The organization is founded by whites with the goal of helping African Americans push for increased civil rights. The spark that brings the NAACP together is in 1908 when Springfield race riots result in 80 injuries, six deadly shootings and two lynchings. Racist newspaper and governors statements about the riots anger a passionate reformer named Walling who writes article in *The Independent* asking what large organization can come to the aid of blacks. Mary Ovington helps pull together an organization to do the job. Oswald Villard, the son of railroad baron and philanthropist Henry Villard, is a publisher who writes a document explaining why a large national organization is needed and many people flock to the first meeting of what will become the NAACP. Many of the Niagarites join the group. Black men and white women tend to be at odds because years ago the African American leader Frederick Douglass has agreed not to support the cause of female voting, says Lewis. Nevertheless, about a third of the attendees are white women.

At the first NAACP meeting Professor Seligman gives evidence of the brains being the same in white and blacks. Du Bois says the blacks are poor not because of their own deficiencies but because unequal treatment and the loss of self-respect. Du Bois and other NAACP members consider pulling together to work with labor unions, but decide not to because many union members fear blacks. White union members fear blacks will take their jobs and the AFL labor union leader Samuel Gompers doesn't seem committed to the African American cause.

When members are being proposed for the leadership roles of the NAACP, one woman angrily protests the nomination of Washington. Villard complains to his uncle that the African American members of the National Committee for the advancement of Negro (which is the name the group uses until they choose NAACP) are nasty and petty. Du Bois is optimistic about blacks and whites working together in the group, calling the NAACP an alliance, not a charity. The first gathering of the NAACP agrees to reprimand the president of the United States, demand civil rights and to get access to voting and equal education.

One myth about the meeting is that Du Boise votes to exclude Ida Wells Barnett from committee of forty decision makers, but actually it's Villard who does so. Du Bois pleads to put her back onto the committee. She eventually withdraws from the NAACP. Lewis says Villard thinks he will be the boss of the new organization because he is raised in privilege as the son of the Northern Pacific railroad tycoon and comes from a family of New England abolitionists. Villard promises Washington the NAACP won't be run by Du Bois. Furthermore, Villard doesn't want too many blacks on the NAACP council. He



writes a negative critique of Du Bois's new writings about John Brown. Washington writes letters to important donors to keep them from giving money to the new NAACP organization.

This is too much. Du Bois blasts the Tuskegee Machine for using blacks as clubs to keep white laborers from asking for too many rights. He starts to get help and support from Clarence Darrow, Horace Bumstead, Susan Warton and other prominent people. When his friend, the president of Atlanta University, traitorously takes money from Washington, Du Bois decides to resign without taking any additional pay from the college. He doesn't completely accept the apology the University President sends.

At the second NAACP conference, the word "Colored" is included in the name in order to include all people of the downtrodden races. Du Bois is given the propaganda job plus a salary. His dramatic talent makes him the perfect choice. (At this time the word propaganda simply means to spread or "propagate" messages. It is not a negative word.)



Chapter 15, "Rise of the Crisis, Decline of the Wizard"

Chapter 15, "Rise of the Crisis, Decline of the Wizard" Summary and Analysis

Years later Du Bois says he shifts from economics to propaganda because of all the frustrating events happening in the world around him, but Lewis thinks this choice suits his nature too. The first action Du Bois takes in his new job is to start a magazine for the NAACP called *The Crisis: a Record of the Darker Races* even though his other magazines have failed. He publishes and prints 1,000 copies of his first issue with help from Villard. Lewis says the style is influenced by writings by Frederick Douglass as well as *The Globe* and *Freeman*. In his opening remarks in the magazine, Du Bois promises to use the magazine to show the dangers of race prejudice.

The first issue ironically criticizes the lynching of some dark skinned Italians as well as rampaging white militia who are lightly punished after shooting up a black neighborhood. Du Bois points out the amazing successes of several talented African American, then rallies support for a black man who shoots a white man in self defense as the white man tries to force him to go back to work on a farm. The magazine contains suggestions about what to read and reports on the progress of women's issues. It also mentions that Washington is traveling Europe assuring people that African Americans are being treated well in America. In response to Washington's trip, Du Bois and the NAACP have already sent a signed document of disagreement called "An Appeal to England and Europe."

The Crisis is an immediate success and the group has to print twice as many copies when the next issue is published. In *The Crisis* Du Bois never hesitates to complain about any problem. He exposes dishonest or immoral African American church leaders, the educational quality of Wilberforce University and even bad grammar and weak reporting by other black journalists. The other papers, many of which are influenced by Washington, lash back at him, but the popularity of *The Crisis* grows. By 1912 the publication's circulation is 22,500.

Lewis says the style of the writing is almost religious and reads like a sermon. The magazine encourages people to face their own prejudices. One tough issue is women's rights. For years white female suffragettes (women demanding the right to vote) have avoided race issues. Now, Du Bois says they should include more black women in their battles. On the other hand, he writes a powerful attack on men who crowd the streets to burn marching suffragettes with cigarettes. Du Bois doesn't quite know how to handle socialism and labor organizers. Since so many labor union members and leaders refuse to work with African Americans, it's hard to support their goals and cause. Also, the Socialists dismiss the race problem as an outgrowth of labor problems and Du Bois can't agree with that, either.



When election time comes up, Du Bois sees that black people can influence the vote because four parties are fighting for the presidency. Taft, a Republican, has said that the South should handle the black problem, so the party of Lincoln can't be trusted. Roosevelt is running on an independent Bull Moose Party, but he hasn't helped African Americans as president and now he refuses to make any statement of support for blacks. Finally Du Bois throws his considerable support to Democrat Woodrow Wilson, an educated man who promises to address racial issues.

Although Washington continues to fight Du Bois and try to protect his own power position, he is doing some good. Behind the scenes he is wheeling and dealing and has gotten a reprieve for the black farmer who shot the white man. In *The Crisis* Du Bois plows ahead with essays saying it should be legal for blacks and whites to marry, because otherwise black women will be helpless against their white seducers.

Washington and his employee Emmett Scott start to see Du Bois as a threat to the circulation of the many papers that come out of their own university or which are owned by wealthy supporters of Tuskegee. They rally these newspapers to attack the NAACP members and white progressive supporters. The Bookerites try to stop government contracts with Milholland's company. The Bookerite paper, *The World*, even hints that a friendly meeting of progressives has white/black sexual connotations.

Real slander involving the aging Washington is just around the corner. Washington is discovered drunk in a red light district in the middle of the night outside the home of a married white woman. Witnesses say he is calling out "sweetheart." The woman's husband emerges and attacks Washington, but in a rare twist, the white man goes to jail. It is a huge scandal that threatens everything Washington has worked to achieve. Du Bois and the others who dislike Washington probably believe he has behaved improperly, but none of them attack him. A sort of peace treaty is called when Washington endorses the NAACP and the NAACP sends a cold letter of support to the National Negro Business League founded by Washington. Du Bois doesn't pull any punches and continues to write articles critical of Washington's policies, but makes no personal attacks.



Chapter 16, "Connections at Home and Abroad"

Chapter 16, "Connections at Home and Abroad" Summary and Analysis

Nina and Du Bois have grown apart. For one thing, he is often far away from home. His daughter attempts to get his attention by frequently imagining illnesses.

In 1911 while Nina has begun house hunting in New York, Du Bois goes to London to address an upscale club called The Lyceum and to attend the new Universal Races Congress. Ironically, at the same time Nina faces trouble finding an acceptable place to live, the NAACP is fighting a battle against housing discrimination. According to Lewis, Washington worries that Du Bois will stir up trouble in England.

Du Bois opens the conference with a lovely poem. The room is filled with talented, famous people who believe world harmony is just around the corner, and Du Bois gets the royal treatment. Lewis says Du Bois is fooled into thinking this event will change global society because he still clings to the teachings of Hegel that pure, true ideas can transform the world.

One evening Du Bois is seen dancing with a beautiful dark skinned woman who will become the model for *The Dark Princess*, a character in one of his later books. Lulled into a sense of well-being and hope that this world organization will make a difference he heads home, but the start of WWI makes a second such conference impossible.

Back in New York, Du Bois somehow finds the time to finish and publish his first novel, *The Quest for the Silver Fleece*. It's not a perfect book, much too flowery in keeping with the style of the day, but it ties together stories of whites and blacks in a new way. The novel concerns a brilliant uneducated Southern black woman named Zora and her boyfriend Bles. At first they are wonderful, wild, natural and superior to others but Zora eventually realizes she can learn things from white education. Her desperate struggle to better herself includes a parody of the Ogden type philanthropists who plot to keep her down, some kindly educators, greedy cotton and gold barons and sexual harassment by white men.

Lewis claims this is the first American book with a dark skinned heroine. This reflects Du Bois's belief that women will point the way to a better world. He imagines Zora owning a copy of the books which have guided his own principles, from philosophy to poetry to moral tales to an agricultural encyclopedia.

Du Bois's own daughter, Yolande, is not treated with such respect as the heroine of his novel. A mostly absent father, Du Bois pushes Yolande too hard for her abilities, often making her feel like a failure in the process. Du Bois makes a tremendous effort to get



Yolande enrolled in the exclusive Bedales School for girls in England. Just as World War I breaks out Nina and Yolande arrive in Britain to enroll the girl in Bedales. Both mother and daughter are miserable. It's cold, wet and unfriendly in England. Nina's fur coats are lost at sea and she comes down with some sort of illness just as Zeppelins start dropping bombs on the nation. Nina sends whining letters back home requesting more money and Du Bois manages to scrape up an amazing \$1,800 a month so Nina can get a nice private apartment. Now Nina writes more cheerful letters, but she is concerned Yolande's grades are too high. She thinks the school is too easy on her daughter. In addition, the school supervisors complain about Yolande's bad manners.

Du Bois barely takes time to write back. While his wife and daughter worry about bombs, he's off to Jamaica for a conference (where he meets Marcus Garvey, a future leader). Nina writes back that she's starting to enjoy England, although she may just be putting on a brave front. Nina mentions that Yolande acts bored and listless. She fears her daughter misses her father too much and possibly will grow into one of those black women who one day realizes she is not good for anything. Lewis wonders if Nina doesn't mean a woman like herself.

Even as he forgets to write back to family, Dubois is transforming himself into a stage director. He puts on a huge musical review called "The Star of Ethiopia." This musical combines classical African themed pieces like Aida with black original music and spectacle to boast of a certain historic black superiority in the arts. With this show Du Bois tries to prove that Africans do and always have had intellectual and artistic talent. Many supposed scientists of the day try to prove blacks have always been slower than whites in cultural and technical development. In his publication, *The Negro*, Du Bois attacks many of these silly ideas with more accurate information.

Du Bois writes to Nina that he's going to Florida. While there, Lewis supposes, he has an affair with an old friend of the family, a woman who is also unfortunately a battered wife. He most certainly is having affairs with several women at this time, including Jessie Fauset who is a writer who works on *The Crisis* with him. Nina knows Jessie Fauset personally.

For whatever reason, Bedales gives up on trying to educate Yolande and kicks her out. In a letter pleading to stay, Yolande writes to her father, "I can't help it if I'm stupid." The mother and daughter arrive home in 1916 just as Du Bois leaves for a vacation in Maine.



Chapter 17, Crises at *The Crisis*"

Chapter 17, Crises at *The Crisis*" Summary and Analysis

In 1913 Washington's influence is in decline compared to that of Du Bois. Jim Crow laws are infuriating people so that they won't accept his attitude, and many young adults have grown up reading *The Crisis*. Du Bois repeatedly says he does not want to lead the NAACP, but if whites try to dominate the organization he will fight. Villard, Florence Kelley and Joel Spingarn often face Du Bois's boardroom attacks. Lewis says this is a defensive strategy by Du Bois (attack first), but Du Bois has also come to expect more from whites.

He runs a self-supporting paper, *The Crisis*, for the benefit of a mostly white organization, and so when anyone questions his authority it makes him angry. Now, Villard asks Du Bois to publish lists of crimes by African Americans in the interests of balanced journalism. Du Bois thinks there is enough negative reporting about African Americans and blows up because this is not the purpose of *The Crisis* and the board sides with Du Bois.

Other infighting about the new secretary and the power given to different branches of the organization make things worse. Ida Wells-Barnett leaves after a fight with Villard. Du Bois fails to mention it in *The Crisis* when Trotter gets an appointment to go talk to the U.S. President about his policies. Villard and Du Bois start to hate one another, and Du Bois does some maneuvering to get control of the whole organization. Spingarn and Ovington try to make up a way to keep both men on board. They give Du Bois independence and move him out of Villard's office, but the two still argue. Villard at bottom does not want to see black people have social equality with whites.

In 1914, the group fights and finally votes to put power in an executive committee with four leaders, chairman, editor, treasurer and secretary, giving whites and blacks equal power. Joel Spingarn becomes the chairman of the NAACP. For three years this works out well for Du Bois. Spingarn does speaking tours and seems to understand the black people's plight. Because he is Jewish, Spingarn is able to tap into the good will of generous Jewish donors who see the African American struggle linked to their own. Spingarn also produces anthologies and helps found the publishing house Harcourt Brace. One day he makes the mistake of complaining about the money spent on *The Crisis* and asks Du Bois to focus more on NAACP news. This makes Du Bois very defensive. Although the magazine continues to profit, there is a brief downturn when the economy of the country sours. Spingarn writes a letter to Du Bois asking him to cut expenses, calling his work "trifling." A huge fight breaks out at the next board meeting, but when all the dust settles, whites are still in control of the organization, but Du Bois is in total control of *The Crisis*.



Chapter 18, "The Perpetual Dilemma"

Chapter 18, "The Perpetual Dilemma" Summary and Analysis

Washington dies of heart problems and Lewis says that the obituary Du Bois writes for him is "stately and judgmental." Du Bois talks about how much blacks have to thank the man for as well as blaming him for a weakening of the college system. A new era begins at Tuskegee with a president who dislikes Jim Crow laws.

Americans are also looking to new rulers. Most hope to stay out of the blazing conflict going on in Europe and they have a promise from Wilson that this will be so. It seems unlikely that America can stay out of the war which is so big that it forces 50-year-old German school chums of Du Bois to put on uniforms and go to the front. Du Bois writes an essay showing that the centuries-old battle over Africa is at the heart of much of the WWI conflict. He implies that a downside of democracy is that it allows poor the power to share in the money earned from exploiting colored people.

This and other thinking give Du Bois greater celebrity. Someone even wants to name a cigar after him. Du Bois uses his growing popularity to fight against the new film "The Birth of A Nation" which makes heroes out of the Ku Klux Klan and depicts blacks as out of control rapists. When this film plays in theaters a white viewer shoots a black teen, white viewers scream for lynching and mob murders increase more in 1915 than they have in a decade. For once Du Bois wants censorship, but many of his civil rights coworkers disagree. As a lucky flipside, many people both white and black became aware of the NAACP through their protest of the film. The effort by the NAACP to stop this film revives in the 1930s when the movie is re-released with sound. Pressure groups including the Irish join blacks to demand the movie be re-cut in order to be less offensive. The Star of Ethiopia musical extravaganza helps to counter the bad feelings about African Americans generated by the film.

In 1913 and 1914 Trotter meets with President Wilson on race issues. The second visit occurs right after Wilson's wife dies. Trotter begins a loud argument with the president over his broken promises on race issues, outrageous behavior for one of the first black men invited to the White House. *The Crisis* defends Trotter, but later fails to support Trotter, Grinke and Wells Barnett's fight against "The Birth of a Nation," so the three begin to openly attack Du Bois personally. Still, Du Bois feels that now the Tuskegee Machine has fallen apart, he can organize all the civil rights organizations into one group. Du Bois hopes to rally all the reformers around the growing terror of lynching. He publishes an article about how a mentally handicapped rapist named Jesse Washington is dragged by car, carved up then burned by an angry mob. Then he rails against Woodrow Wilson for saying and doing nothing about the incident. The article raises anger against lynching.



Du Bois's attitudes about Germany begin to change at this time. His favorite European country seems to be the aggressors in the war. He writes that the British deserve the right to administer the fate of colored people around the globe. Later, he changes his mind about this too, and backs Irish liberation fights against the British as well as the Easter Rebellion. In *The Crisis* Du Bois likes to point out the successes of talented black people, many of whom will become important leaders. He celebrates the successes of Marcus Garvey and a rising military man named Charles Young, who Du Bois hopes will become the first African American general.

To further grow the civil rights movement, Du Bois gets behind something called the Amenia Conference. A large group of African American leaders gather at the fancy estate of Joe Spingarn. Presidential candidates Wilson and Charles Hughes (a Republican) send greetings to the gathering, but *The Crisis* boldly attacks both politicians. He says Wilson's new freedom ideas haven't helped the South, and the president has allowed attacks on Latin America. Wilson's people have toppled the elected president of Mexico and allowed American soldiers to invade Mexico following Pancho Villa. Du Bois toys with the idea of forming a Negro party. Ultimately, the only thing the Amenia conference really proves is that the NAACP and Northern industrial power are on the rise. Du Bois correctly predicts that there will be no quick fix to civil rights issues.

In the meantime, Marcus Garvey notices that all the main leaders of the NAACP are either white or look white. The group decides to put James Weldon Johnson, an ex-Bookerite Black man, in charge of bringing in new recruits to the organization, and he is very successful in raising membership.

Du Bois falls ill and has to have his kidney removed. It is touch-and-go for a while and many people write letters of concern. Clearly Du Bois has become the most important African American leader in the country and it is a cause of rejoicing when he recovers.

Wilson enters WWI on April 2, 1917. Du Bois thinks this is the right choice. He thinks this could signal the end to old-style power and repression in Europe. When Aleksandr Kerensky's socialist government overthrows the powerful czar of Russia, Du Bois thinks it is time to convince American socialists to reject racism and include the black struggle as a key part of their movement. As a member of the executive committee for Intercollegiate Socialist Society, he calls on the labor unions and Socialists to fight racism if they want to come to power, but they do nothing. Du Bois travels to the South as soon as he is feeling healthy. In Atlanta he criticizes Coca-Cola for taking tax money from poor blacks and whites to build water mains to their own factory complex when the poor people themselves live in wretched slums. He praises Atlanta University, and the beauty of what he calls Colored Charleston.

On his return North, Du Bois has to deal with a proposal by Joel Spingarn for creating a black training camp for soldiers who might then become U.S. officers. Du Bois is torn about this. Charles Young and others debate the issue. Of course if African Americans do join the military they will be assigned to separate units, which Du Bois hopes will be allowed to carry weapons. For this they must have African American leaders to train



them properly, so people like Charles Young would have to be promoted. Du Bois calls for an African American officers' training camp. According to Lewis Du Bois thinks that if blacks fight for democracy, old white power regimes will crumble. His support of plans to create a special African American training site is rewarded when called Camp Des Moines is built. Du Bois calls for African American men to enlist even if it is in a segregated military. Trotter accuses Du Bois of folding into pressure from the government in making this suggestion. Socialists Asa Randolph and Chandler Owen add their blame in their magazine *The Messenger*. Du Bois puts aside his idealistic belief that training should not be segregated and continues to encourage enlistment.

White Southern officers become alarmed that they could some day serve under a black man. One lieutenant writes his Senator threatening to kill someone if this comes to pass. Mysteriously, Charles Young is dragged out of his unit and sent to the military hospital for a battery of unnecessary tests. The doctors claim his high blood pressure will prevent Young from serving in the military any longer, although he has fought valiantly in plenty of battles with no sign of sickness. Young is forced to retire from the military, but in protest he rides from Ohio to Washington D.C. on horseback, proving he's physically fit.



Chapter 19, "The Wounded World"

Chapter 19, "The Wounded World" Summary and Analysis

Thanks in part to Du Bois's urging, 700,000 African Americans register for the military, but shortly later the war office says that no non-white officer above the level of captain will be commissioned. This means that black officers will be noncommissioned, and may have control but not really have the authority and command to take charge of others. Noncommissioned officers are generally not people who have gone to college. The African American officers will be chosen from a pool of mostly uneducated enlisted privates. The White House also decides that 70 percent of the black soldiers are trained for dirty manual labor and supply jobs instead of for fighting.

By 1917 in East St. Louis the friction between white labor members of the new union the AFL and black workers has grown. The skilled union members tell unskilled white immigrants and new workers to join their union or the black people will take their jobs. Anger boils over on July 1, when blacks fire on a carload of plain clothed police officers who they probably mistake for men who have been shooting at them in the previous days. Furious whites take to the street and drag blacks out of their poor housing called Shanty Town. They burn 6,000 homes and hundreds of mangled black corpses begin to bob up out of the river as whites cheer. Du Bois rushes to town with a white social worker named Martha Gruening and the two do field research - Du Bois with blacks and Martha with whites — to get the facts on how this horrible event has occurred. Ultimately 82 white and 23 black people are indicted for the crimes. Samuel Gompers, the leader of the AFL, makes excuses for the whites, and, surprisingly perhaps, Teddy Roosevelt criticizes Gompers for his racism.

Willard suggests a silent protest march to memorialize the victims. Du Bois joins 8,000-10,000 silent and attractively dressed African Americans on 5th Avenue in Washington in one of the first peaceful civil rights protest marches in history. During the same month 50,000 people read *The Crisis* when Du Bois publishes his essay "The Massacre of East St. Louis." The article includes detailed findings about what set the riot off, as well as the famous words, "No land that loves to lynch N—s can lead the hosts of Almighty God." In the essay Du Bois traces the roots of the riot to financial troubles and worries by people of both races. Strangely, in a reprint of the article much later, Lewis says, Du Bois adds an incident of blacks fighting bravely that is totally made up.

About a month later the African American 24th Infantry division stationed in Huston grows angry when one of their own is sent to prison for trying to stop a white police officer for beating up a black woman. They march into town and fire on a police station hitting 16 white people. Blacks die in the fray, too. How can Du Bois react to this turn of events? The 24th is clearly wrong, but it has fought bravely for America in the past. Du Bois writes in *The Crisis* that only extreme pressure can have made the men react this



way. The military swiftly holds secret trials for members of the 24th. Nineteen are hung and 67 get jail sentences of 24 years to life.

Emmett Scott, old ally of Booker T. Washington, lands a job in Washington at the Department of the Interior. From this position of power he assures Du Bois that he has given a copy of *The Crisis* to Secretary of State Baker, but Lewis thinks that he is probably working against Du Bois. Du Bois argues that blacks are saving the world, and so after the war the Europeans should create an African State as a reward. He says that Belgium should give up the Congo for this purpose. Du Bois's friend Joel Spingarn joins the military intelligence service because he's too unwell to fight in actual battles. Du Bois also writes an essay condemning Wilson for hanging the black soldiers of the 24th without fair trials. This sort of outspokenness will soon turn the attention of the U.S. government on Du Bois, but in the mean time he celebrates his birthday with a huge celebrity party.

Du Bois is trying to decide if working with the AFL labor union would be a good idea, but finally concludes that the workers are too racist against blacks. The GEB decides not to fund liberal arts for African Americans because of a report by a man named Thomas Jesse Jones. The report criticizes the fact that GEB money is being spent to teach languages, physical science, medicine, law and philosophy. Thomas reports that the quality of schools teaching these to blacks is low. GEB board members meet and argue that black teachers should really be part time farmers.

Military Intelligence investigates and turns out secret reports about the NAACP and Spingarn who Lewis believes they mistrust because he is Jewish. When Spingarn joins the Military Intelligence Bureau he learns the group is trying to derail *The Crisis*, so he starts working on finding a way to save the paper and his friend Du Bois. During the same period, Spingarn starts trying to get the Federal Government to overrule states' individual laws in order to make lynching a federal crime. Possibly to protect Du Bois from being arrested under a new Sedition Act (a bill that punishes people who criticize the government), Spingarn offers Du Bois a job with the Military Intelligence Bureau, with the understanding that Du Bois will write articles more favorable to the government. Du Bois agrees, and Lewis says this is because of personal vanity.

Du Bois does start writing articles asking blacks to join the war effort. Many sign up, and some of Du Bois's old friends want him off the NAACP because they feel he is betraying black people. The leaders of the MIB see that Du Bois is becoming unpopular with blacks because so many are dying in war, so they don't want him to be hired to an MIB job. They withdraw the offer of a job and send Spingarn to the front lines to fight.

At last in 1916 the war is over. Du Bois takes a boat with other journalists to see President Wilson negotiate the armistice (or peace treaty) between nations after the war. Many people are excited by Wilson's idea that a League of Nations (later the United Nations) be set up to keep peace in the world. Du Bois takes advantage of this emotional time to try to set up a meeting in Paris about the future of Africans. It's good for Du Bois to get out of the country. He's growing unpopular because many blacks hate him for encouraging two hundred thousand of them to fight, and he can't even raise



money to write a book about the war. As Du Bois runs about trying to put the African meeting together, he says American secret service agents follow him. The American government has refused to give permission for the meeting

The First African Congress does happen when a black representative to the French congress who is quite well loved for his war service helps set up the meeting. During the week of the meeting, like others from Tuskegee, Du Bois does some investigation into recent American wartime activities and finds that the white officers have "fought more valiantly against Negroes than they did against the Germans," and that many of the enlisted men were sent to France without proper training. Most African American officers have been stripped of rank. In *The Crisis* he damns the behavior of the military as well as the actions of Sam Moton from Tuskegee and Emmett Scott for doing nothing about the bad treatment of African American soldiers.

After the Pan African conference, Du Bois finally is able to meet with Wilson's representatives to ask that Germany be supervised by the League of Nations. There seems to be some real momentum behind the idea of repairing the problems in Africa originally begun by Europeans. Sadly, a cruel backlash against returning African American soldiers, labor and race riots, and panic over the Russian revolution are sweeping America. Du Bois is ready to continue the struggle.



Characters

William H. Baldwin, Jr.

Horace Bumstead

Wallace Buttrick

Andrew Carnegie

Erastus Milo Cravath

Alexander Crummell

Alexander Du Bois

Alfred Du Bois

Burghardt Gomer Du Bois

Mary Silvina Burhardt Du Bois

Nina Gomer Du Bois

Nina Yolande Du Bois

Thomas Fortune

Marcus Garvey

Samuel Gompers

Archibald Henry Grimky

William James



Robert Morss Lovett

John Edgar Milholland

John Ogden

Robert C. Ogden

Mary White Ovington

Theodore Roosevelt

Emmett Scott

Joel Spingarn

Moorfield Storey

William Howard Taft

William Monroe Trotter

Henry Villard

Oswald Garrison Villard

Booker T. Washington

Ida B. Wells (Barnett)

Woodrow Wilson

Charles Young



Objects/Places

Alexandria

This is the rural area outside of Fisk University where Willie goes to support himself with a teaching job during the summer. Meeting less educated, poorer rural workers from a part of the country where more racial prejudice exists influences Du Bois future writings. It is also where he has his first sexual experience with a woman.

Atlanta University

This remarkable University teaches a high level of liberal arts education, and because of this white philanthropists who might otherwise give it money regard it as a threat. Du Bois teaches at Atlanta for a number of years, and here he helps the college publish a series of deeply important long-term studies on the African American experience. The campus grounds are attractive and well groomed, but just outside the campus students find themselves in slums. The city of Atlanta itself is quite dangerous for African Americans, and it erupts in violence with the lynching and burning of Sam Hose. Du Bois must actually sit on his front steps and guard his family with a shotgun during the altercation.

Fisk University

Fisk is a white run religious college for African Americans in Nashville Tennessee. President Erastus Milo Cravath oversees one of the few black colleges with liberal arts standards as high as those for White colleges. One important founder who helps the school get its start is John Ogden, a visionary who sets up fund to train ex slaves to become congregational preachers. As soon as Fisk opens its doors ex-slaves pour in to get a chance at equal training, yet the college is under-funded. To support their school, student singers tour the country and bring fame and money to Fisk. The fine college attracts more privileged African Americans who set the tone for the rest of the school.

In 1885 when Du Bois enters, it is run by Dean Spence and features outstanding professors like Helen Morgan who is the first woman full professor at an educational institute that teaches men and women. For the first time in his life Willie meets sophisticated and beautiful black women whom he comes to admire. He does very well in his studies and is made editor of his college paper and begins to write a student column in the regional paper *The Herald*. The college continues to suffer economic difficulties as more American money donors begin to believe only trade school and job skills should be taught to blacks. Du Bois meets many life long friends and his wife at Fisk.



Friedrich-Wilhelm III University in Berlin

The campus is in Germany, a country that is pulling itself out of old-fashioned peasant and master society and attempting to become a modern industrial society. Unfortunately, the Prussian leaders of Germany are using a pushy, overbearing approach to crush all opposition. When Du Bois arrives before World War I however, the intellectuals at the University in Berlin are feeling much freedom to generate important new ideas. Socialism and various philosophies are being taught at the University. Du Bois loves being in a place where his color does not restrict him very much and where he is appreciated for his brains. However, when he's outside the university his experiences are mixed. In large cities, he is treated like any other white upper class individual. When he hikes out into the European backwaters, people react as if he is something inhuman.

Great Barrington, MA

In 1868 when Du Bois is born Great Barrington is a medium sized town close to New York and the Hudson River. It is situated high in the clearing between mountains against the Housatonic River. Settlers include Du Bois's French and Dutch ancestors, the Burghardts. Most of the black natives are decedents of a West African Slave named Tom who is also an ancestor of Du Bois. There are about 4,000 people in the town, including around 30 black families. Many whites in the region are protestant Republicans who believe black people should serve in government and that it is the duty of whites to help uplift the African Americans. Great Barrington is picturesque, with low crime, very little racism. Farmers and mill workers attract poor white immigrants and as the black farm workers begin not to be able to compete with imported food they grow steadily poorer.

Harvard University

This is the elite Northern college outside of Boston where Du Bois is the first African American to earn his PhD. At the time when Du Bois enters the graduate program, the school has begun to be concerned that it will be considered a place where wealthy white men get their diplomas, so they have opened the University up to anyone with talent. Outstanding professors at the time are developing new thoughts about how the human mind works and about the meaning of life and truth. Harvard is well established and already nurtures certain traditions and exclusive clubs, but Du Bois is too poor to participate in much of the fun.



The North

All of the states above the Mason Dixon line are included in the term "The North." Mostly a safe haven for African Americans after the Civil War, and the place where Du Bois grows up in relative peace, the North is certainly not without its racism. Various cities crowded by blacks attempting to escape Southern Jim Crow laws become flashpoints for violence.

Philadelphia's Seventh Ward

This is an area set off from the rest of the town where a quarter of the African Americans in the city live. Many of these are poor people who have drifted North from the South. The district is full of sleazy dance halls, crime, people with social diseases and every night lots of the citizens must go to local hospitals to be treated for wounds from fighting. Most of those living in the neighborhood have lost middle class food and service industry jobs to new immigrants from Europe, so they have become desperately poor.

Also, wealthy whites who moved there after the war remain in the district. Studying what is wrong with the residents of this ward becomes one of Du Bois's most exciting jobs. He talks to hundreds of citizens in the neighborhood, then "crunches" these numbers to come up with objective proof that laziness is not the cause of Philadelphia's 7th Ward problems.

The South

All the states below the Mason Dixon that participated in the Civil war are included in the term "The South." This area is less developed industrially than the North, and is mostly dependent on growing cotton and tobacco. After the devastating financial loses suffered because of the Civil War, the North begins the Reconstruction, a time when Northern troops occupy the South in order to rebuild it financially and to ensure the Black men get votes and rights. Many con men pour into the South and the rebuilding efforts don't seem to work very well; however Lewis thinks this effort has simply not gone on long enough. Lewis also points out that rebuilding the South is expensive, and he suggests that the North pulls out of the region in order to focus on their own building of railroads, which requires federal money. Many Southerners are Democrats opposed to Northern Republicans.

Lewis says that after reconstruction ends, fear takes hold in the white community, North and South, that blacks will cause turmoil in the South and possibly join up with the new immigrants coming into America to form labor unions. This would be bad for business because organized workers could demand too much money from their bosses. The Northern philanthropists, Southern leaders, several presidents are happy when Booker T. Washington agrees that the African Americans should hang back and not push for reforms in education or civil rights.



Now, the price of cotton goes down. Uneducated, poor African Americans get even more desperate, and Southern poor whites fear losing their jobs to these people. Lynching and violent and hostile riots break out. It becomes even more difficult for an African American to get a liberal arts education than it was immediately after slavery. Jim Crow laws forcing blacks to sit separately from whites or to accept other severe limitations are imposed on blacks. Du Bois believes that African Americans are beginning to feel beaten down and to lose hope.

Tuskegee

Booker T. Washington is the powerful head of the Tuskegee University. A great portion of all the donations given by powerful white leaders go to Tuskegee or directly into Washington's pocket because Booker is thought to be the person who most influences the thinking of other African Americans. Booker's philosophy means that the students won't learn too much or aspire for too much at Tuskegee. The standards at Tuskegee are low. It is more of a vocational school or training school than an actual college. When white donors visit, the African Americans serve them at a separate table.

Wilberforce University

South of Dayton Ohio, this college starts out as a beautiful woodsy resort where white slave owners would go to vacation with their black slave lovers and their mulatto children. Ohio abolitionists work hard to get the land sold off to others and to put the resort out of business. Eventually, Methodist Bishop William Wilberforce turns it into a university. Tricky legislation is enacted that results in taxpayers funding a religious college. When Du Bois accepts a job on campus he is disgusted by the low educational standards of the school. He hates that the classrooms are often half empty whenever a revival meeting comes to town, and the religious chanting keeps him awake at night.



Themes

Money Drives Racial Inequality

The author of this book, Lewis, makes detailed notes in order to prove his case that the real reason black people and white people clash in the South as well (as in Africa) is economic in nature. Like Du Bois, Lewis believes that greed is why slaves are taken in the first place and that Northern greed results in their abandoning the cause of reconstruction of the South. Time after time in the book he says that a riot is caused because money has become tight.

Formal Education is Important

Du Bois spends his whole life fighting for quality education for blacks, and most everybody today agrees that all people deserve the best possible education. Lewis spends hundreds of pages explaining exactly which school courses Du Bois has taken and which courses he has taught and which books he has read. Lewis wants to prove that Du Bois's lifelong quest to educate himself has shaped his ideas in ways that he in turn shapes the world.

Du Bois, Man of Contradictions

Lewis likes to juxtapose (place side by side) actions Du Bois takes that seem opposite. For example, he follows information about Du Bois working with women and fighting for feminist causes, with pathetic stories of how he ignores his wife and daughter. He also shows Du Bois as a loving son who doesn't grieve for his dead mother, a snob who spends years of his life working directly with the poorest people and a shy womanizer. These opposite sides make Du Bois seem a little less like a perfect genius and a little more like an ordinary human being.

Much of History is Driven by Human Pettiness

It would be hard to write a book about the forming of new national organization without talking about disagreements and friction, but Lewis really loads his biography up with stories about little but very destructive arguments and behaviors. From Booker T. Washington's petty jealousy, to Trotter's hot headed arrogance, to Villard's spoiled sense of privileged, Lewis give nearly everyone a small minded motive for behaving in a particular way. Many of these motives are documented through letters, but many others are not.



The Civil Rights Movement Owes Its Success to Heroes

W.E.B. Du Bois Biography of a Race is full of allusions to famous events, movements and achievers in African American history. Pages swim with important people who have helped (or hindered) the struggle for African American success. Fortunately for those who do not know much about this history, Lewis stops to explain a little more about the most important players so that by the end of the book most readers will know a great deal more about the civil rights struggle than they did at the beginning of the book.

Style

Tone

Lewis speaks from an almost omnipotent point of view, which is to say he takes a godlike position, shifting back and forth through time as if he is eternal and describing what is going on in the minds of the various people he talks about. This is not a very safe approach for a historian talking about real, living people. Lewis must be very sure he can prove a particular individual feels a certain way before he says this is what the person thinks; otherwise historians or relatives of the person might attack him. Lewis does not always bother to give his proof right away, but frequently he will add a footnote of supporting evidence. Easily a quarter of the book is taken up with proof and footnotes.

The author also seems to believe he is writing to liberals and socialists who will agree that most racial problems have their roots in economic conflict, just as W.E.B Du Bois came to believe. Lewis assumes most other ideas are outdated.

Lewis also assumes that readers know a great deal about African American history and black leaders before coming to the book. It is as if this is a graduate thesis and Lewis is speaking to the professors of African American studies who already support his research. This assumption makes reading the book a real chore for anyone with only a basic education in civil rights battles.

Setting is not a tremendously important part of this biography except when a place is important to Du Bois. Lewis describes Great Barrington in detail, and talks a good deal about Germany and other places in Europe where Du Bois is struck by the beauty, sophistication or poverty of a location. However, Lewis tends to focus on the behavior of people living in certain places rather than the actual physical setting. For instance, readers learn how cold, damp and miserable England is when Lewis wants to paint a picture of Nina's unhappiness during her time there during WWI.

Lewis relies upon oblique sarcasm to entertain his readers. Oblique means "sideways" and "sarcasm" refers to saying something with another more negative second meaning to it. Often Lewis will come from the side to criticize a thing or person indirectly and cleverly. This is a smart way to get his opinion across without sounding like he is preaching and without distracting too much from the main story. One either understands the sarcasm, or one doesn't.

Lewis enjoys using as many different words for things and ideas as he can. He likes to hone in on exact shades of meanings by using the most precise word he can think of, even if that word is difficult or unfamiliar to many readers. At other times Lewis seems simply to get bored with plain old words and uses a synonym to amuse himself. For example, instead of saying "dancing" he says "terpsichore." For this reason, reading this book is a challenge, a nuisance and an education.



Structure

Lewis often hints at what is going to happen well ahead of the order that it actually does occur in the chronology of Du Bois's life. He will start a chapter stating that something has happened, and then he will backtrack to explain how it came to happen. For example, at the start of a chapter he announces that Du Bois is appointed to handle propaganda at the NAACP, then flashes back into time almost a year earlier when this comes about. In the middle of the chapter he describes the actual day that the job is awarded to Du Bois.

Why does Lewis do this? Likely because he hopes to hold the interest of readers who know nothing about Du Bois by hinting at the great events coming up. It's also possible that Lewis is trying to make history seem cyclical, or it is simply his style to move about in this way. The style can be quiet confusing.

Lewis employs a formal sentence construction. He uses many different simple, complex and compound complex phrases, many adjectival and prepositional clauses. This book feels as if it is written for intellectuals who can handle this sort of sophisticated speech, and it may have originally been written as a sort of textbook. However, because the language Lewis uses is very well structured, any reader with a little patience can get through the book. He trusts his audience's intelligence, just as the great intellectual Du Bois trusts his audience.

It's easy to see why Lewis loves Du Bois's writing so much. Both men write with a flowing, rolling pace that might even sound beautiful set to music.



Quotes

"Born in Massachusetts in the year of Andrew Johnson's impeachment and dead ninety-five years later in the year of Lyndon Johnson's installation, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois cut an amazing swath through four continents (he was a Lenin Peace Prize laureate and his birthday was once a national holiday in China), writing sixteen pioneering or provocative books of sociology, history, politics and race relations. In his eighties he found time to finish a second autobiography and produce three large historical novels, complementing the two large works of fiction he wrote in the first two decades of the twentieth century." Chapter 3, page 3

"Gnawing suspicions (possibly even a few hard facts) about the reasons for his father's disappearance led him to cling to paternal mythology - to gild Alfred's portrait - and to blame Mary Silvina for removing him from their lives. After all, it was she who had acquiesced in the Burghardt clan's putative opposition to their going to Connecticut. At bottom, she had deserted his father and was largely responsible, therefore, for their demeaning material predicament in Great Barrington. Undereducated and infirm, Mary Silvina, his 'good chum,' was now an albatross, although the more this cruel, disloyal thought insinuated itself, the more evasive, ambivalent, and wretched Willie's feelings for her must have become." Chapter 3, page 52

"What the extant blue books and bound essays reveal is a common thread of robust analysis, a gutsy readiness on Du Bois's part to reshape large quantities of knowledge to make them fit into new conceptual containers. Undogmatic, intuitive, skeptical, his intellectual powers as a graduate student were arresting." Chapter 5, page 109

"Winding down, Du Bois sardonically related several previous, unsuccessful attempts to secure help from self-proclaimed White patrons of his race. 'I find men willing to help me thro' cheap theological schools, I find men willing to help me use my hands before I have got my brains in working order, I have an abundance of good wishes on hand, but I never found a man willing to help me gat a Harvard PhD'" Chapter 6, page 126

"...Washington clearly intended the crux of his speech to be the mutuality of racial obligations in the Redeemed South. In exchange for Black acceptance for restrictions on the franchise and no further demands for 'social equality,' the South's White rulers were gradually allowed to progress in agriculture and business and to reign in the rednecks. His people in the South, Washington and Atlanta, were thirsty men and women aboard a ship lost at sea, who should head the voice crying, "Cast down your buckets where you are..." Chapter 7, page 175

"It is a peculiar sensation, this sense of always looking at ones self through the eyes of others," One ever feels his two-ness and America, a Negro." Chapter 8, page 199

And so it became the task of the Wizard of Tuskegee to sanction what in any case he had absolutely no power to prevent - to sell it as a bargain, a compromise, an accommodation; to denounce and renounce the so-called Reconstruction experiment



and hold out seductive prospects of a distant but realizable racial parity based on the unifying dollar rather than the divisive ballot." Chapter 10, page 260

"The deal was struck with the survivors of the old planter class and the allied new class of bankers, mill owners, railroad vice-presidents, mine owners, and furnishing merchants who had reclaimed the South from Reconstruction. Heterogeneous in background and disputatious in politics, they were variously called 'Redeemers' or 'Bourbons' or 'Conservatives.' Until the early 1890s, what had united them was a strategy (masterfully implemented by the likes of Mississippi senator Lucius Quintus Lamar and South Carolina governor Wade Hampton) of using poor Black people to control poor White people and their rising cousins. By poll taxes, residency requirements, literacy laws, stuffed ballot boxes and a host of discriminatory devices, the conservatives had tilted the electoral process heavily in their favor disfranchising as many as a fourth of the White males who otherwise would have voted in many of the states of the former Confederacy." Chapter 10, page 261

"Bad as conditions were, pragmatic northern philanthropists like Baldwin, Ogden, Peabody and the others saw worse coming: the erection of an ironclad system of legal and physical apartheid, the coming of Jim Crow with its quadruple public bathrooms, special trains and tramways, separate restaurants and hotels, double waiting rooms, color-coded drinking fountains - an absurd array of artificial distinctions prohibitive to cost-effective business." Chapter 11, page 270

"Du Bois compressed a quarter century of Black history into two long, flowing paragraphs in 'Of Our Spiritual Strivings,' the kind of feat that was to become his signature. Suddenly, personal testimony and lamentation give way to vast tableaux of Sphinxes and African grandeur, then the descent into slavery follows where racial memory was kept vivid by the Black preacher until Jubilee Day commenced the heady time of Reconstruction." Chapter 11, page 280

"The conservative planters and colonels were not so much submerged in 'new men' or pushed aside by Snopeses as reincarnated in the 'radical' younger generation that had appropriated the language of the Populists, the racism of the rednecks and the economic agenda of Yankee capitalists. Chapter 12, page 337

"Even so, his leadership role in the battle with Booker T. Washington not only increasingly distracted him, the impact of that burgeoning contest on funds for his own research and the financial health of Atlanta University became more stifling month by month." Chapter 13, page 343

"White blood alone made Black intelligence possible, Stone argued. Were it not for stern and steady Caucasian controls, Negro atavism and savagery would run amok. When the Wizard advised the Carnegie Institution that Stone was an inappropriate recipient of funds to investigate race relations, however, he was told that no less an authority than Du Bois had certified Stone's fitness. At almost the same moment, a furious Du Bois was writing Stone to protest the deviousness behind his articles." Chapter 13, page 368



"Save us, World-Spirit, from our lesser selves!

Grant us that war and hatred cease,

Reveal our souls in every race and hue!

Help us, O Human God, in this Thy Truce

To make Humanity divine," Chapter 15, page 440

"'War is hell,' he ended, 'but there are things worse than Hell as every Negro knows.'"

Chapter 18, page 516

"In the preliminary draft for 'The Wounded World,' Du Bois would sum up the perfidy of the army high command in four terse sentences: 'First, was the effort to get rid of Negro officers; second, the effort to discredit Negro soldiers; third, the effort to spread race prejudice in France; and fourth, the effort to keep Negroes out of the Regular Army.'"

Chapter 19, page 572



Topics for Discussion

How do the political views of Du Bois change over his lifetime? Name at least three opinions he seems to have held early in his life that differ when the book ends.

Du Bois is able to change the world with his powerful writing. Is this still possible today?

If Du Bois were alive today, what things about our culture and society do you think would please him, and what would make him angry?

How does Du Bois's childhood make him confident and strong enough to do the important civil rights work he later achieves?

From what you know of Martin Luther King, Jr., how does Du Bois's approach to fighting for civil rights seem different or similar?

Do you accept the author, Lewis's explanation for much of the civil rights strife in America, namely that the race friction is based in economics?

Do you feel that black and white people have achieved equal rights today? Why or why not?

What does all the infighting between early NAACP organizers tell you about the effectiveness of organizations that argue? Could the group have achieved goals earlier without such fights?