The Souls of Black Folk

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF W.E.B. DU BOIS

W.E.B. Du Bois was born to a free black family who owned land in Massachusetts, two years before the Emancipation Proclamation. He attended an integrated public school followed by Fisk University, during which time he spent summers working at a black school in rural Tennessee. He then attended Harvard College, where he earned a second bachelor's degree and received a scholarship to pursue a PhD in sociology. While completing his doctoral work, Du Bois spent time at the University of Berlin. Having graduated as the first African-American to receive a PhD from Harvard, Du Bois worked as a professor at Wilberforce University, where he met his wife. Du Bois then spent time at the University of Pennsylvania before taking a professorship at Atlanta University. During this time, he published works of sociology about African-American communities that analyzed the subtle class distinctions within the black community and challenged racist ideas and stereotypes. Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, while growing increasingly involved in campaigning against lynching and Jim Crow segregation. In 1909, he co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and became the editor of the NAACP's journal, *The Crisis* in 1911. He joined the Socialist party during this time, coming to believe that the origins of racism lay within the system of capitalism. Under McCarthyism, Du Bois was tried for his sympathies to socialism. In 1961, furious that the Supreme Court upheld the McCarran Act requiring Communists to register themselves as such, he joined the Communist party. He died in Ghana at the age of 95, one year before the Civil Rights Act was passed in the US.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Chattel slavery—which had been banned in Northern states starting in 1775—was finally abolished in the South with President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1865. This moment coincided with the end of the American Civil War, which began in 1861. The period that followed, known as Reconstruction, saw money and resources sent to the South in the hope of aiding the transition from a slavery-based into a modern economy. During Reconstruction, former slaves (known as freedmen) experienced what Du Bois described as "a moment in the sun." Black men were given voting rights, and the Freedmen's Bureau—an organization that Du Bois covers extensively in *Souls*—was established to provide education for freedmen, channel philanthropic efforts to black communities, protect labor rights, and much more. While well-intentioned, these efforts were somewhat haphazard and chaotic, and were ultimately blocked by whites who refused to accept the authority of the Reconstruction government. Over time, Southern "Redeemers"—a coalition of conservative, landowning whites—took control of the South and overturned the progress that black people glimpsed during Reconstruction. During this period, black people were subjected to extreme violence by the Ku Klux Klan and other vengeful whites, and often found themselves in conditions that were little better than slavery. Meanwhile, many white people in the South argued that black people had received an opportunity to "prove" they were worthy of political and civil rights and that they had demonstrated their inferiority through ignorance, laziness, and crime. Of course, the reality was that black people were not naturally lazy or ignorant, but that they had none of the resources or opportunities necessary to exist in the modern world. Meanwhile, the Southern justice system was racially skewed to the point that whites could not be prosecuted for crimes against black people, creating the illusion that black people were more inclined to criminality.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

When Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk*, the African-American intellectual tradition was still in its infancy. The earliest African-American writers were freedmen who wrote books that were often autobiographical in nature and sought to persuade white readers to support the abolition of slavery. Examples include Frederick Douglass' *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Booker T. Washington extended this tradition into the post-Emancipation period by writing an autobiography called *Up from Slavery* in 1901, which received a critical review from Du Bois. Du Bois' doctoral dissertation was entitled *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the United States of America, 1638-1871*. Prior to writing *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois had also published a text entitled *The Study of the Negro Problems* (19898), a study of the black community in Philadelphia entitled *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), and another volume entitled *The Negro in Business* (1899). A prolific writer, he published dozens more books over the course of his life, including an autobiography that was published posthumously. Du Bois was an enormously influential figure, significantly shaping both academic and popular writing on race into the present day. He is considered one of the "fathers" of the Harlem Renaissance, a period of stunning black cultural production that included the writers Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Nella Larsen. He was also a significant

influence in the political and literary education of black intellectuals and civil rights leaders such as James Weldon Johnson, A. Philip Randolph, and Arthur Schomburg.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Souls of Black Folk*
- **When Written:** 1903
- **Where Written:** Atlanta, Georgia
- **When Published:** 1903
- **Literary Period:** Early African American Literature
- **Genre:** Sociology
- **Setting:** USA, especially the South
- **Antagonist:** White racist society
- **Point of View:** Du Bois' own point of view, though some of the chapters are narrated in the first person and some in the third

EXTRA CREDIT

Dr. Du Bois. Du Bois refused to be addressed by his first name, insisting that even his closest friends call him "Dr. Du Bois."

Parallel Persecution. In 1936 Du Bois traveled to Nazi Germany, and on his return to the US expressed his horror at the Nazis' treatment of Jews, which he compared to the African slave trade.

PLOT SUMMARY

Du Bois begins with the claim that the central problem of the 20th century is that of the **color line**, and that all readers will thus be interested in the issues raised in *Souls*, no matter their race. He outlines the book, which features thirteen distinct chapters on issues ranging from Reconstruction to leadership to education to religion.

The first chapter opens with Du Bois noting that white people seem to be curious about what it is like to be considered "a problem" by society. He recalls the moment at which he first became aware of racism as a child, when a little white girl in his elementary school class refused to accept a greeting card he gave to her. Du Bois characterizes the force of racial prejudice and alienation as a **Veil** that separates black people from whites and from the broader society in which they live. The Veil produces a distinctive kind of subjectivity that Du Bois calls **double-consciousness**, a term that refers to the way black people are forced to seem themselves both through their own eyes and through the hostile gaze of racism. This double consciousness leads black people to experience a tortured sense of internal conflict and confusion.

Du Bois notes that before Emancipation, slaves dreamed that a single divine event would not only abolish slavery but also end all of the violence, pain, and injustice to which they were subjected. When slavery was finally abolished, however, this ended up being far from the reality. The transition away from slavery was chaotic, violent, and laborious, and black people living at the turn of the century have not yet truly experienced freedom. During the Civil War, the Union armies were uncertain about how to deal with the fugitive slaves who increasingly sought shelter behind their ranks. From this point forward, the treatment of freedmen was haphazard and inconsistent.

In order to assist the newly freed slaves in the immediate aftermath of slavery, the federal government sponsored the founding of the Freedmen's Bureau, which sent money, clothes, and educational materials to the South, and assisted in providing freedmen with access to education, land ownership, medical treatment, better labor conditions, and a fairer criminal justice system. Although this was planned with the best of intentions, the result was far from a success. Chaotic conditions in the South and the opposition of both Southern whites and the federal government conspired to inhibit the Bureau from accomplishing half of what it initially set out to do. There were certainly some positive consequences of the Bureau's existence, but overall it failed to provide freedmen with the resources and support they desperately needed, and ultimately the Bureau was shut down.

Du Bois moves on to discuss the most famous African-American leader at the time that he is writing: Booker T. Washington. Du Bois points out that Washington is extremely popular among white people and has many excellent qualities, but that this popularity is akin to an oppressive "cult" that squashes criticism, particularly criticism originating within the black community. Du Bois points out that in the early days of slavery, there were many slave uprisings, but as time went on this happened less. By the time Emancipation took place, the key leader of the black community—Washington—was notably conciliatory to whites, making a famous "Atlanta compromise" speech which involved giving up the fight for black political and civil rights. Although Du Bois argues that Washington was not directly to blame for the loss of rights that came in the backlash after Reconstruction, he does place some responsibility on Washington and the "cult" he created. Du Bois suggests that the African-American community is in desperate need of better leaders to fight on their behalf into the future.

Du Bois then switches to personal narrative, recalling his experience teaching at a rural school in Tennessee during the summers of his undergraduate years at Fisk University. During these summers, he grew close to members of the community in which he worked and became acquainted with the problems facing the black rural poor. He was particularly close to a girl called **Josie**, whom he describes as kind, intelligent, and ambitious; however, when he returns to the community years

after his tenure as a teacher, he finds out Josie has died.

Du Bois shifts to focus on the city of Atlanta, and describes the zeal and dedication of the young black students at Atlanta University. He argues against the current trend advocating that industrial education is sufficient for black people. Although some young African Americans thrive better learning technical skills and trades, others are perfectly capable of excelling in elite institutions and becoming scholars. Du Bois argues that classical higher education also instills moral values that the South—and the country in general—is in desperate need of. He emphasizes that the only hope for racial progress is in the teaching of truth and reason, which lead to moral righteousness. During slavery, black people were treated as no more than workers, strictly prohibited from even learning to read and write; so it would be a great shame if this trend continued into the post-Emancipation period. When given the chance to apply themselves in even the most challenging educational environments, black people have shown their commitment and ability. Du Bois concludes that it is thus a matter of great moral and practical urgency that higher education opportunities become available to young black people.

The next chapter moves away from the pleasant environment of Atlanta University to the decidedly more forsaken, violent, and segregated landscape of the rural South. Du Bois describes the "Black Belt," an area of rural Georgia with a large poor, black population. He notes that black workers in the area are plagued by debt and haunted by memories of slavery. Indeed, many still live in slave cabins and work in conditions resembling slavery; few own land and a significant proportion pay their rent in cotton, an arrangement that makes paying off debt and owning land virtually impossible.

Du Bois turns his attention to the social interaction between white and black people, which has become increasingly restricted through segregation. Although poor communities of both races often live in proximity to one another, the wealthiest members of each race tend not to interact at all. Yet the lives of members of both races are inevitably bound up together: whites continue to control black people even indirectly, since black people aren't allowed to vote and are heavily discriminated against within the criminal justice system. Du Bois suggests that racism is likely better solved through ordinary social interaction than through legislation, but in order for this to happen people must first accept that racism is a real and important problem.

Du Bois then vividly describes a scene at a black church as if from an outsider's perspective. He explains that through studying the black church, it is possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the black community, and to connect to the thoughts and feelings of slaves whose lives were left out of the historical record. Having been excluded from the country around them, black people create their own world within the church—a world that provides education, community, governance, and more. Religion serves as both a source of strength and an outlet for the expression of bitterness and sorrow. It also allows African Americans to have faith in a better world to come, whether on Earth or in the afterlife.

Du Bois tells the story of the birth of his son, Burghardt, whom he deeply loved but whose blond hair and blue eyes reminded Du Bois of slavery and seemed to be a sinister omen. Soon enough, while Burghardt was still in infancy he contracted an illness and died. Du Bois describes the extreme grief and despair he felt in the wake of his son's death, and notes that his family were called "Niggers" by a group of white people during the boy's funeral. However, Du Bois also admits that he felt a perverse sense of relief at the fact that Burghardt would not have to grow up and experience the cruel reality of the Veil, but would instead find true freedom in death.

Du Bois then tells the story of Alexander Crummell, a leader whom he knows personally but whose story he tells in a somewhat mythic, Biblical fashion. Born to a free black family in early-19th-century New York City, Crummell was faced with three temptations while growing up in a racist world: Hate, Despair, and Doubt. With difficulty, he overcame these temptations and went on to study and qualify as an Episcopalian priest. Despite daunting opposition, Crummell built an impressive array of accomplishments, including studying at the University of Cambridge and living in Liberia. Du Bois suggests that, although he was famous neither during his life nor in death, Crummell exemplifies the sort of leadership needed by the black community.

The penultimate chapter of the book consists of a fictional story of a young man named John Jones. John grows up in rural Georgia; a talented, cheerful, and popular boy, he is sent to study at Wells Institute, against the wishes of the white population in his hometown who claim that education will "ruin him." At the Institute, John has difficulty studying and gets into trouble. He also discovers the reality of racism and becomes embittered as a result. He eventually returns home and tries to help his community, first by urging unity across religious denominations and then by choosing to teach at the black school. John asks the town's white judge if he may take the teaching position, but the judge is hesitant, worried that John will advocate resistance to the rule of white people. John promises not to, but once he starts teaching he goes back on his word, and his classroom is immediately shut down. The story ends with the suggestion that John is about to be lynched.

The book's final chapter examines the genre of the **African-American spiritual**. Du Bois claims that spirituals are the most beautiful form of expression to originate out of the US. An oral tradition, spirituals are derided by white people, who see them as vulgar and caricature them in minstrel acts. Despite this, spirituals remain a vitally important art form for the African-

American community, particularly because they provide a chance to connect generations back through slavery and give an idea of slaves' inner thoughts and feelings (in other words, their souls). Du Bois concludes on a hopeful (if tentative) note, asking the reader not to forget the book and urging people to use reason in order to solve the problem of racism in America.

CHARACTERS

W.E.B. Du Bois – As well as being the author and narrator of the book, Du Bois also plays a prominent role as a character within his own narrative. Much of the book consists of first-person accounts of Du Bois' own experiences, and particularly those experiences that helped develop his awareness of the issues of race and racism. Although Du Bois narrates his own story non-chronologically, overall the book provides a comprehensive account of his life from childhood onwards. Born to a fairly affluent free family in Massachusetts, Du Bois attended an integrated school and describes becoming aware of the **Veil** for the first time when children in his class exchanged greeting cards and a little white girl refused to accept his card. Rather than becoming embittered—as other figures such as Alexander Crummell and John Jones are tempted to do—Du Bois resolved to work hard academically in order to overcome the effects of racism. On some levels, this plan succeeded. Du Bois had an immensely successful academic career, becoming the first African-American to receive a PhD from Harvard and eventually taking a professorship at Atlanta University, where he wrote *The Souls of Black Folk*. However, Du Bois makes clear that his academic success and other fortunate experiences in his life, while positive, are still overwhelmed by the constant presence of the Veil. Like other intelligent, well-educated black figures in the book, Du Bois remains keenly aware of the plight of those less fortunate than him even as he achieves great personal success. Indeed, he uses his position of influence in order to try and help black people who do not have the same resources or power in society, focusing on those worst off—the rural poor in the South. Despite his professional success, however, Du Bois' life was not untainted by personal tragedy. His first child, a son named Burghardt, died in infancy, an event he chronicles in the chapter entitled "Of the Passing of the First-Born." In this chapter, Du Bois reveals his own vulnerabilities and expresses some of his more cynical thoughts about the nature of racial justice and progress. Although he claims it is possible that race relations may have improved over the course of his son's lifetime, he also suggests that the only time African-Americans can achieve true freedom is in death.

Booker T. Washington – At the time Du Bois was writing, Booker T. Washington was the most famous African-American leader in history. Born around 1856 into slavery, Washington later worked for the uplift of Southern black people through the promotion of education and philanthropy. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois admits that Washington was a pioneer, taking on a role—a Southern African-American leader committed to advancing the welfare of his people—that few would have imagined possible. On the other hand, Du Bois is highly critical of Washington's leadership style, and the chapter on Washington in *The Souls of Black Folk* functions mainly to point out the deep flaws in Washington's approach. Du Bois argues that Washington was far too conciliatory to Southern whites, and is especially disapproving of the Atlanta Compromise, a speech in which Washington claimed he would not fight the legal and political oppression of African-Americans but instead encourage racial uplift through education and hard work. Scholars remain divided over whether Du Bois' assessment of Washington is fair. On the one hand, Du Bois is persuasive in his argument that Washington's conciliation paved the way for the stripping of black civil rights in the Jim Crow era. It is also clear now that Du Bois' criticism of Washington heralded the beginning of a new era of African-American leadership, in which Du Bois and other leaders of the newly-founded NAACP pushed more aggressively (and effectively) for freedom and equality for black people. However, some argue that it would have been impossible for Washington to be any more radical given the context in which he was working. It has also emerged that, even while publically declaring his acceptance of Jim Crow, Washington secretly supported efforts to undo the legal and political oppression of black people. Either way, it is unquestionable that Washington was the most important voice of black people in the US until the arrival of Du Bois.

Josie – Josie appears in the chapter on Du Bois' time teaching in Tennessee. Having graduated from the Teachers' Institute, Du Bois searches in vain for a school in need of a teacher, and it's only through Josie's help that he is able to locate such a school. He then ends up staying in her community and growing close to her family. In many ways, Josie represents the tragic suffering and wasted potential of poor black people in the South. When Du Bois meets her, she is 20, charming, and ambitious, with talent and intelligence and dreams of making a better life for herself. Her family, while imperfect, are kind, generous, and honest people. However, when Du Bois returns to Josie's community years after his teaching post ends, he finds that her family members have been in trouble and Josie herself is dead. The cause of her death is not specified, and neither is her last name; thus in both life and death, Josie remains somewhat anonymous, representative of the vast number of African-Americans whose struggle, suffering, and death was not acknowledged or recorded in history. By including her story in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois preserves Josie's story and pays tribute to her unfulfilled promise and hope for a better world.

Burghardt Du Bois – Burghardt is the infant son of W.E.B. Du Bois. He dies as a baby, and his brief life and death are

chronicled in the chapter entitled "Of the Passing of the First-Born." Although Burghardt does not play a substantial active role in the narrative, his appearance carries important symbolic significance. Because he dies before he can grow up to understand and experience the reality of the **Veil**, Burghardt remains in a permanent state of innocence and freedom, such that his father feels a perverse sense of relief over his fate. Du Bois also makes a point of mentioning Burghardt's light-colored hair and blue eyes, mixed-race features that he suggests may have foreshadowed Burghardt's tragic fate. The implication of this observation is that Burghardt particularly contains the violent legacy of slavery within himself, somewhat like the "tragic mulatto" figure of the American literary tradition. *The Souls of Black Folk* is dedicated to Burghardt and to Du Bois' daughter, Yolande, who grew up to become a teacher.

Alexander Crummell – Like Booker T. Washington, Alexander Crummell also gets his own chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk*, although Du Bois' presentation of Crummell is much more flattering. Indeed, Du Bois' inclusion of the chapter on Crummell works to show an alternative model of black leadership to Washington's conciliatory approach. Like Washington, Crummell was born during slavery, although unlike Washington his family members were free and living in the North. Despite facing immense racist opposition, Crummell managed to study and be ordained as an Episcopal Priest. He then went on to study at the University of Cambridge, England, where he devised the concept of Pan-Africanism, which advocated the unification of all black people in North and South America, the Caribbean, and Africa, in order to end racist injustice. Crummell went to live in Liberia for 20 years, before returning to the United States. Du Bois contrasts Crummell with Washington, but also with John Jones. Both Crummell and Jones are faced with the temptation to become embittered, to give up hope, and to doubt if they are doing the right thing. They are both subjected to humiliation and find themselves in highly dangerous situations. However, Jones, unlike Crummell, succumbs to these temptations, and eventually perishes in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Although Crummell's story serves as an inspirational model within the book, its juxtaposition alongside the story of John Jones reminds the reader that the success Crummell achieved was near miraculous.

John Jones – Du Bois dedicates a whole chapter to the story of John Jones, a fictional character arguably representative of late 19th century Southern black men as a whole. John grows up in Altamaha in Southeast Georgia, and begins the story as a hard-working and cheerful young man unaware of the reality of racial oppression. The black community in which John grows up sends him to Wells Institute, where he struggles as a student and grows embittered as he learns the truth about racism and comes to feel the presence of the **Veil**. John returns to his hometown with hope of helping the black community, only to be shunned by both black and white people. At the end of the story, it is hinted that he is about to be lynched. John's story can be interpreted in multiple different ways, and Du Bois leaves the central message deliberately ambiguous. On one level, the story is a kind of *bildungsroman* (coming-of-age tale), a story of a young black man moving from a place of innocence to crushing awareness of racism. It is unclear, however, what moral the reader should take away from this tale. John's story ends in bitterness, failure, and a violent death, yet this narrative is arguably not a warning against pursuing knowledge and striving for justice, but rather an honest—and pessimistic—exploration of what it means to be a black person in the US.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SLAVERY VS. FREEDOM

Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk* almost 40 years after the Emancipation Proclamation officially abolished chattel slavery across the US, yet the legacy of slavery was anything but over. Much of the book is dedicated to examining this legacy, and calling into question the extent that African-American people can truly be considered free. Du Bois also examines the way that the South is particularly shaped by the ongoing consequences of slavery, and argues that many Southern whites look back on slavery with a sense of nostalgia and longing.

Much of Du Bois' analysis focuses on slavery's economic legacy. In the years following Emancipation, the majority of black people in the South remained extremely poor. Many black "peasants" performed taxing agricultural labor on land they rented through payments in cotton, or were forced to enter unfair labor contracts in which they were exploited by employers, worked in appalling conditions, and received "indeterminate wages." Although technically free, the environment in which black people found themselves was often practically indistinguishable from slavery. In the second chapter of the book, Du Bois examines how the promises of Reconstruction and the Freedmen's Bureau remained unfulfilled, leaving former slaves and their descendants trapped in a cycle of extreme poverty.

The physical remnants of slavery also remained in the time Du Bois was writing; the plantations, slave barons' houses, and slaves' shacks were a visual reminder of how recent the era of slavery was. At one point, Du Bois describes a "ragged, brown,

and grave-faced man" who points out a spot where dead slaves' bodies were kicked aside by overseers, and tells Du Bois: "This land was a little Hell." The traumatic legacy of slavery exists not only within people's minds, but within the landscape itself.

Throughout the book, Du Bois is committed to interrogating the concept of freedom and what it means for black people who were liberated by the Thirteenth Amendment, but for whom life in the in the post-slavery era remains highly impoverished, restricted, and dominated by prejudice. His exploration of the psychological effects of racism are also crucial to his critical examination of what freedom means. Whereas in the past black people were imprisoned by slavery, following Emancipation they remain imprisoned by the psychological weight of the **Veil**. This psychological burden is so heavy that Du Bois confesses he felt a kind of jealousy of his infant son who died before growing old enough to experience the Veil's effects—he died "free."

MATERIAL VS. PSYCHOLOGICAL RACISM

One of the most groundbreaking aspects of *The Souls of Black Folk* is its focus on the psychological experience of racism alongside the issues of physical and economic oppression. In the book, Du Bois argues that even the few black people who manage to achieve prosperity, higher education, and professional success cannot escape the mental and emotional effects of living in a racist society. Du Bois himself is a key example of this phenomenon; born into a free, affluent family, educated at top universities, and possessing a prolific, respected academic career, he is nonetheless plagued by the feeling of being "a problem" and by the constant presence of the **Veil**.

Du Bois' exploration of psychological racism centers around his concepts of the Veil and **double consciousness**. These two interrelated ideas highlight how racist theories are so intense and pervasive that black people are forced to see even themselves through the lens of white prejudice. As a result, many black Americans suffer from self-doubt and bitterness, which further hinders them from achieving success.

Despite his unique attention to psychological racism, Du Bois does not neglect the problem of material inequality. He carefully shows how the legacy of slavery as well as contemporary legal and economic discrimination combine to create a situation in which black people are severely deprived of the wealth, safety, and opportunities they deserve. Du Bois' detailed examination of phenomena such as the history of the Freedmen's Bureau and the economic system of slavery provides a contrast to his more abstract, theoretical writing on the psychological component of racism. As a sociologist, Du Bois makes persuasive use of empirical evidence that highlights the undeniable effects of material racism. However, although psychological racism is less easy to scientifically quantify, Du Bois makes clear that its effects are just as real and important as tangible, material forms of oppression. He uses personal experience and anecdote as "evidence" of the more abstract elements of subjective prejudice.

EDUCATION

Education is at the centre of Du Bois' theory of racial uplift, and to his understanding of how society in general can be shaped for the better. One of the key problems Du Bois identifies with the way society currently operates is that people—and white people in particular—are obsessed with wealth and motivated entirely by profit. He argues that education can counter this problem of greed by instilling better morals in people and encouraging them to value truth, compassion, and beauty over money. Du Bois particularly emphasizes the importance of classical education as opposed to only industrial, technical schooling, which other leaders such as Booker T. Washington argued would be sufficient for the African-American community. Du Bois argues that although some black people are better off working as laborers and "artisans," others have the capacity to succeed in intellectual settings and should be given the opportunity to do so. He cites evidence indicating that black men have performed well in educational institutions as esteemed as Harvard and Yale, and that those who have received the opportunity to study have gone on to successful careers as teachers, clergymen, and healthcare professionals.

Meanwhile, the experience of attending a black college allows students to reckon with the problem of racism and to understand how this impacts them in their own lives. Du Bois highlights how this experience can be a mixed blessing, as greater understanding of racial injustice can lead to bitterness, even as it allows black people to advance themselves and their communities. This concept is particularly highlighted in the story of John Jones, whose carefree innocence is "ruined" by education and who tells his sister that everyone who becomes educated ends up unhappy. Nonetheless, Du Bois argues that the South in particular is in desperate need of the "knowledge and culture" that is cultivated through education, and that this is the only way a "backwards" people and society will become more just.

Du Bois' description of his own development as a scholar and teacher is also an important part of the book. His personal experience of elite universities and academic success forms a distinct contrast to the limited access to education experienced by most African Americans, particularly those in the South for whom discrimination, poverty, and child labor mean that "ignorance" and illiteracy is widespread. In the book, Du Bois seeks to disprove the widely-held notion that black people's ignorance is the result of naturally low intelligence and argues that instead it is a result of the legacy of slavery (during which slaves were banned from learning to read and write) and of the

present discriminatory conditions of the South.

LEADERSHIP

Throughout the book, Du Bois implies that one of the main problems preventing African Americans from achieving greater justice and prosperity is lack of proper leadership. He devotes a whole chapter to criticizing the leadership of Booker T. Washington, the most famous and influential black leader at the time. Du Bois argues that Washington was far too conciliatory to whites, and that his decision to compromise on the issues of civil, political, and educational rights allowed white people to strip African Americans of these rights and reverse the brief moment of progress that took place during Reconstruction. Du Bois is certainly aware of how difficult it was for a single leader to address the concerns of both the radical and conservative sides of the African-American community, not to mention whites who were vigilantly opposed to any kind of racial equality. However, he is decisive in his judgment that Washington contributed to the "speedier accomplishment" of the disenfranchisement, "civil inferiority," and economic hardship black people experienced at the time he was writing.

For Du Bois, then, the question of leadership is closely tied to education. He shows that teachers (including himself) often come to serve as leaders within their communities. Similarly, institutions such as universities and the church also provide opportunities for individuals to work for change on behalf of the communities they represent and to inspire people toward hard work and self-improvement. Given that black people were deprived of the vote, teachers and clergymen became even more important as leaders of the African-American community. The chapter on Alexander Crummell, who was a Cambridge-educated scholar as well as an Episcopal priest, highlights the ways in which Crummell was a better leader than Washington and thus suggests that the leaders the black community needs will likely emerge from the church and universities.

In writing *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois positioned himself as a major leader in the African-American intellectual tradition and in the fight for racial justice. In many ways, Du Bois' leadership style is unusual. He combines personal anecdote, historical evidence, numerical data, and even a short story in order to depict the African-American community in a multi-dimensional, insightful, and nuanced manner, and refuses to shy away from highlighting the bleaker elements of black life. Although prescriptive at points, the main purpose of Du Bois' writing seems to be to convey rich and detailed information about the history and present situation of black people in America. In doing so, Du Bois suggests that if more people properly understood the reality of race and racism, they would be inspired to act in a way that would foster racial justice.

EXCLUSION VS. BELONGING

Du Bois begins the book by arguing that "the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the **color line**," thereby claiming that black people's exclusion from white society is the most important issue facing 20th-century America. Both a physical and metaphorical barrier, the color line prevents black people from accessing the institutions, spaces, and opportunities available to white people; this exclusion is both created by and fuels the psychological and social issues of the **Veil** and **double consciousness**.

Throughout the book, Du Bois explores the negative effect of Jim Crow segregation on the quality of services and opportunities available to black people. The violence to which black people in the South are subjected (and the impossibility of prosecuting white people for this violence within the Southern justice system) means they tend to self-segregate for their own safety. However, this exclusion then increases the cycle of economic hardship, as black communities tend to have poor resources and opportunities for work and education. Du Bois is careful to show that "exclusion" from white people can also be a good thing, though—as well as providing physical safety, it can also create mental and emotional safety, as takes place within black universities—but he also emphasizes that this exclusion damages black communities by cutting them off from resources they need in order to maintain a decent quality of life.

At the same time, Du Bois also pays attention to the ways that black people form communities that foster a sense of belonging in the midst of a country determined to exclude them and designate them as inferior. Schools, universities, churches, families, and political organizations are all spaces in which African Americans create their own sense of belonging, and that provide support for those in need. Du Bois' writing on **African-American spirituals** also demonstrates the importance of this genre of music for creating support, strength, and a sense of belonging within the black community. While racism led many whites to belittle spirituals as a simple, vulgar genre, Du Bois counters this view, arguing that spirituals are the most beautiful form of expression to come out of America, and emphasizing the power of spirituals to create a sense of community. Spirituals are especially significant due to the way they allow black people to connect with the lives of their ancestors. While slavery systematically worked to erase black genealogy and history, the spirituals passed down over generations of slaves forms a connection between the present-day black community and those who preceded them.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and

Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE COLOR LINE

Du Bois begins his argument by declaring: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," and he repeats this statement several times throughout the book. The color line refers to the divide between races, often invisible but sometimes physical. The line is inherently hierarchical, ensuring that white people receive better treatment, services, and opportunities, while black people receive the inferior version—or nothing at all. The color line was instituted and solidified by slavery, yet has survived Emancipation and taken new forms. Jim Crow segregation, for example, is a particularly distinct way in which the color line is enshrined in the law and custom of the South. However, although the color line may seem overwhelmingly powerful and unbreakable, Du Bois suggests that it might be unstable. There is only so long that two races can live alongside one another in close but highly unequal proximity before the line between them is broken.

THE VEIL

The Veil is the most frequently mentioned symbol in the book, and one of Du Bois' most important ideas. In some ways, it is possible to think of the Veil as a psychological manifestation of the **color line**. The color line exists in the world, defining people's access to opportunities and to institutions from universities to bathrooms to the justice system. The Veil, on the other hand, exists in people's minds, and compels white people to structure society according to a racist logic—to build and police along the color line. Du Bois argues that the Veil prevents white people from seeing black people as Americans, and from treating them as fully human. At the same time, the Veil in turn prevents black people from seeing themselves as they really are, outside of the negative vision of blackness created by racism.

According to Du Bois, the Veil is a constant presence, but not one that is felt all the time. It takes time for young children to realize the Veil exists, and it is for this reason that Du Bois feels a perverse sense of joy that his son died before he was old enough to perceive the Veil. In some instances, this innocent ignorance can last beyond childhood, as in the case of John Jones. It isn't until John leaves rural Georgia that he truly feels the presence of the Veil. Through this example, Du Bois suggests that the Veil is felt less severely by those growing up within a segregated black community, or perhaps in contexts where they feel that racial inequality is a fundamental and permanent aspect of life.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Double consciousness is one of the most influential and enduring of Du Bois' ideas, though he only mentions it explicitly a handful of times within *The Souls of Black Folk*. Double consciousness arises as a result of the **Veil**; forced to view themselves and the world through the white lens of racism, black people must then negotiate the interaction of this racist view with their own view of reality. Through this balancing act, a dual, contradictory consciousness emerges, one that feeds two opposing perspectives on the world to black people at once. Du Bois suggests that until African Americans can reconcile these two views and feel that there is no contradiction between being both black and American, they will be unable to achieve true progress, freedom, and peace.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPIRITUALS

In many ways, Du Bois depicts a rather bleak picture of "the souls of black folk," outlining the way that the seemingly endless injustice and suffering black people endure forces them into a **double consciousness**. Unable to escape white racist views of the world, black people become alienated from themselves. At the same time, however, Du Bois suggests that black people's souls exist on a different register from this troubled subjectivity, and are expressed in the tradition of the African-American spiritual. As Du Bois explains in the chapter on this topic, spirituals emerged from traditional African songs that were passed down from the very first slaves in the U.S. to the African-Americans living in the early 20th century. He describes them as "the most beautiful" form of human expression to have emerged in the U.S., the only moment in which Du Bois speaks of black culture in such unequivocally reverent terms.

For Du Bois, spirituals are a way of connecting to the many slaves who lived and died outside the record of history, whose lives were silenced by the white racist brutality. Although we cannot know what these enslaved people actually thought and felt, traces of their experience—of their souls—are found within the sounds and words of spirituals. Du Bois notes, for example, that few spirituals deal with the topic of romantic love, yet many mention childlessness—an indication of the way that slavery shaped black people's understanding of kinship.

It is important to note that, below the fragment of a poem that begins each chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois includes a few lines from a spiritual. This simple juxtaposition creates a dialog between the Western European literary tradition and African-American folk culture, and suggests that both have equal value—a radical statement in the context in which Du Bois was writing.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Signet Classics edition of *The Souls of Black Folk* published in 2012.

The Forethought Quotes

The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois opens the book with this statement, and emphasizes its importance by repeating it several times. Although it may appear simple and perhaps obvious, in reality it presents a challenge to much mainstream thought at the time Du Bois was writing. As he will show later on, many white people considered racial inequality and exclusion to be a fringe issue that did not directly affect them. Others held that race relations in the US were not currently a problem; slavery had ended, and some whites claimed black people had proved themselves inferior and "not worth saving" in the decades following Emancipation. Even whites who did not hold such overtly racist views tended to support segregation, even while they may have also advocated philanthropy and education dedicated to uplifting black communities.

In contrast to these views, Du Bois argues that race relations are the fundamental issue of the 20th century not just to black people, but for everyone. Considering *The Souls of Black Folk* was written in 1903, Du Bois not only claims that the color line is the most important issue at the time he is writing, but will continue to be far into the future. While this may seem cynical, Du Bois insists throughout the book that he is simply assessing the situation in a realistic, pragmatic way. Finally, Du Bois emphasizes that segregation itself—manifested in the concept of the "color line" dividing the races—is an inherently racist system standing in the way of justice and progress.

Chapter 1 Quotes

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,––an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has described the moment during his childhood when he first became aware of the Veil, meaning the psychosocial force of racism that prevents black people from accessing the same chances, resources, treatment, and quality of life as white people. He argues that the Veil makes black people feel like outsiders in their own country, and even creates a painfully split subjectivity that he calls "double consciousness." Although double consciousness was one of Du Bois' most influential concepts, this is one of the only points in the book when he mentions it explicitly.

Du Bois explains that double consciousness is a painful burden because it creates a constant feeling of alienation, self-hatred, and doubt. He emphasizes that African-Americans are so torn apart by the warring identities and perspectives they are forced to inhabit that it can feel like existing as two opposing people, not one person. This is a major example of the psychological burden of racism, though Du Bois shows that double-consciousness does also have material effects, including causing black people to turn to hedonism and crime, or to too-readily compromise with whites on political matters.

The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land. Whatever of good may have come in these years of change, the shadow of a deep disappointment rests upon the Negro people.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has explained that slaves used to believe they would be saved by a divine intervention, and when Emancipation finally arrived there was a brief moment when it seemed like this sacred justice had prevailed. However, the years following Emancipation have proven such optimism premature, if not entirely delusional. Although technically no longer slaves, black people are not really free at all. This is most obviously true of the rural Southern poor, whose lives often still resemble slavery. However, it is also true of even the most privileged and successful black people, whose existence is restricted by the presence of the color line and the Veil. By referring to the unresolved "sins" of America, Du Bois suggests that black people will not be free until there has been some sort of restorative or compensatory justice for the damage caused by slavery.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ There was scarcely a white man in the South who did not honestly regard Emancipation as a crime, and its practical nullification a duty.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has provided an account of the history of the Freedmen's Bureau, which was established in order to assist and support newly free black people in the transition from slavery. He identifies many of the Bureau's flaws, but also points to the insurmountable obstacles it faced—particularly racist opposition from white people. Du Bois' discussion of white people's racist attitudes is generally rather moderate and reserved, but on this occasion he provides a much harsher diagnosis. Not only do almost all white people in the South think Emancipation was a "crime," but they take it upon themselves to actively reverse it.

While this may seem a rather extreme assessment, historical evidence demonstrates that there was indeed widespread opposition to Emancipation among white people in the South, opposition that was mobilized in the backlash against Reconstruction and the violence and oppression of the Jim Crow era that followed.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ History is but the record of such group-leadership; and yet how infinitely changeful is its type and character!

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has detailed his assessment of the highly influential African-American leader Booker T. Washington, criticizing Washington's popularity among white people and the silencing of his condemnation within the black community. He argues that it should not be the case that black people have their leaders chosen for them by whites, but that they should elect their leaders themselves. This is especially important because, as Du Bois points out in this quotation, the historical record tends to revolve around the leaders of groups, rather than ordinary citizens—and thus people are represented by their leaders not only in a present, political sense, but also in history. So it is unwise and unjust for leaders not to be chosen by the very people they aim to lead.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and Opportunity. All this caused us to think some thoughts together; but these, when ripe for speech, were spoken in various languages.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has described his happy memories of teaching in a rural school in Tennessee during his summers as a student at Fisk university. He suggests that the community's isolation from the rest of the world created a sense of belonging; in addition to this, its inhabitants are also brought together by sharing major life events and suffering under the burden of racism. Du Bois thus emphasizes that

exclusion can create belonging, even if it also does not erase (and perhaps even causes) differentiation within the excluded group.

He illustrates this idea by pointing out that the shared thoughts of people in the community were "spoken in various languages." There are multiple ways to interpret this statement, but it is possible that Du Bois is referring to the differences between black people from the North and South, from different social classes, different religious denominations, or different levels of education. Du Bois thus reminds the reader of the limits of belonging, even within a community as tight-knit as the one in Tennessee.

Chapter 5 Quotes

For every social ill the panacea of Wealth has been urged––wealth to overthrow the remains of the slave feudalism; wealth to raise the "cracker" Third Estate; wealth to employ the black serfs, and the prospect of wealth to keep them working; wealth as the end and aim of politics, and as the legal tender for law and order; and, finally, instead of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, wealth as the ideal of the Public School.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has argued that hard work and entrepreneurship will be vital to the economic development of the South. However, he warns that over the past decades, white Southerners have become obsessed with wealth to the point that money itself is seen as a solution to every social problem. Du Bois' concerns in this passage echo themes that have been central to political debates in the US throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Du Bois claims that although wealth is useful and can be a powerful tool in bringing about social progress, wealth alone will not lead to meaningful change. This is partly because racism is as much a psychological as an economic issue, and thus even if black people were in a better position financially, they would still suffer the effects of racist ideology.

Additionally, Du Bois is suspicious of the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself, as he perceives this to be a corrupting influence on society. Critical of capitalism, Du Bois believed that too much focus on profit corrodes moral values, and that people should instead be guided by knowledge and reason. This belief represents a major distinction between Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, who focused on entrepreneurship—rather than education—as the proper vehicle for African-American advancement.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Above all, we daily hear that an education that encourages aspiration, that sets the loftiest of ideals and seeks as an end culture and character rather than breadwinning, is the privilege of white men and the danger and delusion of black.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has been laying out his passionate argument in favor of education as the key to progress for the African-American community and for eliminating racism. He emphasizes that the current preference for founding industrial schools for black people is not sufficient; although industrial schools are useful and appropriate for many black people, others have the capacity to benefit from classical higher education. In this quotation, Du Bois summarizes a widely-held racist attitude that empowerment through education is "the privilege of white men," from which black men ought to be excluded.

Note that Du Bois specifies that the justification for this racist exclusion is not that black people are necessarily unintelligent, but that they do not have a right to education and that knowledge that inspires "aspiration" is dangerous for black people. This echoes moments in the novel in which white people—such as the townspeople and white judge in the story of John Jones, or the clergy who refuse to allow Alexander Crummell to train as a minister—object to black people receiving an education that might empower them. To these white people, it is important that African-Americans remain in a subordinate position; as such, they worry that education might cause black people to agitate against racial injustice and seek power and influence for themselves and their communities. Indeed, it is precisely this link between education and empowerment that Du Bois identifies as the reason why providing higher educational opportunities for black people is so important.

> The teachers in these institutions came not to keep the Negroes in their place, but to raise them out of the defilement of the places where slavery had wallowed them. The colleges they founded were social settlements; homes where the best of the sons of the freedmen came in close and sympathetic touch with the best traditions of New England. They lived and ate together, studied and worked, hoped and harkened in the dawning light.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has explained that at the time he is writing, despite the protests of white people who claim that educating African-Americans is a waste of time and resources, many black people have graduated from Teachers' Institutes, black colleges, and from the top universities in the country. Du Bois points out that this last category of student proves that black people are capable of excelling in the most challenging courses, and in this passage describes their experiences at these elite institutions. Du Bois paints a rather idyllic picture of the traditional university experience, conjuring an image of a progressive, inclusive, and supportive environment free of racism.

While the image of university Du Bois invokes is perhaps a little romanticized, it works to persuade the reader that allowing black students to receive a classical education at highly competitive institutions is a positive thing, rather than being risky or absurd. Du Bois' emphasis on the harmoniousness of student life at New England universities is a stark contrast to the backlash against integration that would come in the later decades of the 20th century.

> O Southern Gentlemen! If you deplore their presence here, they ask, Who brought us? When you cry Deliver us from the vision of intermarriage, they answer that legal marriage is infinitely better than systematic concubinage and prostitution. And if in just fury you accuse their vagabonds of violating women, they also in fury quite as just may reply: The rape which your gentlemen have done against helpless black women in defiance of your own laws is written on the foreheads of two millions of mulattoes.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has argued that black people are perfectly capable of excelling at university, and if there is to be any racial, social, and economic progress in the South there will need to exist colleges to educate the black population. In this passage, he shifts from discussing education specifically to focusing on the general problem of racism, and particularly what he identifies as white hypocrisy. Du Bois' tone in these lines is more directly accusatory than in other parts of the book, when he seems careful to maintain a more reserved, forgiving stance. Here he points out that even the concept of "black crime" arbitrarily singles out African-Americans as criminal when the evidence of white criminal activity against black people is arguably far greater.

However, it is probably Du Bois' initial rhetorical question in this passage that is the most powerful. He laments the hypocrisy of white Southerners who exclude black people and resent their presence within society, while conveniently forgetting the fact that it was whites who brought black people there against their will in the first place. This paradox directly relates to Du Bois' exploration of the unresolved duality of African-American existence, which forces black people to feel like strangers to themselves.

Chapter 7 Quotes

> If you wish to ride with me you must come into the "Jim Crow Car." There will be no objection,––already four other white men, and a little white girl with her nurse, are in there. Usually the races are mixed in there; but the white coach is all white.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois opens the chapter in rural Georgia, and in this passage switches to the second person to address the reader directly. His words confirm the notion that the presumed audience of *The Souls of Black Folk* is white; they must go into the "Jim Crow Car" because Du Bois is black, but—as he points out—there are other white people in the carriage. The presence of these other white people emphasizes the fact that segregation is an asymmetrical

system. While white people are allowed in the Jim Crow car, black people are strictly forbidden from riding in the white car. Thus segregation is arguably less about separating the races, and more about maintaining white control.

Note the detail about the little white girl and her nurse, which provides further important information about the reality of segregation. As Du Bois mentions, black people were intimately involved in the personal lives of white Southerners, particularly black women who were employed as nannies, cooks, and cleaners in white people's homes. The most private of spaces, therefore, were not segregated at all; however, there were strict conditions placed on these black workers. The master-slave dynamic did not die with slavery, and black people were expected to behave with extreme obedience, humility, and subservience around their white employers, as well as white people in general.

❝ Yet even then the hard ruthless rape of the land began to tell. The red-clay sub-soil already had begun to peer above the loam. The harder the slaves were driven the more careless and fatal was their farming.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has described the landscape of the rural South, emphasizing its desolate, "forsaken" quality. He notes that in the poorest areas, only black people remain, as they are too impoverished to move. In this passage, he describes how the land was exploited during slavery, and in doing so draws a connection between the terrorizing treatment of the slaves and the ruthless treatment of the land. Both the slaves and the natural landscape suffered under violence and tyranny, and have been left worn down and desolate as a result. This parallel further suggests that it will take many years of support, nourishment, and careful planning in order to restore the land to full fertility again, just as such care is needed for poor black communities to thrive in the aftermath of slavery.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ "Why, you niggers have an easier time than I do," said a puzzled Albany merchant to his black customer. "Yes," he replied, "and so does yo' hogs."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has been describing the poverty and destitution of the Black Belt, and explained that white employers refuse to improve the working conditions of the black laborers they employ, claiming that this would lead to disaster. In this brief anecdote, he describes a white merchant who claims that black people have "an easier time than I do," to which his black customer replies that yes, and so do the man's pigs. This is an important moment in the book, as there are not many instances in which Du Bois records an exchange between a white and black person where both speak their minds on the topic of race.

The result is revealing. On one level, it is possible to blame the white man's racist views on ignorance, as he seems to genuinely believe that black people have it "easier." On the other hand, as the black customer points out, this apparent ignorance relies on the willful decision to view African-Americans not as people, but more like animals. Such thinking was a legacy of slavery, during which slaves were classified as property (rather than people) and treated as akin to livestock. As this exchange between the merchant and customer shows, this treatment did not end with Emancipation.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ War, murder, slavery, extermination, and debauchery––this has again and again been the result of carrying civilization and the blessed gospel to the isles of the sea and the heathen without the law.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois opens the chapter by stating that his age is characterized by the effects of colonialism, which white people have justified because it brought "civilization" and Christianity to groups of people they deemed uncivilized. In this brutally ironic passage, he points out that the reality of colonialism was violence and tyranny, and emphasizes the hypocrisy of the fact that this was carried out in the name of

Christianity. Many people in favor of colonialism argued that it was unfortunate that colonization often involved violence, but that this was a regrettable side effect of what was an essentially noble cause. Du Bois rejects this view by emphasizing that "again and again" colonialism took the form of deliberately tyrannical programs (such as systematic genocide and chattel slavery).

In any land, in any country under modern free competition, to lay any class of weak and despised people, be they white, black, or blue, at the political mercy of their stronger, richer, and more resourceful fellows, is a temptation which human nature seldom has withstood and seldom will withstand.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has argued for the importance of suffrage as a tool for progress. He explains that during the French revolution, the prospect of universal suffrage seemed possible, but that this promise has disintegrated. In this passage, Du Bois argues that history has shown that it never works to have one stronger group of people governing on behalf of a weaker group. This is not just true of particular places and periods in time, but of "human nature" in general. By making this argument, Du Bois uses classical philosophical reasoning to suggest that black people in the US are treated unfairly.

Depending on the reader's individual interpretation, this passage could appear more or less conventional. It may be the case that Du Bois is simply arguing for democracy. Having just invoked the French Revolution, perhaps he is claiming that the basic liberal values on which America was founded should be enacted properly by giving African-Americans the right to vote. On the other hand, it is possible to interpret this statement in a more radical way. Surely, in any capitalist country (note that Du Bois invokes capitalism with the phrase "modern free competition") those who are in government will inevitably be "stronger, richer, and more resourceful" than those over which they rule. Is it possible that Du Bois is arguing that capitalism is incompatible with true political justice?

Chapter 10 Quotes

One can see in the Negro church today, reproduced in microcosm, all the great world from which the Negro is cut off by color-prejudice and social condition.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

Chapter 10 focuses on the African-American church, and after introducing the topic Du Bois makes a persuasive case for why it is an important object of study. In this quotation, he argues that the black church "reproduces" the world from which black people are excluded, implying that studying the black church allows us to see the world as African-Americans create it for themselves. Du Bois' words emphasize the theme of exclusion as a productive force, as well as a violent and painful one. Because black people are unfairly excluded from the wider country in which they live, they turn to one another and create a new world within the boundaries of their own community. Although this does not excuse segregation and exclusion, it demonstrates the creative strength and resilience of black Americans.

It is no idle regret with which the white South mourns the loss of the old-time Negro,––the frank, honest, simple old servant who stood for the earlier religious age of submission and humility. With all his laziness and lack of many elements of true manhood, he was at least open-hearted, faithful, and sincere.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has argued that at the time he is writing, black people are forced to live in a state of duplicity, with half turning to "radicalism" and the other half to "hypocritical compromise." In this passage, he claims that white Southerners look back nostalgically at "the old-time Negro," a figure who was perceived to be meek, obedient, and honest. Through his description of this stereotype, Du Bois subtly shows how it was constructed through a racist white point of view. The reason why white people preferred "the

old-time Negro" was because he was totally submissive to them and didn't agitate against his subservient role.

However, throughout the book Du Bois disproves the idea that black people are happy to be subservient to white people, arguing instead that black people should be considered full people in their own right, with rich, strong, and complex "souls." The death of old black stereotypes is thus a good thing, as it indicates that black people are moving closer to their true selves instead of performing falsely in order to appease white people.

Chapter 11 Quotes

Why was his hair tinted with gold? An evil omen was golden hair in my life. Why had not the brown of his eyes crushed out and killed the blue? –For brown were his father's eyes, and his father's father's. And thus in the Land of the Color-line I saw, as it fell across my baby, the shadow of the Veil.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker), Burghardt Du Bois

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Switching to a highly personal mode, Du Bois has told the joyful story of the birth of his first son, Burghardt. Seeing his wife's love for the baby, Du Bois came to adore him, but could not help but be disturbed by Burghardt's complexion. For Du Bois, Burghardt's blond hair and blue eyes are a reminder of the sexual violence of slavery—the mass rape of slave women by white men, and the mixed-race children born as a result. Although both Burghardt's parents are black, his features are evidence of the white genes that are inevitably mixed into his parents' lineage.

Du Bois laments this both as a reminder of the violence in black people's past and as an ominous indication of the tragedy in his ill-fated son's future. Note that this is a deliberate reversal of the symbolic meaning of blond hair and blue eyes in the white European tradition, which denotes ideas of innocence and purity. To Du Bois and other descendants of slaves, whiteness represents a *violation* of purity through oppression and sexual violence.

Chapter 12 Quotes

The nineteenth was the first century of human sympathy,––the age when half wonderingly we began to descry in others that transfigured spark of divinity which we call Myself; when clodhoppers and peasants, and tramps and thieves and millionaires and––sometimes––Negroes became throbbing souls whose warm pulsing life touched us so nearly that we half gasped with surprise, crying, "Thou too! Hast Thou seen Sorrow and the dull waters of Hopelessness? Hast Thou known Life?"

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has introduced the life of Alexander Crummell, who was born into a free black family in New York in 1819. He explains that, learning about racism as a child, Crummell became resentful of the world. In this passage, Du Bois suggests that the 19th century was the first age during which people began to look at marginalized people in society and sympathized with them as people—in other words, recognized their shared humanity. By arguing that "Negroes became throbbing souls," Du Bois is not referring to a transformation within black people themselves, but in the way they were perceived by whites.

Du Bois' claim that the 19th century was the first point at which this happened on a large scale is certainly contentious. On the one hand, many would argue that—particularly among non-colonizing groups and during the pre-colonial era—people were not racially categorized in the same way, such that some people were considered more "human" than others. On the other hand, almost all human societies have deemed some within their society as social outcasts, and many have claimed that certain groups—particularly women and foreign tribes—were less human.

Du Bois' choice of the 19th century as an era defined by human sympathy is thus likely to be less a definitive statement about the whole of history, and more a specific statement on the growth and eventual success of the abolition movement during this period. He suggests that it was only when white people started viewing slaves as people with deep and complex souls that any progress toward racial equality took place.

Of all the three temptations, this one struck the deepest. Hate? He had out- grown so childish a thing. Despair? He had steeled his right arm against it, and fought it with the vigor of determination. But to doubt the worth of his life-work,––to doubt the destiny and capability of the race his soul loved because it was his… this, this seemed more than man could bear.

Related Characters: W.E.B. Du Bois (speaker), Alexander Crummell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

Du Bois has told the story of Alexander Crummell's early life, indicating that as a young man he was tested by three "temptations"––Hate, Despair, and Doubt. This passage describes Doubt, the final temptation, as the worst of all. While it is comparably easy to overcome hate and despair, the urge to doubt himself and his very race is something from which Crummell almost does not recover. All three temptations are brought about by racist incidents, but only doubt makes Crummell resent black people in particular, rather than the world and its racist nature. Du Bois uses this tale—which in many ways resembles a Biblical or mythic story—in order to warn the reader against falling into doubt, while simultaneously showing how easy it is for this to happen.

Chapter 13 Quotes

"Now I like the colored people, and sympathize with all their reasonable aspirations; but you and I both know, John, that in this country the Negro must remain subordinate, and can never expect to be the equal of white men. In their place, your people can be honest and respectful; and God knows, I'll do what I can to help them. But when they want to reverse nature, and rule white men, and marry white women, and sit in my parlor, then, by God! we'll hold them under if we have to lynch every Nigger in the land."

Related Characters: John Jones

Related Themes:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is taken from the fictional story of John Jones. At this point in his life, John has returned home to his community in rural Georgia, after being sent to Wells Institute to study and running into trouble while there. Back home, John asks the town's white Judge if he can teach a class at the school for black children. The Judge is wary, and tells John that although he is "a friend" to black people, this friendship has its limitations. Over the course of this passage, the Judge's tone switches from sympathetic to patronizing to sinister. These shifts in tone suggest that behind white people's claims to compassion often lie viciously racist thoughts.

As the Judge's words make clear, he is particularly threatened by the idea that black people—particularly intelligent, upwardly mobile people such as John—will try to "reverse nature" and fight back against oppression. Clearly, the Judge is only sympathetic to black people as long as they accept a completely subservient role in society. He considers the undoing of the racial hierarchy so dangerous that it justifies the violent genocide of the entire black community. His threat foreshadows the violent end John meets at the end of the chapter, and connect John's story to the widespread lynching that occurred in the wake of Reconstruction.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE FORETHOUGHT

Du Bois introduces the book, explaining that it contains reflections on the meaning of being black in the 20th century. He assures the reader that the book will be of interest to them because "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of **the color line**." He asks that the reader forgive any of accuracies, and describes the book as merely a "vague, uncertain outline" of the lives of African Americans.

From the beginning of the book, it is implicitly clear that Du Bois is addressing a white audience. His words suggest an imagined presumption that white people would consider issues of race and racism as irrelevant to them personally; however, Du Bois argues that this is far from the case.

Du Bois briefly summarizes the book's contents. Two chapters deal with the legacy of Emancipation. One examines the question of leadership, and features a critique of Booker T. Washington. In the next chapters Du Bois introduces the concept of "**the Veil**," and discusses the issue of education. Further chapters cover the black peasantry, religion, and **song**. The book concludes with "a tale twice told but seldom written." In the final page of the Forethought, Du Bois identifies himself as "flesh of the flesh" of black people, whom he categorizes as living under the Veil.

The topics Du Bois addresses may at first appear to be a rather random assortment of different issues facing the African-American community. However, his overview of the book's content also illuminates its key overarching themes, including problems within education and leadership, the pervasive burden of racial exclusion, and the idea that the "freedom" black people have been promised is something of an illusion.

CHAPTER 1: OF OUR SPIRITUAL STRIVINGS

The chapter begins with Arthur Symons' poem "The Crying of Water." Du Bois explains that people in "the other world"—the world of white people—seem perpetually curious about what it feels like to be "a problem." Du Bois explains that he first became aware of being "a problem" as a child in Massachusetts. One day, all the children in his class at school exchanged greeting cards, and one girl refused to accept Du Bois' card. It was this experience that made him realize he was different, and was excluded from the world of white people by "a vast **veil**."

Du Bois uses poetic imagery to illustrate the idea that white and black people in America are separated into two worlds. Although they may inhabit the same community—as is the case in Du Bois' integrated school—the reality is that they are divided by an invisible yet immensely powerful force, which Du Bois characterizes as a veil. Children are not born with knowledge of the veil, but black children discover it at an early age.

Du Bois didn't immediately feel the need to destroy the **veil**, but instead dedicated himself to working hard in the hope of excelling in the future as a doctor, lawyer, or writer. He notes that this reaction differs from that of other young black boys, many of whom grew bitter at the idea that God made them outsiders within their own country. Du Bois emphasizes that all young black men felt the pressure of prison walls around them as they grew up, and that they were forced to choose between grimly accepting their fate or hopelessly attempting to overcome it.

Throughout the book, Du Bois shows how easy it is for black people to grow bitter over their exclusion and mistreatmentwithin society. His reference to prison highlights the fact that even though all African-Americans have technically been free since Emancipation, the reality of their lives isstill oftenasconfined and constricted as imprisonment.

Du Bois characterizes black people as "a sort of seventh son," cursed to live behind the **veil**. At the same time, this veil produces a "second-sight" that means black people are forced to view themselves through the hostile perspective of whites. Du Bois calls this "**double-consciousness**," and suggests that it is both a burden and a kind of skill. Double-consciousness can leave African Americans feeling filled with internal conflict; yet it is a testament to their strength that they are still able to conduct their lives in this state of duality.

Although this is one of the only moments in the book in which Du Bois mentions double consciousness explicitly, it is one of the most important and influential concepts to emerge from his work. According to Du Bois, racist ideas are so pervasive that black people end up internalizing them without being aware that they are doing so. This is a key example of the insidious psychological operation of racism.

African American history has been shaped by the struggle to overcome the state of **double consciousness**. Du Bois emphasizes that this does not mean eradicating either the African or American side of black American identity, but rather insisting that these two sides can exist harmoniously instead of being in conflict. This task is so difficult that it can appear as though black people are weak, when in fact they are simply faced with an almost impossible burden—the "contradiction of double aims."

Although Du Bois was a Pan-Africanist who became increasingly sympathetic to black nationalism over the course of his life, this passage makes clear that he does not reject America entirely. However, neither does he follow Booker T. Washington's approach of advocating assimilation into white society. In some ways, Du Bois occupies a middle ground between these two styles of leadership.

Du Bois examines how this "contradiction" manifests itself in the lives of different African American figures—the craftsman, the minister, the *savant* (intellectual), and the artist. In each case, the figure is torn between two contrasting "audiences" (one white, one black) and thus two contrasting purposes. This can in turn lead people to follow "false gods" and pursue "false means of salvation."

Du Bois' discussion of the dilemma facing these figures is also applicable to his own position as an academic and writer. Although Du Bois is arguably writing with a white audience in mind, he is careful not to misrepresent reality in order to pander to white people's perspective.

During the slavery era, black people dreamed fervently of freedom and imagined that one "divine event" would end not only slavery but all the prejudice and hardship they were forced to endure. However, at the time Du Bois is writing—forty years after Emancipation—it is clear that this has not been the case. America has not dealt with the reality and legacy of slavery, and black people have yet to truly experience freedom. The post-Emancipation period has thus been characterized by a collective feeling of "deep disappointment."

In this passage, Du Bois explicitly lays out his notion that the freedom promised to black people after slavery is an illusion. He describes the peculiar combination of hope and disappointment that characterizes black life at the turn of the 20th century. Unlike whites, black people do not have the option of ignoring the reality of slavery and its legacy, and this leads to bitterness.

There are many causes of the enduring hardship black people have faced since the end of slavery, including the Ku Klux Klan, the carnage of the civil war, "the lies of carpet-baggers," and a widespread sense of confusion about the best path forward. At first black men were fixated on seeking justice and equality through the vote; however, this was gradually replaced with a strong emphasis on education.

In this passage Du Bois implicitly emphasizes the relative powerlessness of black people in the face of the many modes of violent racism they face. As he points out elsewhere, the vote alone was not enough to combat racist forces, and even that was then taken away.

Du Bois describes black peoples' struggle to access education as unimaginably difficult, and notes that the goal of gaining power through education has not yet been achieved. Dedicating time and energy to education has allowed black people to engage in a process of self-reflection, but this has not necessarily been a good thing; forced to view themselves through the **veil**, black people can come to feel self-conscious about the issues of poverty and ignorance. As a result, some black people come to accept the racist notion that white people are a "higher" race.

Here Du Bois introduces a major theme of the book—that education can be simultaneously empowering and self-defeating for black people, because even as it equips them with knowledge and skills, it also awakens them to the reality of the vast injustice they face. Du Bois stresses that this does not decrease the value and importance of education, but also that it should not be ignored.

Of course, the reality is that black people face such overwhelming prejudice and oppression that it can be almost impossible to avoid "self-disparagement." Meanwhile, the dreams of Emancipation—freedom, political power, and education—have failed to be realized, even though at the time Du Bois is writing they are needed more than ever. Du Bois argues that African Americans also desperately need a strong sense of community, as well as the assurance that black history, thought, and culture are important and valuable. In fact, if white America opened itself to the culture and values of black people, the country as a whole would likely be vastly improved.

For Du Bois, increasing the strength of the black community will not come at the expense of community in the US as a whole. Rather, black people's ties with their own kind will strengthen the overall harmony of American society. In order for this to happen, white America must stop viewing black culture as a threat and excluding black people from public institutions, opportunities, and conversations.

CHAPTER 2: OF THE DAWN OF FREEDOM

After a opening with a poem by James Russell Lowell, Du Bois begins this chapter by repeating the statement that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the **color line**." He presents this as a global problem, rather than one that solely affects the US, and argues that "the question of Negro slavery" was the main cause of the American Civil War. Du Bois explains that in this chapter, he will examine the years 1861-1872 in the context of the African American community, paying particular attention to the Freedmen's Bureau, which he characterizes as "one of the most singular and interesting" efforts to address the problem of the color line within the US.

Du Bois emphasizes the importance of historicizing the present situation of black people in America, meaning placing this situation in its historical context and showing how events in the past led to the present reality. Remember that at the time he was writing, few had conducted anything close to a proper historical study of black people's experience following the Civil War or of institutions such as the Freedmen's Bureau.

At the time, the President, Congress, and others all insisted that the Civil War was not about the question of slavery; however, the large numbers of fugitive slaves who appeared behind the lines of Northern forces proved that this was not the case. There was confusion over how to deal with these "black refugees," with some suggesting that they should be returned to slave masters and others arguing they should be considered "contraband." Eventually these fugitive slaves were put to work by Union forces, which "complicated rather than solved the problem."

The confused treatment of "black refugees" fleeing slavery highlights the chaotic and ambiguous landscape of race relations in the South (and the US as a whole) during the end and in the immediate aftermath of slavery. For over two centuries, white people in the South had treated black slaves as property with only instrumental value, and these attitudes did not shift easily.

Eventually, President Lincoln "saw the inevitable" and issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and soon Congress called for black men to enlist in the army. However, there was still confusion over what to do with the newly liberated slaves, with army officers wondering if they were obligated to provide food and shelter for those who were not eligible to fight. In the end, the Bostonian Edward L. Pierce "pointed out the way," overseeing the beginnings of the Freedmen's Bureau. Meanwhile, there was a proliferation of Freedmen's Aid organizations, which sent money, clothes, and educational materials to the South.

The Freedmen's Bureau emerged into a chaotic situation, and Du Bois' description of this chaos emphasizes the fact that it would have been unrealistic to expect one organization to solve all the problems created by centuries of slavery and racism, not to mention the more immediate issue of the war.

Even while schools, banks, and other institutionsfor newly freed black people were being established, there was still much uncertainty and inefficiency in the system. Many black people in the Southfound themselves unemployed or working for little to no pay. Meanwhile, land that had been abandoned during the war and dissolution of slavery was seized in order to be given to former slaves, and President Lincoln encouraged the establishment of a "comprehensive and unified plan" for the fallout of Emancipation, but this was only executed in a "half-hearted" way.

Outlawing slaveryradically transformed the political, economic, and social organization of the South overnight. On the other hand, it was not possible for the government to change people's day-to-day lives in such a sudden and drastic way. Thus Lincoln's ambitious plans for the aftermath of slavery were not properly realized.

In March 1865, Congress officially established the Freedmen's Bureau. The purpose of the Bureau was to "protect" freedmen, provide them with 40 acres of land, regulate their wages, and issue rations of clothing, food, and fuel. This made each newly freed black person the "ward of the Nation," a relationshipDu Bois portrays as especially tense given the power dynamic present during slavery. The first Commissioner of the Bureau was Major-General Oliver O. Howard, whom Du Bois describes as "honest" and well-meaning, a little incompetent, yet responsible for much positive and progressive work.

The Freedmen's Bureau was undoubtedly founded on good intentions, as the services and provisions it offered were designed to help freed black people in the difficult transition from slavery. On the other hand, even these provisions were somewhat restrictive. The fact that freedmen were forced to become so reliant on the state preserved the dependency of black people on white men for basic needs.

Some of the tasks of the Bureau, in addition to distributing rations and establishing schools, included instituting marriages among freedmen, acting as a court of law when necessary, and helping freedmen draw up contracts with their employers. Du Bois identifies two major challenges the Bureau faced: firstly, the distribution of land to freedmen required the seizure of what was technically private property. As a result the Bureau ended up with far less land under its control than it initially anticipated. Secondly, it was difficult to ensure that the Bureau functioned efficiently, particularly at the local level, where there was "a heterogeneous and confused but already existing system of relief and control of ex-slaves."

Again, it is important to bear in mind just how drastic a change the end of slavery was. White slave owners felt that the government had robbed them of their "property" by freeing slaves, and thus were especially unwilling to have their land taken and given to those who had been made newly free. As Du Bois shows, the government disrupted these men's entitlement to property somewhat, but not entirely, and thus most freedmen were left without the land they had been promised.

Despite all the challenges it faced, the Freedmen's Bureau did achieve positive outcomes, including greatly reducing physical suffering. It also "inaugurated the crusade" of New England women who traveled South to teach. In 1866 there was a debate over whether to expand the Bureau, with some arguing that expansion was necessary in order to secure the Thirteenth Amendment and others claiming that such expansion would be a breach of constitutional rights. Ultimately, a bill expanding the Bureau was passed through Congress, but vetoed by President Johnson. Despite this, the Bureau retained a great many powers, including tax collection, law-making, criminal punishment, and so on.

As this passage shows, the Bureau was most successful in addressing some of the more immediate and urgent problems that arose in the aftermath of Emancipation. However, it did not have the strength or support to grow into a sustainable long-term institution. In describing the Bureau's setbacks, Du Bois implicitly raises the question of how history would have unfolded differently had the Bureau been more successful. What would early 20th century black life look like if that were the case?

The climate of the South at the time was tumultuous; Du Bois describes it as akin to "waking from some wild dream to poverty and social revolution." The very name of the Freedmen's Bureau was counter to the ideology that had dominated Southern life for two centuries. Freed slaves, meanwhile, were left "bewildered between friend and foe." Although the system of slavery had been eradicated, the people who participated in it remained, as did their passionate feelings of hatred and fear of one another.

In this passage Du Bois shows how psychological and material racism coexist. Although Emancipation eradicated the most severe system of material racism in the US—slavery—psychological racism lingered, which in turn created new forms of material racism. This suggests that psychological racism is even harder to tackle than material oppression.

Between its founding and June 1869, the Freedmen's Bureau facilitated the medical treatment of half a million people. In its mission to make freedmen into "peasant proprietors," however, the Bureau faced insurmountable challenges, and the dream of "forty acres and a mule" for every freed slave was not realized. Du Bois argues that the Bureau's greatest success was in the area of education. Although there was at first bitter opposition among whites at the prospect of promoting the schooling of young black people, $6 million was spent on education during Reconstruction, and major black universities such as Howard, Fisk, Atlanta, and Hampton were founded.

Du Bois' account of the failures and successes of the Freedmen's Bureau suggests that the Bureau's success in the field of education was perhaps because of segregation. The policy of segregated schooling meant that hostile Southern whites tended not to be directly involved in the education of black people. Thus the Bureau was able to direct efforts toward black schools and universities unimpeded by white opposition.

The Freedmen's Bureau's least successful area of work, meanwhile, was justice. The main task of the Bureau was to make up for the deep racism of the Southern courts; however, the result of this was that "Bureau courts tended to become centers simply for punishing whites," whereas the Southern courts essentially aimed at "perpetuating the slavery of blacks." Meanwhile, beyond the courthouse, white people sought their own violent "revenge" on black people through beatings, rape, and lynching. However, Du Bois argues that although it is easy from a contemporary perspective to criticize the Bureau, at the time it would have been impossible to know how to address the issues the Bureau faced.

Once again, Du Bois emphasizes that even if the Bureau worked at optimum capacity, many of the issues it faced were simply unsolvable. During slavery, the justice system in the South largely existed in order to regulate the behavior of slaves, punishing slaves for running away, stealing, and so on. It was essentially impossible for a white person to be prosecuted for a crime against a black person. Although the Bureau attempted to rectify this issue, the problem was simply too widespread and severe.

Du Bois summarizes the work of the Bureau, arguing that it successfully put to use over $15 million helping freedmen, yet failed to mitigate the intense prejudice harbored by Southern whites, the "ex-masters." Du Bois claims it was natural that an institution like the Bureau would be subject to harsh criticism, and in 1870, there was a Congressional investigation of the Bureau that eventually led to the court marshal of General Howard in 1874. Although Howard was eventually exonerated, these events brought to light many of the Bureau's problems.

Here Du Bois explicitly suggests that the main obstacle the Bureau faced was psychological racism. Even the enormous structural and economic issues the South faced were dwarfed by the problem of white people still feeling that they had the rights of "masters" over black people. In this sense, the Freedmen's Bureau was arguably always doomed to fail.

In general, most critics of the Bureau did not object to its handling of particular matters so much as to the fact that it existed in the first place. Du Bois argues that had the Bureau not faced such widespread opposition from Southern whites, it could have established itself as a permanent institution that would have made a significant difference in shaping the South after slavery. Ironically, the argument that the federal government should not intervene in race relations ended up being used to justify the enfranchisement of African American men.This argument proposed that the government should cease its manipulation of Southern society and allow ordinary white and black men to take matters into their own hands. Du Bois characterizes this surprising logical twist by stating that "the Freedmen's Bureau died, and its child was the Fifteenth Amendment."

Note that the arguments over the Freedmen's Bureau are somewhat similar to political debates between conservatives and progressives in the US today. In the late 19th century, many white people in the South objected to idea that the federal government would have such extensive control over people's everyday lives through the operations of the Bureau. During slavery, however, white people had controlled every aspect of slaves' existence, and thus Emancipation presented a dilemma over how to transition to a society in which each person had full autonomy and control over their own lives, regardless of their race.

Du Boiscompares the premature death of the Bureau to that of a young person, and emphatically claims that, despite the efforts of the Bureau and of black people themselves, "the Negro is not free." In many parts of the country, the lives of freedmen and their descendants still resemble slavery, and the legacy of the Freedmen's Bureau is its unrealized potential. Du Bois concludes the chapter by repeating its first claim, that the "problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the **color line**."

Du Bois' comparison of the end of the Bureau to the death of a child foreshadows the chapter on his son's death. Although there is not a direct parallel between these two "deaths," both illustrate themes of injustice, disappointment, and bitterness. Both the Bureau and Du Bois' son carried the hope of freedom and the ultimate denial of that hope.

CHAPTER 3: OF MR. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND OTHERS

This chapter begins with a poem fragment by Lord Byron that includes the phrase: "Know ye not / who would be free themselves must strike the blow?". Du Bois then opens by claiming that the rise of Booker T. Washington is "the most striking thing" in African-American history since 1876. Du Bois argues that Washington's approach to social change—defined by industrial education, compromise with the South, and "silence" on the issue of civil rights—was similar to the approach of free black men from 1830 until the Civil War. However, Washington's "enthusiasm," hard work, and "perfect faith" were unprecedented.

It can be difficult to understand Du Bois' exact position on Washington, given that he speaks of him with both strong criticism and praise. Overall, Du Bois implies that he admires Washington as a person and is impressed by his accomplishments, but that he rejects his leadership of the African-American community. Indeed, Du Bois even suggests that Washington caused a regression—as opposed to progression—of black people's rights and experience.

Washington was greatly admired by whites in both the North and South; black people, meanwhile, were "silenced" in their criticism of him.His willingness to work with conservatives, and in particular his crafting of the Atlanta Compromise, ensured his fame and success even while it also seemed an abandonment of any hope of striving for political rights. In the North, meanwhile, Washington understood and assimilated to a culture fixated on material prosperity. Overall, Washington's "singleness of vision and oneness with his age" made him highly successful, and Du Bois describes his widespread fame as akin to a "cult."

Du Bois' description of Washington's leadership often takes the form of a backhanded compliment. Saying that Washington was a perfect fit for his age is actually something of an insult considering Du Bois' denunciation of the society in which Washington lives. To Du Bois, Washington's focus on entrepreneurship and conciliation with racist whites are exactly what makes him a bad leader for black people.

Du Bois admits that it is tempting not to criticize Washington, both because he achieved so much having come from so little, and also so as to avoid being accused of jealousy. However, even while white people have praised Washington, black people have bitterly criticized him, and Du Bois says the silencing of this criticism is dangerous and undemocratic.

Note that at the time Du Bois was writing, there were almost no African-American leaders with any influence beyond local communities such as universities and churches. Choosing to criticize Washington was thus a risky move.

Du Bois examines the history of African-American leadership, beginning with those who led slave uprisings and revolts before 1750, "while the fire of African freedom still burned in the veins of the slaves." As time went on and relations between black and white people (marginally) improved, leaders became less focused on "revolt and revenge"; during this period, African-American leaders began to gain intellectual achievements and make political demands. Meanwhile, the Haitian revolution inspired slave uprisings in the South, whereas in the North black people forced out of white churches founded "a peculiar socio-religious institution": the African Church.

Although he does not say so specifically, Du Bois impliesthat losing the fiery spirit of "revolt and revenge" was a setback to black leadership and progress. Du Bois recognizes that pushing for education and civil rights is valuable and compromise necessary, but also suggests that those born into a world that has seen centuries of slavery and racism can accept injustice too easily.

Some black people in the North came to focus less on the dissolution of slavery and more on securing rights for themselves as a different class of people from the enslaved. Others became active in the abolition movement. After the 1876 revolution and the "oppression of the Negro votes," a new leader arose: Booker T. Washington. Washington continued previous policies of "adjustment and submission," but was unique in doing so in a completely new political climate, in which the economy was booming and interactions between people of different races was at an all-time high.

Here Du Bois shows that just because a black person occupies a position of influence, doesn't mean they will necessarily work to benefit the black community as a whole. Although very different examples, the freedmen who fought for their own rights as distinct from slaves and Booker T. Washington both demonstrate the kind of leadership that was harmful to black people in the long run.

Du Bois criticizes Washington for withdrawing pressure for African-American civil rights at exactly the point when this pressure was most necessary. As a result, black men were disenfranchised, black people were legally defined as second-class citizens, and money was withdrawn from black institutions of higher education. Although these things can't be blamed directly on Washington, the movement he created was undoubtedly partially responsible. Du Bois identifies several paradoxes in Washington's arguments, all of which relate to the fact that while Washington advocated dignity and self-reliance, the policies that he endorsed made dignity and self-reliance impossible.

Here Du Bois shows that bad leadership does more than slow the progress of racial justice—it can actually impede or even reverse it. Washington's argument that black people must be self-reliant was dangerous because it cohered with the views of white people who did not want to assume responsibility for the legacy of slavery. As Du Bois points out, this created a situation in which even black people who were determined to improve their own lives were prevented from doing so by the lingering problems of racism and inequality.

Washington's views are criticized by two distinct groups of black people: those who reject white society entirely and advocate emigration out of the US, and those active in politics who object to the disintegration of the political, civic, and educational rights of African Americans. This latter group may agree with some of Washington's points, but hold that black people will never be able to fulfill their potential if they are forced to live as second-class citizens and do not receive opportunities such as higher education.

It is important to bear in mind that people like Du Bois did not criticize Washington because they wanted *black people to be dependent on government aid and other forms of assistance—rather, they acknowledged that the legacy of slavery as well as lingering psychological and material racism meant that black people did not have a fair chance of success and prosperity without the help of government.*

Du Bois criticizes this group of highly-educated black people for not vocalizing their oppositiontoWashington. He argues that "it is the duty of black men to judge the South discriminatingly," which means making well-informed assessments that take into account the complexity and variability of white Southern attitudes toward black people. At the same time, this also means reckoning with the danger of seeing black people in the South be reduced to a state of "semi-slavery." Du Bois praises Washington's vocal criticism of lynching and other "sinister schemes," but argues that Washington's "propaganda" implies that overall the South's unjust treatment of black people is reasonable.

This passage reveals the type of leadership Du Bois endorses; namely, one based on historical and sociological knowledge. Du Bois argues that it is important for people to recognize and understand the nuances of the way the South—including institutionalized Southern racism—operates. He implies that if people have access to knowledge and education, this will bring about better leadership and ultimately create a more equitable country.

Du Bois presents his own modifications of Washington's arguments. He claims that "slavery and race-prejudice are potent if not sufficient causes of the Negro's position" and that striving is important, but must be supplemented by policies and institutions that support people's ability to strive. The South needs to be pushed to remedy its wrongs, and black people must resist Washington's belittling and dismissal of Southern racism and injustice. Du Bois concludes with the words of the Founding Fathers, reminding the reader that America was founded on the principle that "all men were created equal."

Here Du Bois emphasizes that his own views are not wildly different from Washington's, but that the subtle distinctions between their arguments are crucial in leading the African-American community to a better situation. Note that Du Bois' vision of justice emphasizes the responsibility of Southern racism for creating the bleak conditions in which black people now find themselves, and stresses that Southern whites must be held accountable.

CHAPTER 4: OF THE MEANING OF PROGRESS

The chapter begins with a verse by the German writer Friedrich Schiller. Du Bois opens with the phrase "Once upon a time," and goes on to recall a time 17 years before the time of writing, when he was a student at Fisk and spent a summer teaching in rural Tennessee. He describes the Teacher Institute he attended, in which white teachers had their classes in the morning, and black teachers at night. After training, the teachers went out "hunting" for schools, journeying across the land and asking each school individually whether they needed a teacher.

Although Du Bois led a much more privileged life compared to poor black people in the South, his experiencesarestill very much saffected by racism. The segregation of the Teacher Institute highlights the fact that racism is not only unjust but impractical. Similarly, the fact that Du Bois and the other new teachers had to find a school on foot portrays the Southern infrastructure as old-fashioned and disorganized.

Du Bois found a school through Josie, "a thin, homely girl of twenty," whom he met while walking. Du Bois describes Josie's family: her father was "a simple soul, calmly ignorant," her mother was ambitious and energetic, and she had many siblings, some of whom had already moved away. Du Bois liked the family, finding them to be hard-working and honest. Some time after finding a school to teach at, Du Bois rode with a white teacher to the Commissioner's house.At first he was pleased to be invited to dinner, however, the "awful shadow of the **Veil**" fell when Du Bois realized the white men would eat first, "then I—alone."

Throughout the book, Du Bois describes positive aspects of negative situations. Josie's family are poor and have a difficult life, but Du Bois is careful to illustrate their admirable qualities as well. On the other hand, Du Bois also frequently features moments of tainted joy and crushed optimism. For example, his own happiness at being invited to dinner at the Commissioner's house turns to bitter disappointment when he is forced to eat after the white people.

Du Bois describes the school where he chose to teach as run-down and poorly furnished. Josie attended the school along with her siblings, and Du Bois mentions that she dreamed of studying at "the great school in Nashville." Du Bois describes the rest of the students, recounting them by name and noting that some were beautiful, some plain, some smart, some lazy, and so on. Du Bois admits: "I loved my school," and describes the time he spent teaching in idyllic terms. However, he explains that some of the elder members of the community were suspicious of "book-learning," and that some children were taken out of school to perform agricultural work.

In this passage Du Bois again mixes positive and negative recollections about his time teaching at the school. One effect of this is to remind the reader how frequently black people's success and happiness was marred by the ongoing consequences of slavery and the continuing problems of racism and poverty. Du Bois shows that even while the education of black children is vital, it is often met with resistance from both white and black people.

Du Bois recalls that on Friday nights he would stay with a farmer called Doc Burke and his family, in a home that was modest but "scrupulously neat" and welcoming. Du Bois goes on to describe other families who hosted him, as well as his time spent having conversations with Josie. Although Josie dreamed of going away to school in Nashville, it seemed unlikely that this would be possible. Josie was hard-working and resourceful, but the jobs available to her paid far too little money.

The black people Du Bois describes are dedicated and hard-working, with dreams of self-improvement. The neatness of Doc Burke's home highlights the morally upstanding nature of his family and others like them. However, as Du Bois shows, these good qualities are not enough for poor black people to succeed in a racist world.

Du Bois spent two summers teaching at the school and living "in this little world." He describes attending ceremonies at the local black church,during which he met people from "other worlds" and listened to "the mighty cadences of **Negro song**." The community Du Bois inhabited was drawn together by a common experience of the cycle of life, poverty, hardship, and "the **Veil** that hung between us and Opportunity."Older members of the community tended to view life with a kind of grim, fatalistic acceptance, whereas younger people who did not have firsthand experience of slavery and war struggled in vain against racism and injustice.

In the midst of a book that deals extensively with exclusion, Du Bois' description of the "little worlds" he encounters in the South highlight the strength and joy to be found in belonging to small-scale communities. Although black people have to face the relentless burden of the Veil, this experience of exclusion becomes the basis of new forms of attachment, inclusion, and belonging.

Ten years later, Du Bois returned to Tennessee to find that Josie was dead. This was only one of many hardships her family had suffered—her brother was also in prison for theft. The old schoolhouse was gone and had been replaced with a new building. Doc Burke had managed to buy a hundred acres and a larger house, but remained in debt and was still working even in his elderly, frail state. Du Bois reflects on the cycle of life and death, observing that life is incredibly difficult for the poor, "and yet how human and real!". He concludes that in such a context it is hard to know whether the world is experiencing a moment of "twilight" or "the flush of some faint-dawning day."

The story of Josie and the community in which she lives ends on a bleak and tragic—if ambiguous—note. Earlier parts of the chapter betray hints of optimism and seem to suggest that things may actually turn out well for Josie and her family. However, this turns out to be far from the case. Du Bois' final words in this chapter indicate the extent to which this feeling of disappointment and uncertainty about the future is characteristic not only of a single community, but of African-Americans in general.

CHAPTER 5: OF THE WINGS OF ATLANTA

The chapter begins with a poem by the abolitionist poet John Greenleaf Whittier, which includes the lines: "All are rising— / the black and white together." Du Bois describes the city of Atlanta, lying "gray and still on the crimson soil of Georgia." He invokes the haunting legacy of slavery and the Civil War, yet claims that the people of Atlanta are "turned resolutely toward the future." Du Bois argues that "a fearful wilderness" surrounded Atlanta after the war, a wilderness caused by the combination of poverty, serfdom, crime and punishment, and most of all, "the **Veil** of Race."

Du Bois describes the past as inescapably part of the present. Even as the people of Atlanta dream of better things to come, they cannot escape the legacy of slavery, which manifests in issues such as crime and poverty in the present. Indeed, Du Bois' use of the word "crimson" to describe the Georgia soil hints at the violence (and bloodshed) of slavery, which remains embedded as a permanent feature of the Southern landscape.

Du Bois argues that hard work and prosperity are the correct path to a better future for Atlanta (and indeed for all the South). However, there is a danger of mistaking money as the end goal, rather than simply the means of securing a better future. Du Bois perceives that at the time he is writing, many Southerners are falling victim to an obsession with money. Furthermore, wealth is seen as the goal of politics and solution to every social problem. Du Bois expresses concern that this obsession is spreading to the black community. The older leaders of the African American community are making way for the younger generation, who tend to be affluent property owners.

Du Bois' concerns about the role of greed in politics and society echoes many concerns that remain in the present. Note that he is particularly concerned with how the desire for wealth is affecting the African-American community, and particularly the black leaders who are the first generation of black people in the South to have a chance at achieving prosperity. Du Bois identifies the moment he is writing as pivotal in avoiding the greed that afflicts white men.

Du Bois draws a parallel between the "death" of two figures: the honest, deferential slave, and the "Southern gentleman." He argues that the obsession with money is behind the disappearance of both. Black people's prizing of faith and knowledge is in danger of being overtaken by a fixation with wealth.

While Du Bois hardly laments the disappearance of these slavery-era Southern figures, he expresses concern that the moral vacuum and uncertainty created by Emancipation may be filled by an obsession with money.

Du Bois describes a cluster of beautiful, stately buildings: Atlanta University. This is where he lives, and where students study the classics and learn "old time-glorified methods of delving for Truth." Du Bois argues that at no university, not even Oxford or Yale, do students strive so passionately as they do at Atlanta University. He describes the students learning of a "future fuller than the past." He argues that the founders of Atlanta and other black universities "made their mistakes," but that the decision to found universities was undoubtedly correct, as this is the best way of laying the foundation for a better future.

For Du Bois, hope for the future lies in the young, intelligent, hard-working black people who have a chance to receive a classical education at university. He views education as crucial because it allows people to fully understand the reality of the past and present while also instilling moral values that will lay the foundation for a fair and prosperous future.

Du Bois argues that the biggest mistake made by the founders of Atlanta University was thinking that progress would come quickly. They also made the error of "forgetting" about the distribution of talent, which means that not every young person will succeed at university; "to make the blacksmith a scholar is almost as silly as… making the scholar a blacksmith." Du Bois also argues that the purpose of universities is not just to train students for professional life, but also to be an "organ of adjustment" that helps society exist in a harmonious, civil way.

Du Bois treads a careful line between what he describes as the naïve idealism of the Atlanta University founders and the arguments made by Booker T. Washington (and others) that black people do not need more than a technical education. In this passage, he clearly demonstrates that just because he advocates the existence of higher education opportunities for black people, that doesn't mean all black people should enroll in these institutions.

Du Bois claims that the South is especially in need of universities at the moment, as the culture of balanced, critical thought was ruined by slavery. He argues that support for the development of black universities should run parallel to support for white Southern universities. According to Du Bois, universities teach "Patience, Humility, Manners, and Taste." He repeats the sentiment that laborers should be taught trades and technical skills, whereas "thinkers" should be taught to "think." At the same time, universities do not operate in a vacuum, and their value is not simply instrumental; rather, they have a crucial role within society of promoting righteousness and truth.

Later black intellectuals and leaders argue that Du Bois' attitude toward university contains overtones of elitism. He suggests that traditional higher education makes people more moral, an argument that some reject as classist. At the same time, Du Bois' own work highlights the importance of education in the advancement of social justice. By conducting sociological and historical analysis of the black community, Du Bois significantly influenced the civil rights movement.

CHAPTER 6: OF THE TRAINING OF BLACK MEN

The chapter begins with a quotation from the medieval Persian mathematician, philosopher, and poet Omar Khayyam. Du Bois states that since the first slaves arrived in the US, there have been three "streams of thinking" about race. The first "stream" favors the idea of human unity and co-operation across races. The second, which Du Bois describes as an old Southern way of thinking, holds that black people are in a category between humans and animals—potentially "lovable within [their] limitations," but doomed to always be behind the **Veil**. The third mode of thought is that of black people themselves, who yearn for freedom and equality but are sometimes forced to wonder if the second way of thinking is correct.

Note that whenhe describes the "three streams of thinking," Du Bois places all black people into one stream. At first this may seem strange, as if Du Bois is suggesting that all black people have the same thoughts and opinions. However, what Du Bois is actually showing is that the development of ideas about race and racism is completely out of the hands of black people. Indeed, white people do not treat black people as authorities on themselves, but more like objects to be studied. By writing "Souls," Du Bois challenges this view.

Du Bois argues that the racism of the South must be addressed seriously; it cannot be "laughed away" or erased by changes to the law, and it should not be ignored. The only solution to racism can be found in education, reason, and culture. Similarly, the hopes and ambitions of black people must be taken seriously. Currently, education is tasked with addressing all three streams of thought at once; it must help people realize their potential, "stamp out" prejudice, and support those who live behind the **Veil**.

Throughout the book, Du Bois argues that racism must be taken seriously and not ignored, no matter how powerless people feel to fight it. His argument that racism can be undone by education and reason would come to be challenged by later black writers, however, who pointed out that education can also be used to reinforce, rather than challenge, racist ideas.

Education in the South must provide a way forward for "two backward peoples." Du Bois examines the history of Southern education since the civil war. In the first years following the war, education was in a state of chaos and uncertainty. There then followed ten years of constructive change, when—among other achievements—universities for freedmen were founded. However, the quality of these universities was varied and often rather poor, and the quality of schooling for black children was low. At the same time, the industrial revolution took over the South. Industrial schools were thus also founded, and became prominent in the decade beginning in 1895.

It would certainly have been controversial for Du Bois to claim that Southern whites were "backward people" at the time he was writing. While this assertion was frequently made about African Americans, most white people thought of themselves as an inherently advanced, civilized race. Du Bois rejects this idea, suggesting that intelligence, ability, and morality are developed through education, as opposed to being innate cultural or genetic qualities.

Du Bois identifies a problem with industrial schools—that they can treat people as no more than workers, a means of increasing material prosperity. He argues that this line of thinking originated in slavery, but has not disappeared after slavery's end. Education that allows for the fulfillment of dreams and ambitions is treated as "the privilege of white men" (and white men only). Du Bois describes the South as being racially divided into "two separate worlds" at every level of life: schools, workplaces, churches, culture, transportation, hospitals, and jails. This separation is so absolute that it "absolutely precludes… sympathetic and effective group-training and leadership" across the races.

Du Bois points to the fact that for most of the period that black people have lived in the US, they have been seen to have only instrumental value, meaning they were only valued as workers who could make money for plantation owners. For Du Bois, it is therefore unsurprising that in the post-Emancipation era, white people (and even some black leaders like Washington) advocate industrial education for black people, as this will train them to be workers and little else.

In spite of the "sneers of critics," Teachers' Institutes were founded and quickly trained 30,000 much-needed black teachers. Du Bois quotes an article from a white Southern newspaper arguing that providing classical education to young African Americans ended up being "a waste of time, efforts, and money," because black people simply robotically repeated the information they were supposed to learn. While Du Bois dismisses this argument as unreasonable, he concedes that there *are* valid concerns surrounding the state of black higher education that need to be addressed.

The claim of "critics" that Teacher's Institutes for black people were a waste of money is arguably even more sinister than it first appears. Of course, many whites did hold the view that black people were not intelligent enough to benefit from a traditional education. On the other hand, remember that slaves were banned from even learning how to read and write. Clearly, many whites thought that education would lead black people to challenge their oppression, and thus the status quo.

Du Bois admits that fifty years ago it would have been difficult to prove that black people were capable of succeeding in a "modern college course," but now over four hundred African-Americans have graduated from top universities, including Harvard and Yale. Du Bois writes that he personally knows many black graduates, and that he has never encountered a more selfless, devoted, and determined group of people. He says that they are mostly "conservative, careful leaders," who are not "agitators."

From a contemporary perspective, Du Bois' assurance that black university graduates are not "agitators" seems strange and—depending on one's definition of an agitator—not particularly accurate. However, bear in mind that Du Bois is largely writing to persuade a white audience that black people should be afforded the right to a traditional education.

Du Bois says that if white and black people are to live alongside each other in a harmonious fashion, there will be a need for black colleges to exist. It would not be sustainable for all black people in the South to be lumped together in the same socioeconomic class, with no mobility or diversity. Moreover, there is an obvious demand among young black people for higher education.

Du Bois' argument for giving black people the right to higher education is nuanced and multifaceted, designed to appeal to a range of audiences with very different ideas and reservations about the consequences of an educated black population.

Du Bois makes an impassioned argument that if white Southerners object to black people's presence among them, they should stop and remember who brought them there; if they complain about black crime, they should look to the widespread evidence of white-on-black rape (in the form of mixed-race people) and of the greatest crime of all: slavery. Du Bois admits that of course not all black people are honorable, but that there is more danger in "half-trained minds" than in those who have received a proper education.

Again, Du Bois oscillates between different perspectives and arguments for why black people should be given access to higher education. At times this tactic of persuasion seem somewhat conciliatory to whites, but at others he makes a more forceful case, such as when he points out the hypocrisy of white people who complain about black crime.

Du Bois argues that black colleges have three functions: to "maintain the standards of popular education," help improve the situation of black people, and improve co-operation and relations across the races. He concludes by claiming that it is only through being well-educated that he is able to ever find himself "above the **Veil**."

Du Bois compellingly argues that black colleges are good for white as well as black people. This is because a society dominated by racial prejudice and exclusion is ultimately harmful to everyone, even those whose interests it supposedly serves.

CHAPTER 7: OF THE BLACK BELT

The chapter begins with a quotation from the Biblical Song of Solomon. Du Bois describes arriving by train at a place south-west of Atlanta, "the centre of the Negro problem." Georgia earns this title partly because more black people live there than in any other state, and also because it fought to retain the slave trade with particular zeal. Du Bois addresses the reader, explaining that "if you wish to ride with me you must come into the 'Jim Crow Car.'" He says not to worry, as there are usually a handful of white people in the Jim Crow Car, although there are never any black people in the white car.

In this passage, Du Bois subtly contests some widely-held misconceptions about racism and segregation. As his passage about the Jim Crow car demonstrates, segregation is not absolute; his words suggest that Jim Crow is less about keeping the races absolutely separate and more about restricting the opportunities and services available to black people, and allowing whites to avoid black people if they choose.

The train stops in Albany, "the heart of the Black Belt." Du Bois describes the bitter battle to seize the land from the Native Americans, and describes Albany as a usually quiet town that on Saturdays is flooded with the "black peasantry." Although he describes these people as "simple" and "uncouth," he adds that their activities are pleasant and harmless––they go shopping, talk with friends, drink but do not get drunk, and rarely fight. Du Bois claims that Albany is in many ways a typical Southern town.

Again, Du Bois' discussion of poor rural black people can at first appear elitist. However, it is important to remember that he is writing in a context in which such hierarchical racialized class distinctions were more deeply embedded into culture than is the case today. Du Bois avoids overstating his own affinity to poor black people as well.

Moving his attention across the state, Du Bois compares the contemporary landscape to what existed in the past, pointing out that the plantations have now been divided up between former slave-owning families, Jews, and African Americans. He notes that the land is neglected and thus not as fruitful as it could be. Indeed, the whole area feels "forlorn and forsaken," with many buildings falling apart. Only black people remain, as they have no choice but to stay. Du Bois describes them as weary and working hard to pay off debt and the rent of their land. He also mentions some black people who were tricked out of money and land in the aftermath of slavery.

Du Bois describes the South as defined by a disappointment so strong that it is even reflected in the physical landscape and disposition of its population. Note the contrast of this image to the idea of Emancipation as a rapturous liberation described earlier in the book. For centuries, slaves had longed for freedom and imagined that it would bring an end to their suffering. In reality, however, the abolishment of slavery brought neither peace nor freedom for black people in the South.

Du Boiswrites that the Black Belt is rich with history, but that its story is rarely told. He recounts tales of the Osceola, "the Negro-Indian chieftain," of the slaves brought to the area and the enormous amount of cotton they were forced to harvest. He mentions an elderly man who describes the area as "a little Hell" and recalls slaves dropping dead in the middle of work, only to have their bodies kicked aside. Du Bois describes slave masters who abandoned their plantations to the overseers, a "blue-eyed quadroon" whose dark-skinned husband works in the field, and five houses of prostitutes, two black and one white.

Throughout the slavery era and beyond, whites generally did not consider the lives of black people as worthy subject matter for the historical record. This prejudice, combined with slaves' illiteracy, meant that the life stories of slaves were passed down through oral history, turned into rumor, or forgotten. In this chapter, Du Bois attempts to reverse this trend by recording the lives of people in the "Black Belt."

Du Bois describes a young black man of 22, who before the fall of cotton was successfully renting and farming land. After the fall, however, he was forced to rent land and a mule at an exorbitant rate; Du Bois exclaims, "Poor lad!—A slave at twenty-two." He mentions that after the war black convicts worked on the land that the young man is now renting, and were violently mistreated. Du Bois explains that, despite working fervently, the young man grows more indebted each year. There is little joy among black people in the area, who are generally very poor and live in fear and resentment of the violence white people exert over them.

Du Bois uses the example of this particular young man to demonstrate how the general black population of the rural South remain in a situation that is not substantially different from slavery. Rather than being imprisoned by the structural system of slavery, black people are instead imprisoned by debt, poverty, and violence. Slavery is thus both an actual, specific system (sometimes called "chattel slavery") and a broad, variable set of conditions that restrict people's freedom.

Du Bois moves on to a neighboring area, where more white people live as well as African Americans. He meets a rich black farmer, and points out that much of the land is now owned by Russian Jews. Du Boisconcludes the chapter with another story of a black couple who bought land from a white man, who then cheated them out of it and didn't pay them for work they'd done. After all this, the sheriff then came to confiscate their furniture; when Du Bois points out that furniture is exempt from confiscation, the man replies that the sheriff took it anyway.

In the South, black people have such low social status that even if they do everything right—including working hard, following the law, and appeasing white people—it is almost impossible to succeed. As Du Bois shows in the final passage of this chapter, black people have no recourse for the mistreatment they suffer, as the justice system is just as discriminatory as the behavior of ordinary white citizens.

CHAPTER 8: OF THE QUEST OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE

The chapter begins with a passage by William Vaughn Moody. Du Bois asks the reader if they have ever seen a cotton field "white with the harvest," and compares the look of the cotton to the Golden Fleece from the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts. Du Bois discusses changes to the "Cotton Kingdom," including the revolutionary presence of the cotton mill and debates over whether or not the Black Belt is still the center of cotton production. Du Bois argues that black people are not studied enough, and that white people wrongfully presume they "know it all" when it comes to the lives of African Americans. To counter this trend, Du Bois will examine the lives of the black farm laborers who work in the Black Belt.

Du Bois' work serves as a reminder that much of the plight of African Americans was defined by economic circumstances. Although willful discrimination was a major factor in the poverty and exploitation of black workers in the South, equally important were issues such as industrialization and changes in the price of cotton. Du Bois suggests that these economic (or material) conditions must be examined alongside psychological factors in order to truly understand the lives of black people in the South.

In 1890, 10,000 black people live in the Black Belt, along with 2,000 whites. Du Bois notes that "the country is rich, but the people are poor," and that debt dominates life in the area. Slavery and Emancipations, combined with the impact of war, left a legacy of financial disaster. Du Bois notes that the black laborers in Dougherty County, where his focus lies, live in the same cabinsthat existed during slavery. The cabins are overcrowded, run-down, and poorly ventilated, which has a negative effect on the productiveness of the workers who reside in them.

Although Du Bois does not say so explicitly in "Souls," he was critical of capitalism, believing that it was the root cause of many aspects of racial injustice. Even when the law technically gave black people the chance to own land, gain wealth, and achieve social mobility, in reality most black people were excluded from these opportunities by the issues of poverty, poor labor conditions, and debt.

Due to economic hardship, the black families in the area are smaller in size than they used to be, and few young people are married. Du Bois notes that it is common for couples to separate, and laments the "easy marriage and easy separation"—a legacy of slavery—that is common within African-American communities. He refers to the ease with which marriages are broken as an "evil," and points out approvingly that the black church is making strides to end this tendency. However, Du Boisalso argues that in many cases, couples split due to economic pressures and other factors beyond their control.

From a contemporary perspective, Du Bois' attitude toward marriage may seem conservative. However, it is important to bear in mind that slavery systematically disrupted black people's efforts to build stable, supportive romantic and family units. Black people had been denied the chance to have autonomy over their own social attachments for centuries, and this continued after Emancipation due to economic stress.

Du Bois explains that all but about 10% of the black population of Dougherty Country is very poorly educated, and about two-thirds cannot read or write. However, illiteracy is only part of the story. During slavery, information about economics, government, and other fundamental aspects of society was deliberately hidden from black people, and the consequences of this are still strongly felt. Du Bois argues that when we talk about groups of people in broad terms, it can be easy to forget about each person's individual soul, and to really consider the vast range of emotion felt by each person.

In this passage Du Bois emphasizes the point that black people's "ignorance" is not due to innate genetic or cultural deficiencies, but to the systematic denial of educational opportunities. His discussion of black people's "souls," meanwhile,reminds his presumably white audience of the dignity, depth, and potential to be found in each black person, no matter how much they have been forced to suffer or how many opportunities have been withheld from them.

Having said this, Du Bois then returns to portraying the black community of Dougherty County in broad, statistical terms. He explains that the vast majority of the population work as farm laborers, that child labor is a significant problem in the county, and that 94%of people work—both men and women. Du Bois describes meeting a former slave who complains about the fact that he cannot afford his rent, and that the only way to make money is to own land. The man protests that the "world called him free," but that his reality is "a mockery of freedom." Although poor black workers in the South might legally be free, the reality of their lives is often indistinguishable from slavery.

Note how the condition of black people in the South differs from the "normal" white family structure of the time. At the turn of the century, middle- and upper-class white families were still defined by strict gender roles, with women staying at home to take care of the children and household. In the black communities Du Bois describes, everyone works, regardless of gender and often regardless of age. Material racism thus had a significant impact on the family structure and social conditions of black people.

Cotton is the currency of the Black Belt, and it is a currency "bound to bankrupt the tenant." Many black people are in debt from which they can never hope to recover; this is partly the result of a racist belief among white employers that unless they are bound by debt, black people will not work at all. Thus the poorest black workers in the South remain in a form of slavery, and "the Thirteenth Amendment is sadly broken." These workers' ignorance of the broader labor market leaves them vulnerable to exploitation.

Du Bois shows how the system of cotton farming was established to benefit landowners while dooming tenants to poverty. No matter how hard black cotton farmers worked during this period, there was little they could do to escape debt and actually profit from their labor. Cotton farming is thus one of the clearest examples of material racial injustice.

Du Bois also describes the aggressive harassment and violence black people are forced to face in the Jim Crow South. He notes that much of this is written into Southern culture, but not into law. Du Bois says that black people can find greater safety by living in communities that have a large black population; however, this also means that people stay living in communities where there is little hope for economic growth. Du Bois argues that it is a mistake to view black people as lazy, when in fact they are generally dedicated and enthusiastic workers, but he suggests that they perhaps lack the greed that can motivate people to aggressively pursue opportunities to make money.

Throughout the book, Du Bois emphasizes the ways in which black people in the South must constantly choose between facing the lesser of two evils—whether poverty and violence, ignorance and bitterness, or debt and destitution. As a result, racist ideology ascribes negative characteristics to black people, claiming that they are inherently unintelligent, lazy, or criminal. Du Bois implies that if the reader understands the choices black people are forced to make, they will see these characteristics as false.

Du Bois explains that white employers refuse to improve the working conditions of black people, claiming that such a move would be disastrous and blaming the dilapidated Southern landscape on "Negro freedom." Indeed, Du Bois argues that both white and black men blame their problems on the other, such that a mutual understanding becomes impossible. White men refuse to acknowledge why black men would want to seek better opportunities and quality of life.

Here Du Bois illustrates the way that racism is constructed through fear. Just as many white people delayed the abolition of slavery because they feared the vengeance of freed slaves, so do white employers in the post-Emancipation period fear the consequences of improving the labor conditions of black people. As Du Bois indicates, this fear is largely irrational.

Du Bois explains the different socioeconomic classes that exist among black people at the time he is writing. At the bottom is the "submerged tenth," sharecroppers who are "entirely without capital. Above them are metayers (tenant farmers) and semi-metayers, who pay rent in cotton. Above this, 5% are "money-renters," and only 6% actually own any land. The system of renting through cotton leaves workers extremely vulnerable to exploitationand in an impoverished, "wretched" position. Du Bois suggests that the money-renters are often more intelligent than the metayers, and are in a better position because they have been able to negotiate fairer arrangements for themselves.

Although Du Bois claims that the tenants who manage to pay rent with money are more intelligent, elsewhere in the book he has shown that intelligence and understanding of the modern economy are largely due to luck. For the majority of black people in the South, education and information about the economic system in which they live is simply not available. Thus even black workers with innate intelligence and skill are forced to accept bad (and often illegal) employment contracts and conditions.

Du Bois notes that tax records suggest that there are no black landholders in Dougherty County, but that it's possible there were some whose land was under white patron's names, a practice that began during slavery. In total, only 185 black people have owned land in the county since 1875; collectively, they have owned 30,000 acres, yet only half of this is currently under black ownership. However, given all the obstacles that the black community of Dougherty County have faced, Du Bois holds that this is impressive. More privileged people cannot fathom the "soul-sickening battle" these black communities in the South face. Du Bois concludes the chapter by noting that the very few families who have been able to achieve a degree of financial security through land ownership tend to move to the cities.

Here Du Bois introduces another problem that impacts the economic development of black communities in the South: as soon as black people accumulate enough wealth and resources for social mobility, they tend to move North and/or to cities. This means that rural black communities remain trapped in cycles of poverty, violence, and injustice. This problem continued into the 20th century with the "Great Migration" of African Americans to the North and West, and is arguably still an issue in today's world.

CHAPTER 9: OF THE SONS OF MASTER AND MAN

The chapter begins with a quote from Elizabeth Barrett Browning describing the way that people conduct their lives in intense proximity to each other.Du Bois describes this as a "world old phenomenon," specifying that different races have always lived in close proximity, and that our own age is defined by the colonial arrangement of Europeans living among "undeveloped peoples." It might be tempting to believe that all the suffering caused by colonialism—including war, genocide, and slavery—is justified by the eventual triumph of "righteousness" and "strength" over weakness and evil, but Du Bois rejects this line of thought.

At the time Du Bois was writing, it was normal to justify colonialism and slavery as systems which had their downsides, but which were ultimately beneficial due to the fact that they brought Christianity and "civilization" to peoplewhom white Westerners deemed backward. (Indeed, there remain individuals who promote this line of thinking today.) Although Du Bois rejects this idea, traces of it can be found in parts of his work, such as his discussion of marriage among black people.

Du Bois argues that in the future, people ought to protect "the good, the beautiful, and the true" and reject greed and cruelty. In order to do this, scholars must conducthonest studies of "race-contact," and the South is the perfect place in which to do this. Du Bois claims that people from different races come into contact with each other in a few main ways: through living alongside one another in the same or adjacent neighborhoods; through economic arrangements; through politics; through intellectual exchange of ideas; and most of all through "public opinion." Du Bois also adds everyday social interaction (such as through travel or marriage) and interaction through religion.

One major misconception of the history of the South is that black people and white people did not frequently come into contact with one another. Although Jim Crow segregation mandated that white people could occupy white-only spaces, in reality there were many contexts in which people of different races interacted. However, these spaces were almost invariably white-controlled, meaning that black people were uniquely vulnerable to violence and exploitation within them.

Although Du Bois often speaks of the **color line**, it is usually impossible to draw an actual geographical line indicating racial segregation. Poor white and black communities are often very close to one another, although the wealthiest white and wealthiest black communities are never in proximity. This is a contrast to the living arrangements during slavery, in which slaves had intimate contact with the master's house but lived separately in the slaves' quarters, such that the master would not have to acknowledge the terrible living conditions to which slaves were subjected.

Again, Du Bois emphasizes the asymmetrical nature of social interactions between white and black people. During slavery, black people played a significant role in the intimate lives of white people—nursing and caring for white infants, preparing food and running the household of white families, and often becoming victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by white people. Of course, the same was not true the other way around.

The economic relations between black and white people in the South areaffected by the legacy of black people's training as slaves, not as modern workers. Du Bois argues that, following Emancipation, it was the duty of someone (who exactly this should be is left ambiguous) to assume "group-leadership" and train former slaves to navigate the terrain of the contemporary economy and avoid being cheated and exploited by "swindlers and rascals." Progress will not be made until people accept the reality of racial prejudice and until there areblack leaders who help their communities face the perils of being a black worker in the South.

Here Du Bois returns to the problems that arose in the chaotic period following Emancipation, and from the lack of organized and coherent leadership at the time. In underlining these historical issues, Du Bois suggest that going forward, the African-American community will need to have more effective leadership if black people are to succeed in the modern world. Like Du Bois' writing, leadership should be informed by history.

Du Bois argues that suffrage is one of the most important tools for working toward economic justice. In the 1850s the legacy of the French Revolution made universal suffrage a possibility; although few white people thought black men were intelligent enough for the vote, many believed the vote would stimulate black education. However, a "period of moral retrogression" reversed this progressive trend, and Southern backlash against African-American suffrage combined with indifference from the North cost black men their right to vote. The aim of this is "the elimination of the black man from politics," which Du Bois frames as a disaster for racial justice.

As this and other passages in "Souls" show, progress is less linear than a zig-zag of advancement and backlash. Du Bois points out that the notion of universal suffrage has been around since the French Revolution (if not earlier), but that various conservative and retrogressive forces have prevented the idea of universal suffrage from properly being implemented. The acknowledgment of this pattern prepares the reader to expect further backlash in the future.

Du Bois claims that the question of suffrage is intimately tied with the problem of crime within the black community. He reminds the reader that, before Emancipation, the main task of the police in the South was to control slaves, and that "every white man was *ipso facto* a member of that police." The Southern justice system remains entirely racialized, insofar as white people cannot be convicted of crimes against black people, and black people are so frequently wrongfully convicted that they have no faith in the system at all. Du Bois argues that "such a system is bound to increase crime, and has increased it."

Here Du Bois applies a distinctly modern framework of justice to the problem of crime in the black community. In the past, people believed it was perfectly acceptable for disenfranchised people to live under laws they didn't consent to, but which they nonetheless were forced to obey. However, dissenters from this opinion point out that it is fundamentally unjust and likely to be ineffective, as people without political power have little incentive to obey the law.

Although racial turmoil is at the very heart of the South, this is so rarely spoken of that "there almost seems to be a conspiracy of silence." Furthermore, the small group of black people who have risen to the status of an elite class have almost no interaction with whites whatsoever—they live in different areas, attend different churches, and are legally segregated in public areas (such as buses and movie theatres). As a result, the two groups are highly estranged from and intolerant of one another. Du Bois argues that this total separation of the races has been disastrous, as the problem of racism is in many ways better solved by "a social cigar or cup of tea" than politics, legislation, or the media.

Note that Du Bois' claim about the "conspiracy of silence" over the issue of racism is similar to present-day discussions over the issue of "colorblindness" and "post-racialism." Du Bois' claim that ordinary social interaction is necessary in order to overcome racial prejudice is supported by the historical context of Jim Crow, but also subject to criticism. After all, white people had frequent, intimate social interactions with black people during slavery, but this often seemed to reinforce racism rather than dispel it.

Du Bois argues that although most Southern white people are deeply Christian, their behavior toward black people should be understood as irreconcilable with their religious beliefs. He argues that, contrary to the opinion of many whites, the **color line** thwarts the drawing of accurate "lines of crime." People must accept that racial prejudice causes deep and expansive harm for there to be any justice or progress.

Here Du Bois echoes one of the most powerful tactics of both the abolition and civil rights movements—appealing to Christianity. The hypocrisy of the white Christian South is one of the most important (and puzzling) themes within the history of race relations in the US.

CHAPTER 10: OF THE FAITH OF THE FATHERS

The chapter begins with a verse by the Victorian Scottish writer William Sharp, writing under the pen name of Fiona Macleod. Du Boisthen returns to his days as a rural schoolteacher, describing one Sunday night far from the home in which he'd been staying. He recalls approaching a church and sensing an "air of intense excitement," a "suppressed terror" and even "demoniac possession." He describes a scene of shrieking, jumping, and flailing, all centered around the powerfully charismatic preacher and hauntingly beautiful **music**. Indeed, Du Bois describes African-American religious music as "the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil."

Du Bois' descriptions of the black church take the tone of a social scientist removed from the subject matter he is describing. This is distinctly different from other passages in "Souls," especially the ones that fuse personal narrative with observations of communities in which Du Bois lived or visited. By adopting the perspective of a detached, foreign observer, Du Bois is able to describe the lineage of the black church beginning with its roots in Africa.

Du Bois claims that studying African-American religious practices is the only way to understand how those people who were taken from Africa viewed the world. It is also important to note the influence that black Christians have had on the Methodist and Baptist churches as a whole. In this sense, studying the black church is crucial to understanding not only African-American history but American history in general.

Once again, Du Bois makes an effort to rectify the fact that the lives of the majority of slaves were excluded from the historical record, meaning it is now difficult to gain knowledge about the everyday and emotional lives of slaves. Through studying the black church, though, we can begin to get a glimpse into a world left out of history.

Du Bois describes the black church as the center of African-American social life. He explains how churches operate as the "central club-house" of communities, providing support, entertainment, education, political and economic power. Bishops are some of the most powerful leaders in the black community, and it is possible to think of the churches as "governments of men." This vast influence is partly due to the fact that almost every black person in America is a member of a church.

In this passage, Du Bois illustrates why the black church is such an important and powerful institution. Prevented from political engagement and excluded from proper educational and economic resources, black people built their own organization to meet these needs. As well as providing crucial support, the church also creates an intense feeling of belonging.

Du Bois turns to the history of the black church, describing how African slaves initially practiced "nature-worship," but plantation life destroyed the kinship relations around which these African religious communities were structured. Some elements of the old religions endured, however, such as the existence of the Priest or "Medicine-man." From this figure arose the black preacher, who came to play a different role yet retained many of the Medicine-man's characteristics. After Emancipation, black Christian communities largely cut ties with the white church, which gave rise to new institutions such as the African Methodist Church, which Du Bois calls "the greatest Negro organization in the world."

Du Bois shows that social exclusion and the tyranny of slavery, even while they devastated generations of the African-American community, also saw the birth of new institutions and forms of life. The evolution of traditions and figures that now characterize the black church highlights the enduring strength and resourcefulness of black people who created new ways of existence under the duress of extreme violence. The current influence of the black church also speaks to this endurance and power.

Du Bois argues that Christianity was a uniquely appropriate faith for black slaves, who had been subjugated to extreme lengths such that they were "at the bottom" of the social and economic system. Faced with a mortal existence filled with suffering, slaves dreamed of freedom in the afterlife. The handful of freedmen who emerged as leaders prior to Emancipation tended to hold a "darker and more intense" religious faith, their desire for abolition tinged with dreams of revenge. Emancipation thus appeared—at least at first—to be an act of God with echoes of the Day of Judgment, until the "inevitable" backlash that followed.

Here Du Bois hints at a key problem in the African-American theological tradition: the appeal of Christianity to slaves and their descendants. While Christianity undoubtedly provided comfort, strength, and solace to those whose lives resembled a hell on Earth, some argue that this came at the expense of black people's willingness to rebel and avenge themselves. Those who make this argument include some black atheists and Muslims.

In order to understand the contemporary black church, Du Bois says, it is important to remember that African-Americans live a "double life" inherently colored by the constant presence of the **Veil**. This double life then gives rise to "**double thoughts**and double ideals." On the one hand, the intense suffering caused by racism turns religion into a bitter expression of pain, and on the other, many black people find strength and determination through their identification with Jesus.

Although Du Bois illustrates the way that duality is a burden on African Americans, in this passage he shows how it can also have a positive side. Through Christianity, black people are able to find both a recognition of their pain and a source of strength and justice not available to them in the wider world.

In order to survive and maintain even a modest quality of life, black people in the South must resort to deception. Those in the North, meanwhile, quickly turn to radicalism—either engaging in a sensualist lifestyle of gambling and sex, or forming a black "aristocracy" characterized by keen intellectual awareness that in turn leads to bitterness and pessimism. Most black people live between these extremes, and—cut off from their own history and from the opportunity to live freely—turn to religion and trust in the coming of an eventual "Awakening."

It is important to understand the different levels on which Du Bois' idea of "deception" works. In one sense, it can refer to a life built around lies, theft, and cheating—such as the life of the professional criminals in the North he mentions. On the other hand, deception can work on a micro level, and refer to the psychological act of behaving in a way that appeases white people while keeping one's true thoughts hidden.

CHAPTER 11: OF THE PASSING OF THE FIRST-BORN

The chapter begins with a verse by Algernon Charles Swinburne. Du Bois writes in the first person, recalling the extraordinary moment when his son (Burghardt) was born. He describes his sense of wonder in holding the baby, and his deep love for his wife. However, he also recalls staring at the child's blonde hair uneasily, feeling that it was an ominous reminder of the **Veil**. Du Bois explains that the baby grew to be lively and strong, and that he and his wife were adoringly protective of him. However, the child then grew sick; Du Bois and his wife were struck by fear, sensing the "Shadow of Death." Eventually, the baby died, and Du Bois describes the way "his little soul leaped like a star that travels in the night."

Although much of "Souls" is written from a first-person perspective, this chapter is the most intimate by far. It might at first seem jarring for Du Bois to reveal such a deeply personal tragedy in the midst of his overview of the lives of African Americans. However, the description of his son's life and death is an important demonstration of the emotional life of black people—a window into Du Bois' own soul. Although his son's death is not directly connected to racism, the story links Du Bois to the many black parents who lost children to white violence.

In the wake of the baby's death, Du Bois is desperate to work, even as he feels despair at the cruelty of death in the midst of a world already so full of suffering. Du Bois describes his son's life as "perfect," explaining that he was loved by everyone and that he "knew no **color-line**." At the child's funeral, however, white people glanced at the procession and exclaimed: "Niggers!". Du Bois and his wife felt unable to bury their son in Georgia and instead took his body north. In the midst of his grief, Du Bois could not help but be grateful that his son, who never grew old enough to experience the **Veil**, was "not dead… but free."

Again, while Du Bois' son does not die as a result of racist causes, his life and death are inherently affected by the issues of race and racism. The fact that even at their son's funeral, Du Bois and his wife must suffer being called "niggers" by white people shows the vicious and merciless reality of a racist world. Du Bois' final words in this paragraph emphasize the powerful point that it is arguably better to be dead than a black person alive in America, especially if one wants true "freedom."

Du Bois notes that his son's "otherworldly look" perhaps hinted that he would die before experiencing the reality of racism. He considers that it is possible that his son might have grown up and "borne his burden more bravely than we," or even that the **Veil** would somehow be lifted within his son's lifetime. For now, however, the Veil remains very real, and Du Bois dreams of one day escaping it and reuniting with his son in death.

The end of this chapter echoes the conclusion of an earlier chapter, in which Du Bois voices the thoughts of rural black people who wonder if the era they live in represents a "twilight" or not. Du Bois clearly feels cautiously hopeful that the world is becoming more progressive, but is also tormented by the uncertainty of the future.

CHAPTER 12: OF ALEXANDER CRUMMELL

The quote that begins this chapter is by Alfred Lord Tennyson. Du Boisthen announces: "This is the story of a human heart," and introduces a black boy who lived "many years ago." This boy faced three temptations—Hate, Despair, and Doubt—as he crossed the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Du Bois says that he first met Alexander Crummell at "a Wilberforce commencement season"; the two conversed, and Crummell seemed like a seer not of the past or future but of "the pulsing Now."

Du Bois shifts into a different narrative style entirely in this chapter, one which resembles a parable or religious story. The fact that Crummell was a real person is confirmed by the fact that Du Bois mentions meeting him, yet the description of his character portrays him as something of a mystical figure. By referring to the three symbolic temptations and two valleys, Du Bois is able to describe several of the book's more abstract themes.

Crummell was born during slavery, and his mother lived in fear "lest the shadows bear him away to the land of the slaves." As he grew up, his life was cast over by the shadow of Hate, and he hated the world. However, he then met Beriah Green, "a crank and an abolitionist" who decided to bring Crummell to his school in Oneida County. Here, the students found sympathy with one another, and Alexander's hatred of the world faded slightly. At the same time, he was haunted by the existence of slavery and decided to become a priest and work toward abolition.

Again, Crummell's mother's fear of the shadows taking her son away might seem like something out of a fairy tale. However, it was actually very common for free black people to be kidnapped and sold into slavery with no explanation or opportunity for recourse. Du Bois thus shows that many aspects of the African-American experience have an unreal, ominously fantastical quality.

Crummel was tempted by Despair upon finding that the Episcopal Theological Seminary would not admit a black man, and he briefly succumbed to despair. However, he found away to study for the priesthood in Boston, and his despair subsided as he planned to start a small congregation in which he would teach and inspire a community of black people. This dream came true in 1842 in Providence, and yet—despite Crummell's hard work and dedication to his church—his congregation diminished, and he was confronted with the temptation of Doubt. To doubt his own purpose in life was even more terrible than the previous temptations of Hate and Despair.

"Souls" is filled with stories of black people who work with enthusiasm and dedication only to encounter a seemingly endless series of racist obstacles. Rather than simply saying that these people overcame the obstacles, Du Bois reveals the less obviously heroic and glamorous aspect of adversity—moments of bitterness, fear, and doubt. In doing so, he stresses that it is normal for black people to feel these things, even while it is also vital that they persevere.

Crummell admitted to the Bishop he had failed, and this Bishop sent him to Bishop Onderdonk in Philadelphia. Onderdonk agreed to accept Crummel into his diocese on the condition that "no Negro priest can sit in my church convention, and no Negro church must ask for representation there." Crummell refused these terms, and eventually returned to work "in poverty and starvation" for a church in New York. Following this period, he traveled to England and earned a degree, before departing for Liberia. There, among the slave-smugglers, he "sought a new heaven and a new earth."

This passage can be seen as a direct repudiation of another black leader, Booker T. Washington. While Du Bois acknowledges throughout the book that a certain degree of conciliation to white racists is necessary for the ultimate goal of advancement, he also advocates drawing a principled line. Crummell's refusal to comply here is a direct contrast to Washington's "Atlanta Compromise."

Du Bois remarks on Crummell's remarkable pilgrimage, and suggests that if the reader finds the riddle of the "temptations" and "valleys"hard to decipher, they should bear in mind that it is even harder for a young black boy. Yet Crummell triumphed over the three temptations and the two valleys, and eventually returned to America with his "unbending righteousness" intact. Du Bois speaks reverently of Crummell's impact on the world, and argues that it is a shame that he found so little sympathy during his life. In death, Crummell is not widely known, a fact that Du Bois suggests is a great shame.

Crummell's lack of fame speaks to the ongoing difficulty of achieving success as a black leader. Once again, Du Bois makes an insidious comparison to Booker T. Washington, whose immense fame he describes in detail. It is possible to infer that Du Bois believes Washington's fame is the result of his appeal to whites, considering that Crummell, who is less popular with whites but a better leader, remains comparatively unknown.

CHAPTER 13: OF THE COMING OF JOHN

This chapter begins with another passage by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Du Bois describes the streets surrounding Wells Institute and the black students who attend it. He points out a single student, John Jones, who is "never on time" and has a charming, honest smile. Jones came from Southeast Georgia, where the local white people admired his work in the fields but resisted his mother's desire to send him to school, arguing education would "spoil him—ruin him." However, Jones went anyway, and the black community he left behind daydreamed of the wonderful things that would happen on his return. The white people, on the other hand, remained disapproving.

Having spent most of the book combining history, sociology, political analysis, and memoir, Du Bois again switches genre here by including a fictional story. This is a distinct contrast to a book whose explicit message is the promotion of knowledge and truth. However, the story of John Jones shows that certain truths can only be conveyed through fiction. While Jones was likely not a real person, his story is realistic, and in a way he comes to symbolize Southern black youth as a whole.

For one reason or another, Jones didn't come back for many years, yet the people in his community still spoke with excitement about "when John comes." At the Institute, meanwhile, the faculty worried about him, because he "did not know how to study" and was always getting into trouble. As a result, he is suspended. Jones begs the Dean not to tell his mother and sister, promising to work for a term before returning to the Institute. The Dean agrees, and Jones works very hard and "grew in body and soul." His increased maturity and understanding of the world, however, cause him to feel the presence of the **Veil** for the first time.

Here Du Bois returns to his exploration of the downsides of knowledge. While John lived in Georgia, he was cheerful and carefree, a picture of blissful ignorance. While studying at Wells Institute is supposed to be a positive and empowering experience for John, the transformation it provoked is largely negative. John is disconnected from his family and community, struggles to perform well at the Institution, and is burdened with a new understanding of racism and injustice.

Having become painfully aware of the existence of racial oppression, Jones grows bitter, and his words bear traces of sarcasm. However, he enthusiastically accepts an offer from the Dean to go North to sing with the Institute's quartette. At a concert hall, white people around Jones make racist comments about him, but Jones is so hypnotized by the beauty of his surroundings that he doesn't notice. Eventually, Jones is asked to leave by a young man, whom Jones recognizes as "the White John." He rushes off, feeling foolish, and writes a letter to his mother and sister telling them he is coming home. On the train, he wonders if his misfortune is his own fault for "struggling against" his "destiny."

Many of the episodes in John's life are ambiguous and puzzling, and scholars have debated their meaning since "Souls" was published. John's changing feelings about the world, his encounter with "the White John," and his uncertainty about his own decisions do not lend themselves to a single interpretation. Overall, Du Bois emphasizes that intelligent black people are burdened with self-doubt, confusion, and other feelings that arrive from racism and social exclusion.

Arriving back home, John is unrecognizable to his community, and they to him. At church, he tells the community of his plans to help them prosper by building an Industrial School and encouraging philanthropic programs. He urges unity across denominations, but then an elderly man steps up to the pulpit and induces a frenzy, and John realizes that the congregation believe he is "trampling on the true Religion." Leaving the church, his sister asks if everyone who studies ends up unhappy, and John replies that they do.

John is not able to replace the sense of community he had back home when he moves away, yet when he returns home he finds these ties have been severed irrevocably. When he then attempts to encourage his community to build new ties and create a greater overall sense of unity, he is attacked. Leaving home thus permanently severs John's sense of belonging to his community.

John goes to ask the white Judge if he can teach at the black school, and the Judge tells him that although he is a "friend of your people," African-Americans must remain "subordinate." If they try to "reverse nature," the Judge promises he will lynch every one of them. He asks John if he intends to teach his students about freedom or equality, or if he will accept white rule. John agrees to "accept the situation" and the Judge says he can take the teaching position. However, the Judge soon hears that John refuses to accept the unjust position of black people in town, and shuts down the black school, telling John and his students that they must disperse.

The conversation with the white judge is a direct parallel to Alexander Crummell's encounter with the bishop. John makes the opposite decision to Alexander, and agrees to comply with the judge's racist demands (thereby aligning himself with Booker T. Washington).Whereas this benefits John in the short term, eventually his class is shut down anyway. This turn of events suggests that compromising with racism will never turn out well.

John, dejected and embittered, vows to go North again, telling his mother "I'm going to be free." He goes to sit in the forest, where he hears noise in the distance. White men ride toward him on horses, whose eyes are "red with fury." John wonders if they have a rope, and stands. The story ends: "And the world whistled in his ears."

The tragic end of John's story emphasizes the connection between freedom and death, suggesting that for John—like for Du Bois' son—his only chance of experiencing true freedom will come in death.

CHAPTER 14: OF THE SORROW SONGS

The chapter begins with a verse from a **Negro spiritual**. Du Bois writes that as he has been writing this book, the Sorrow Songs sung by slaves have haunted him. He has been familiar with such songs since he was a child, even though they came from the South. Du Bois repeats his claim that these songs are "the most beautiful expression of human experience" to come out of America. Some of the songs have been forgotten, and some were ruined by caricatures in Minstrel acts.

As an oral tradition, African-American spirituals are passed from person to person, meaning that tracing their exact origin is difficult and some have been lost and forgotten. This oral tradition creates a sense of community, connecting black people in the North (such as the young Du Bois) to the South and those in the present to their ancestors.

Du Bois tells of a man born in New York who served in the Freedmen's Bureau, founding a Sunday school class for black children who he taught to sing. This group became the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who—despite economic and racial oppression—toured across the country and eventually the world. The press "sneered at them," but their performances were so successful that they were able to bring back $150,000, which was used to found Fisk University.

Here Du Bois turns to one of the major contradictions in African-American history. Even while black musicians faceracist disdain, their music is enthusiastically consumed by white audiences. Although the Fisk Jubilee Singers are only one example of this phenomenon, it continues into the present day.

Du Bois argues that the **spiritual** is the "articulate message of the slave to the world." He claims that the songs can seem like they imply that slaves were joyous and carefree, which may have been true of some but cannot have been true of all. In reality, the songs are the music "of an unhappy people," and they express both the suffering of slavery and the hope of freedom. The music originated in the African lands from which the slaves were seized, and has traveled down through the generations for two hundred years.

During slavery, slave owners employed a range of justifications for the practice, including the idea that black people were happy to be slaves. Slave songs were sometimes cited as evidence of this. However, as Du Bois points out in this passage, the reality is that spirituals express the pain and despair—as well as the strength—of slaves.

Du Bois names the **songs** with which he begins each chapter of the book, claiming that the choice of these spirituals was somewhat arbitrary but that they do represent the progression of the tradition from African music to its current distinctly African-American form. Alongside this evolution, white people have developed racist "debasements and imitations" of the songs. Du Bois argues that the message of the slave contained within spirituals was inevitably "veiled and half articulate," and sometimes contain phrases from unfamiliar languages. Almost all of the songs are religious and almost all are "sorrowful," expressing longing for peace in the afterlife.

Du Bois shows that spirituals are an art form created entirely within and for the African-American community—yet they are still not untainted by racism, as white people have made offensive "imitations" intending to mock black people and culture. This again speaks to the burden of duality placed on black people; even when they create art forms not made for a white audience, the shadow of racism and the Veil is inescapable.

Spirituals frequently contain nature imagery, and the lyrics suggest a reflectionof the lives of slaves in the tumultuous, "mournful" natural world around them. The "shadow of fear" falls over the songs. Mothers and children are mentioned frequently, but fathers rarely, and the songs rarely feature stories of love and romance. Many songs depict mothers without their children, and death is not treated in a fearful way but as a return home. Much of the lyrics would have been improvised, and many are structured around fragments and paraphrases of the Bible.

Here, Du Bois develops his exploration of the different forms of kinship and family structure created through slavery. Whereas white popular songs focused on romantic love and would rarely mention the death of children, social conditions were very different for black people, particularly those living under slavery.

The **songs** do contain a sense of hope, a belief that justice will come, if not in this life then in the next. Du Bois wonders if this hope is justified. He notes that in the era in which he is writing, white people claim that other races have demonstrated their own inferiority, and are thus "not worth the saving." Du Bois asks how white people can consider the US their own country, considering indigenous people were there before them.Since that point, white and black people have intimately coincided, and black people have worked, struggled, fought, and cared for whites. Du Bois asks what value these gifts have, and if America would be the country it is without black people. Still, through it all, black people remain hopeful, focusing on the future and the promise of freedom.

Throughout the book, Du Bois wonders whether black people will see justice both in the mortal world and in the afterlife. Even as his prose contains undertones of optimism, overall it is defined by an overwhelming sense of uncertainty. Although Du Bois makes a convincing case that racial progress is a matter of justice and that black people deserve better than their current lot in America, it remains very unclear whether the country will change for the better.

THE AFTERTHOUGHT

The Afterthought is only one paragraph long, and addresses the reader, asking that they hear his cry and that the book will not fall into the "wilderness." Du Boishopes that "the ears of a guilty people [will] tingle with truth," and that human reason will find a solution to the "mockery" of human unity and compassion. He concludes by noting that he hopes this is "not indeed the end."

In this passage, Du Bois hints again that he is primarily addressing a white audience, and he hopes that learning more about the reality of black life will inspire them to effect change. Although Du Bois expresses faith in human reason, he also expresses uncertainty that reason will prevail.

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