Du Bois is the brook of fire through which we all must pass in order to gain access to the intellectual and political weaponry needed to sustain the radical democratic tradition in our time.

Cornel West

In a grand Victorian gesture of self-sacrifice, W. E. B. Du Bois, then a young man in the formative years of his intellectual development, determined to subordinate his individual desires and ambitions to promote a political project that would benefit the world in general by advancing the particular interests of African American peoples. In his journal entry of February 23, 1893, his twenty-fifth birthday, Du Bois wrote:

I am striving to make my life all that life may be—and I am limiting that strife only in so far as that strife is incompatible with others of my brothers and sisters making their lives similar. . . . I am firmly convinced that my own best development is not one and the same with the best development of the world and here I am willing to sacrifice. . . . I therefore . . . work for the rise of the Negro people, taking for granted that their best development means the best development of the world.
Du Bois decided, however, that the commitment he undertook did not require him to set aside the interests of selfish desire and ambition: the entry concludes that the advancement of his “race” will be intimately tied to his own personal achievements as an intellectual, a man who wishes to “make a name in science, to make a name in art and thus to raise my race.”

Through a close analysis of Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, I will argue that although he declares that he intends to limit his striving “in so far as that strife is incompatible with others of my brothers and sisters making their lives similar,” beneath the surface of this apparent sacrifice of individual desire to become an intellectual and a race leader is a conceptual framework that is gender-specific; not only does it apply exclusively to men, but it encompasses only those men who enact narrowly and rigidly determined codes of masculinity.

This gendered framework negates in fact the opportunity offered in words for black women to make “their lives similar”; the project suffers from Du Bois’s complete failure to imagine black women as intellectuals and race leaders. The failure to incorporate black women into the sphere of intellectual equality, I will demonstrate, is not merely the result of the sexism of Du Bois’s historical moment, as evident in the language of his chapter titles in *The Souls of Black Folk*, such as “Of the Training of Black Men,” and “The Sons of Master and Man.” It is a conceptual and political failure of imagination that remains a characteristic of the work of contemporary African American male intellectuals. Du Bois described and challenged the hegemony of the national and racial formations in the United States at the dawn of a new century, but he did so in ways that both assumed and privileged a discourse of black masculinity. Cornel West describes and challenges the hegemony of the national and racial formations at the end of the same century, but many of these discourses are still in place.

In a recent essay, West asserts that Du Bois’s “patriarchal sensibilities speak for themselves.” On the contrary, I will argue that they do not “speak for themselves” but have to be rigorously examined so that we may follow and grasp their epistemological implications and consequences. West’s easy dismissal suggests that there is no need to undertake the serious intellectual work necessary to understand the processes that gender knowledge.

West sets up three fundamental pillars of Du Bois’s intellectual project: his “Enlightenment world view”; his “Victorian strategies” (the way his world view is translated into practice); and his “American optimism.” Is there no need to understand how these foundations articulate with ideologies of gender? If “patriarchal sensibilities speak for themselves,” then they are merely superficial, easily recognized, and quickly accounted for, enabling real intellectual work to continue elsewhere. If they “speak for themselves,” then nothing of intellectual value or worth could result from demonstrating or exposing exactly what constitutes “patriarchy” or “patriarchal sensibilities.” It is through such devices that members of the contemporary black male intellectual establishment, sometimes referred to by the media as “the new black intellectuals,” disregard the need for feminist analysis while maintaining a politically correct posture of making an obligatory, though finally empty, gesture toward it.

Du Bois constructed particular personal, political, and social characteristics of a racialized masculinity to articulate his definition of black leadership. He was particularly concerned about the “moral uplift of a people” and felt that this was best accomplished “by planting in every community of Negroes black men with ideals of life and thrift and civilization, such as must in time filter through the masses and set examples of moral living.” After weighing the political and social needs of what he imagined to be the race, he judged the worth of black male intellectuals and would-be race leaders according to those needs. In addition to focusing on that discussion, my analysis of *The Souls of Black Folk* will demonstrate how, in a similar fashion, Du Bois measured, judged, and lived his own multifaceted identity—as a black intellectual, as a race leader, and as a man. It is important not only to recognize the varied and complex ways in which Du Bois developed a public persona that was crafted to embody the philosophy he espoused, but also to analyze the ideological effect of such embodiment on his philosophic
judgments. My contention is that these judgments reveal highly gendered structures of intellectual and political thought and feeling; these structures are embedded in specific ways in *The Souls of Black Folk*, first published in 1903, reprinted twenty-four times by 1940, revived in the 1960s and 1970s, and now regarded as a founding text in the study of black culture.

First, let me anticipate and address possible objections to the feminist politics of this project. I decided to analyze the intellectual and political thought and feeling of *The Souls of Black Folk* from the perspective of its gendered structure precisely because it is such an important intellectual work. I absolutely agree with Wesley Brown that “Politically, Du Bois’s activism always seem to anticipate struggles that followed...his crucial role in the formation of the N.A.A.C.P., the Pan African Movement, and the efforts to ban nuclear weapons paved the way for our own participation in the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam war protests of the nineteen sixties. This link between Du Bois and struggles for self determination continues until this day.”

I do not focus on *The Souls of Black Folk* because I feel that it is a particularly egregious example of sexist thinking; it isn’t. Nor is it my intention to claim that W. E. B. Du Bois was a sexist male individual. In the public arena, as an African American intellectual and as a politician, Du Bois advocated equality for women and consistently supported feminist causes later in his life.

There is, unfortunately, no simple correspondence between anyone’s support for female equality and the ideological effect of the gendered structures of thought and feeling at work in any text one might write and publish. If, as intellectuals and as activists, we are committed, like Du Bois, to struggles for liberation and democratic egalitarianism, then surely it is not contradictory also to struggle to be critically aware of the ways in which ideologies of gender have undermined our egalitarian visions in the past and continue to do so in the present. Gendered structures of thought and feeling permeate our lives and our intellectual work, including *The Souls of Black Folk* and other texts which have been regarded as founding texts written by the founding fathers of black American history and culture.

In the North American and European academies, Du Bois has come to embody the ideal or representative figure of the African American intellectual, “the brook of fire through which we all must pass in order to gain access to the intellectual and political weaponry needed to sustain the radical democratic tradition in our time.” If we agree that our critical practice ought to include probing the various ways in which we constitute our fields of knowledge, I contend that we need to expose and learn from the gendered, ideological assumptions which underlie the founding texts and determine that their authors become the representative figures of the American intellectual. These authors and their productions are shaped by gendered structures of thought and feeling, which in turn actively shape the major paradigms and modes of thought of all academic discourse.

The significance of *The Souls of Black Folk* as a text which offered new and alternative ways to formulate complex issues of race and nation was immediately recognized by black intellectuals when it was first published in 1903. In *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), James Weldon Johnson paid homage to *The Souls of Black Folk* as offering the country something previously unknown “in depicting the life, the ambitions, the struggles, and the passions of those of their race who are striving to break the narrow limits of traditions.” In his autobiography *Along This Way*, first published in 1933, Johnson asserted that *The Souls of Black Folk* “had a greater effect upon and within the Negro race in America than any other single book published in this country since Uncle Tom’s Cabin.”

Johnson’s enthusiasm was kindled by the ambitious attempt of *The Souls of Black Folk* to create a genealogy for what Benedict Anderson has called an “imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow readers.” Through its representations of individuals, Du Bois’s book aims to bring into being a community. Imaginatively, he forges a people from his articulation of the material terms of their historical existence.
Because *The Souls of Black Folk* was so successful in the creation and imagining of a black community, it was an important text to academics and political activists outside of the academy who fought to establish African American Studies as a coherent and structured field of knowledge—a process which also needed to bring its own imagined community into being through the intellectual and political work of identifying intellectual ancestors; situating and classifying their texts; establishing literary canons and genres of writing; and establishing traditions of thought and intellectual practice.

As one of these rediscovered ancestors, Du Bois became many things to many people: in response to the needs of various agendas, he was situated as an important precursor of different traditions and strands of thought. For Houston Baker, for example, *The Souls of Black Folk* established the general significance of Du Bois as “the black man of culture”; Darwin Turner has argued for the importance of situating Du Bois in relation to a theory of a “Black Aesthetic”; and Wilson J. Moses has stressed the importance of Du Bois’s poetics of “Ethiopianism” in order to position him as an important figure in a tradition of “literary black nationalism.” As a literary critic, Arnold Rampersad believes that the greatness of *The Souls of Black Folk* as a document of black American culture lies in its creation of profound and enduring myths about the life of the people. . . . If all of a nation’s literature may stem from one book, as Hemingway implied about *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, then it can as accurately be said that all of Afro-American literature of a creative nature has proceeded from Du Bois’ comprehensive statement on the nature of the people in *The Souls of Black Folk.*

Similarly, Robert Stepto has defined the African American literary canon as those texts which expressed a “primary pregeneric myth of . . . the quest for freedom and literarcy,” and positioned *The Souls of Black Folk* as “a seminal text in Afro-American letters.” “Seminal” is, perhaps, the most appropriate (if gendered) adjective to describe the present canonical status of *The Souls of Black Folk*, not just as a work of literature but also as a major contribution to the study of African American history, sociology, politics, and philosophy.

Perhaps the most influential contemporary recovery of Du Bois as a major influence in African American intellectual thought and practice is the work of Cornel West. In West’s opinion “W. E. B. Du Bois is the towering black scholar of the twentieth century. The scope of his interests, the depth of his insights, and the sheer majesty of his prolific writings bespeak a level of genius unequaled among modern black intellectuals.” In addition to being considered the greatest American intellectual of African descent, Du Bois is also the only African American intellectual whom West includes in his *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*.

In this book West argues that pragmatism is a viable and necessary alternative to epistemology-centered philosophy. Pragmatism, he proposes, is “a conception of philosophy as a form of cultural criticism in which the meaning of America is put forward by intellectuals in response to distinct social and cultural crises.” As a form of cultural criticism, “American pragmatism is less a philosophical tradition putting forward solutions to perennial problems in the Western philosophical conversation initiated by Plato and more a continuous cultural commentary or set of interpretations that attempt to explain America to itself at a particular historical moment.” West situates his own intellectual work within this tradition and sees himself as a direct descendant of the form of cultural criticism which he has thus defined. And, because Du Bois is the only other black intellectual in this schema, he is West’s only representative African American ancestor.

For West, the ideal black intellectual acts as a “critical organic catalyst,” a practitioner of “prophetic criticism,” and someone who can become, as West regards himself, “a race-transcending prophet.” While all of West’s books both criticize and praise the work and ideas of a wide range of intellectuals, only Du Bois is consistently present in all of his texts and the focus of most of the analysis. West self-consciously situates himself as a contemporary embodiment of Du Bois, but he
neglects to interrogate the ideological and political effects of the gendered nature of Du Bois’s theoretical paradigms.

It is a necessary critical task, then, to examine the gendered intellectual practices which structure the way The Souls of Black Folk imagines a community and organizes its “framework of consciousness,” its “soul.” Du Bois creates this community through a complex evocation of the concepts of race, nation, and masculinity. My discussion of the gendering of Du Bois’s genealogy of race, of nation, and of manhood will evolve from an analysis of the general narrative structure of the essays and a consideration of the order in which they occur.

If African American writing in North America has its source in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts now identified collectively and variously as slave narratives, personal histories, and spiritual or secular autobiographical texts that give voice to and authenticate black existence, then the narrative structure and genealogy of race, nation, and manhood to be found in The Souls of Black Folk imagines its community by reversing the direction of the archetypal journey of these original narratives. The conventional movement of the earlier narratives is away from the conditions of physical and/or mental bondage or despair associated historically with the political, economic, and social formation of the southern states, and toward the attainment of physical and spiritual freedom in the North. But what is understood to be a literary convention has specific political effects: as these narratives moved away from the context in which the majority of African American peoples lived and moved toward a predominantly white society, the direction of the journey determined the imaginative and symbolic landscape in which the conscious desires and ambitions of black humanity could be created and asserted.

Before 1865 it was difficult, if not impossible, for black writers even to imagine the option of returning to the South once black humanity and freedom had been gained in the North. Even after emancipation the American literary imagination was shackled in this respect. For as Mark Twain acknowledged in his 1885 Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, once Huck and Jim missed the Ohio river and sailed deeper and deeper into the South, it was necessary for Jim to “belong” to someone, he could no longer belong to himself and survive. As Huck replied when asked if Jim was an escaped slave, “Goodness sakes, would a runaway nigger run south?”

In 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois confronted the political dilemmas of previous American narrative forms while also revising many of the conventional concerns expressed in African American literature. The trajectory of The Souls of Black Folk is toward the Black Belt of the South, but the text does enact two cultural imperatives from earlier African American literature: freedom and knowledge. The desire for freedom in The Souls of Black Folk is a dual quest, both spiritual and physical, while the desire for knowledge emerges in a number of different ways: it is at various times practical, political, philosophical, and spiritual. The text consistently shifts between a predominantly white and a predominantly black world, but its overall narrative impulse gradually moves the focus from a white terrain to an autonomous black one.

Out of a total of fourteen chapters that comprise The Souls of Black Folk, nine had been previously published as essays in journals, four of them in The Atlantic Monthly. When Du Bois organized them into a book, he did not put them in chronological order according to previous dates of publication or in the order in which he had written them, but arranged them according to an interesting set of themes. Two thirds of the book, the first nine chapters, imagine a black community in relation to its negotiations with the white world of the text. Chapter one, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” provocatively poses the question that white America dare not ask of black Americans: “How does it feel to be a problem?” It then sets up the existential lament, “Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?” to which the following eight chapters provide the response. Readers are guided through the history and stark present realities of relations of dominance and subordination at the “dawn” of the twentieth century. The story that Du Bois outlines is a story of disappointment, “a vain search for freedom” (p. 48).

The history of this disappointment structures the progress of
Du Bois's genealogy, a narrative which is organized through various struggles to claim national citizenship for black people: struggles to emancipate the slaves; struggles to gain the right to vote; struggles for access to education; and the ever-present struggle against economic inequality. Du Bois reconstructs this history in order to envision an alternative future for the nation. In addition to responding to the questions raised in the first chapter, each of the following eight chapters sets up a call: are all these struggles meaningless for black men? The final third of the book, the last five chapters, answer the call with a clear and resounding "no."

The structure of *The Souls of Black Folk* might be described as what Benedict Anderson calls "an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time." The political meanings to be derived from this form of organization are embodied in number of individual figures. Du Bois uses anonymous metaphorical figures like the "blighted, ruined form" of the southern man and the brooding black mother; he draws upon the figures of contemporary intellectuals like Booker T. Washington, Alexander Crummell, and himself; and he attempts to create a narrative of the African American folk. I will discuss the gendered characteristics of the first two types of figuration at some length later, but first I wish to consider the way in which Du Bois genders his narrative of the folk.

The folk are first introduced in the fourth chapter, "Of the Meaning of Progress," in a narrative based upon Du Bois's memories of being a teacher in the rural district of Wilson County, Tennessee. Du Bois taught there for two consecutive summers, while he was a student at Fisk University, and he stayed with the Dowell family. One member of that family, a young woman, Josie Dowell, is transformed by Du Bois into a particularly interesting and memorable character whose life and death become a measure for the historical progress of the folk as a whole. Josie is the center of her family and essential to its survival. She harbors a "longing to know" and is the first student to enroll in Du Bois's school. Josie, in other words, becomes a symbol for the desires and the struggles of the African American folk, struggles which are epitomized by attempts to obtain an education. When Du Bois returns to visit the family ten years later—a passage of narrative time during which the liberal reader would expect to see evidence of progress and the fruition of Josie's desires—we learn abruptly that "Josie was dead" (p. 103). Josie's life and death become a metaphor for what progress has meant for the folk; her body is the ground upon which the contradictions between African American desires and ambition and the ambition and desires of white society are fought.

The individual story of Josie is immediately followed by the collective narrative of Atlanta, a city Du Bois describes as a site of contradictions, lying "South of the North, yet North of the South" (p. 109). Atlanta is portrayed as embodying the desires and ambitions of the white world of the South, desires and ambitions that are founded on material greed. If Atlanta represents a possible future for the nation, it will be a future that grows from the outcome of the struggle for the "soul" of the black folk, Du Bois asserts. If that is so, it would seem to be a future built upon the literal and metaphoric deaths of all Josies.

In the fifth chapter, "Of the Wings of Atalanta," Du Bois personifies and genders the city as female and elevates it to the position of a central character in his narrative. He uses the myth of Atalanta and Hippomenes, in which Atalanta, who could outrun and outshoot any man with whom she came into competition, was betrayed by her own greed. Constantly chased by suitors, Atalanta declared that she would only marry the man who could beat her in a foot race, knowing that no one ran faster than she. Hippomenes decides that only guile can help him win, and during the course of his race with Atalanta rolls golden apples in her path, knowing that she will not be able to resist retrieving them. Atalanta falls to temptation and when she swerves to pick up the final apple loses the race to Hippomenes.

Du Bois's particular interpretation of this myth is sexually charged. He reflects that "Atalanta is not the first or last maiden whom greed of gold has led to defile the temple of love," and a greed for gold becomes entwined with a narrative of sexual lust, a mark that stains the city. "If Atlanta be not named for Atalanta, she ought to have been," he concludes (pp. 110-111). In particular, Du Bois fears for "the black
young Atalanta" who, instead of running a noble race to a glorious future, might stoop for the golden apples strewn by the American Mammon (p. 114).

At this point in the text we can see the gendered consequences of the order of the chapters. Atlanta, as a city embodying the gold-lust of Atalanta, is the center of the section that depicts a predominantly white world. The heart of first section of *The Souls of Black Folk*, then, is organized as a primarily female symbolic space dominated by the figures of Josie and the city of Atlanta. But even though the heart of the text at this point is female, this does not mean that concern with what is female is central to Du Bois's conceptual frame of reference. On the contrary, the metaphoric and symbolic characteristics of Josie and Atlanta determine that neither is a symbol of hope for the future of the African American folk, indeed neither have a viable political, social, or intellectual future in Du Bois's text. Although as a student at Fisk he was surrounded by black female intellectuals who were his peers, he was not yet able to imagine a community in which positive intellectual and social transformation could be evoked through female metaphors or tropes.37

Chapters seven and eight, in the middle of the book, begin to mark the transition from a predominantly white to a predominantly black world, a journey of descent into the black belt of the southern states and through an economic history of black emmiseration under a system of forced labor. This descent is not only into a black world but into a world of disappointed, embittered men who are also hopelessly in debt. The narrative exposes the reality of an apartheid system in housing, in economic relations, in political activity, and in the legal system. The white South is shown in utter spiritual as well as political turmoil, without a soul. The account of this turbulent white world is merely a coda, however, for a journey into the wholesome, spiritual, and soulful existence of black people in chapter ten, "Of the Faith of Our Fathers," which begins the final third of the book.

Within the opening pages of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois establishes his ability to speak as a race leader and grants himself the author-

ity to evoke a convincing portrayal of the black folk by integrating his own commanding narrative voice, as a black intellectual, with the life of the folk, and his own body with his philosophy. From *Genesis* Du Bois takes the words of Adam and, transforming the pronouns, uses them to mark his own body as an essential part of that wider community his text imagines. "And, finally, need I add," he declares in the last sentence of his introduction, "that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the veil" (p. xii). It was Du Bois's ambition to fashion a book that could create and make tangible the "soul" of a race in space and time, and he utilizes his own body to enable that soul to be imagined. Such embodiment is also an important trope to Cornel West:

The Victorian three-piece suit—with a clock and a chain in the vest—worn by W. E. B. Du Bois not only represented the age that shaped and molded him; it also dignified his sense of intellectual vocation, a sense of rendering service by means of a critical intelligence and moral action. The shabby clothing worn by most black intellectuals these days may be seen as symbolizing their utter marginality behind the walls of academe and their sense of impotence in the wider world of American culture and politics.38

West's claim is that moral and ethical values of intellectual practice are inscribed in the clothed body, and these clothes secure the status of the intellect within. The clothes can then be read, unproblematically, as clear signs of intellectual worth [Illustrations I and II].

A comparison of the photographs of Du Bois and Cornel West demonstrates how the male body can be sculpted to model an intellectual mentor. But to define this appearance as the only acceptable confirmation of intellectual vocation, critical intelligence, and moral action is also to secure these qualities as irrevocably and conservatively masculine. Just as Du Bois constantly replaces and represses images of sexual desire (in his chapter on Atlanta) with evocations of a New England work ethic, so West equates the body and mind as disciplined and
contained within a dark, severely cut three-piece suit, buttoned shirt, and tightly drawn tie.

As the readers are gradually drawn into the center of the spiritual and cultural life of Du Bois’s black folk, that life becomes increasingly African in its soul and masculine in its body. With the entry into the black world, the multiple narrative personae (historian, sociologist, and philosopher) are gradually stripped away. While the souls of black folk are to be revealed through religion and music, the heart and soul of the author are revealed through the grief of a father after the death of his son.

Chapter eleven, “Of the Passing of the First Born,” is one of the most direct and passionate revelations of a male soul in American literature. Children are commonly figured as embodiments of the hopes and fears of the previous generation, and this is how Du Bois represents his son.
As he does so, in his role of narrator Du Bois becomes a cypher, simply the transmitter of the frustrated dreams and fears of an entire people, the black folk.

Within the veil was he born ... and there within shall he live,—a Negro and a Negro’s son. Holding in that little head—ah, bitterly!—the unbowed pride of a hunted race clinging ... to a hope not hopeless but unhopeful, and seeing with those bright wondering eyes that peer into my soul a land whose freedom is to us a mockery and whose liberty is a lie.... I ... saw the strength of my own arm stretched onward through the ages through the newer strength of his; saw the dream of my black fathers stagger a step onward in the wild phantasm of the world; heard in his baby voice the voice of the prophet that was to rise within the veil. (pp. 227–228)

Here Du Bois attempts to fuse his own body with a racialized way of knowing the world, “a Negro and a Negro’s son ... saw the dream of my black father.” But he also situates himself as an intellectual and spiritual mediator between the world and his people and interpreter of the meanings of their dreams and fears for their collective future.

For Du Bois the contradictions and ambiguities of his genealogy of race and nation exist metaphorically within the boundaries of his own soul, in which a deep pessimism wars with an emergent sense of optimism about the future of black men within the national community. This struggle of and for the soul of a people, which is enacted within the soul of the narrator, culminates in a recognition that the loss of his son reveals the consequences of the sacrifice that Du Bois was willing, in the abstract, to make in 1893: “now there wails, on that dark shore within the veil, the ... deep voice, Thine Shalt Forego! And all have I foregone at that command, and with small complaint,—all save that fair young form that lies so closely wed with death in the nest I had builded” (p. 232). The death of his son places the fate of the race, figuratively, back within the hands of Du Bois, a leader with no heir.

Du Bois’s reflections on the life on Alexander Crummell, in the following chapter, lie in startling juxtaposition to the meanings he derives from the death of his son. The issue of who shall inherit the mantle of intellectual leadership is again the central question. Although Crummell lived long enough to become a man who gained the “voice of the prophet,” this voice could not bring into being its own prophecies, for Crummell has no acolytes. Therefore Crummell’s name remains unknown, despite his devoting his entire life to intellectual leadership. Here, again, Du Bois locates himself as the only remaining conduit for disseminating Crummell’s work and principles among the race, and the only possible agent for translating those principles of leadership into action.

The story of “The Coming of John” elaborates these paradigms and continues to evoke tension and anxiety about a lack of a viable future for the race, as white and black male desires and hopes violently conflict and result in their mutual destruction. But in this essay Du Bois also consciously confronts and contradicts claims that white male aggression is met only by black male passivity—Black John actually kills his white childhood companion, also named John, for attempting to rape his sister. In this struggle over the control of female sexuality and sexual reproduction, John gains self-respect in his own black manhood. Although his bravery leads to his death, his manner of dying can be a model of manhood for future generations. Here again, the future of Du Bois’s imagined black community is to be determined by the nature of the struggle among men over the bodies of women.

As an intellectual, Du Bois was obviously concerned about the continuity of intellectual generations, what I would call the reproduction of Race Men. This anxiety permeates and structures the essays on his son, on Alexander Crummell, and on the two Johns. The map of intellectual mentors he draws for us is a map of male production and reproduction that traces in its form, but displaces through its content, biological and sexual reproduction. It is reproduction without women, and is a final closure to Du Bois’s claim to be “flesh of the flesh and bone of the bone,” for in the usurpation of the birth of woman from Adam’s rib, the
figure of the intellectual and race leader is born of and engendered by other males.

This anxiety continues to be evoked in the work of contemporary black male intellectuals. In an eloquent and moving passage, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. gives an account of his generation at Yale: “Some of the black students I knew at Yale dropped out, or pursued militancy to a point of no return, or went mad.” But the premature deaths of two who did not drop out, who could have become intellectuals and race leaders, leads him to mourn an even greater loss:

It is also true that some of the black students I knew at Yale have gone on to serve in Congress, as big-city mayors, as presidents and vice-presidents of major conglomerates. This is what members of the crossover generation are supposed to do: cross over. This is what the civil activists and social engineers who recruited us had in mind. It’s how the trope of the “Talented Tenth” was to be retrieved and refashioned for modern times. And yet there’s a sense in which DeChabert and Robinson [who did not cross-over] represented more to me than any of the “success stories”; and their failures of fulfillment (the oldest college story of all) grieved and rankled me as my own. I didn’t go to their funerals: the truth is, I wasn’t ready for them to be dead, either of them. We were supposed to storm the citadel together, to summer at Martha’s Vineyard together, to grow old together. They would be on hand to explain to me the difference between selling out and buying in. Our kids were supposed to marry each other; to graduate from schools where we would give the commencement addresses. Ours was to be the generation with cultural accountability, and cultural security: the generation that would tell white folks that we would not be deterred—that, whether they knew it or not, we too were of the elite.40

Gates’s generational map, like that of Du Bois, is permeated by a particular anxiety of masculinity, an anxiety which is embedded in the landscape of a crisis in the social order. The particularity of the loss of men who are called by name, and grieved in part for the failure of intellectual reproduction, contrasts dramatically with the generality of the social crisis of poverty which he documents as reproduced through the figures of anonymous single mothers.31

Having considered the consequences of the narrative structure of The Souls of Black Folk, I want to consider its conceptual structure, drawn from Du Bois’s creative interrelation of the complex meanings of race and nation. The individual essays that comprise The Souls of Black Folk are composed and tied to each other to form a series of tightly bound ideological contradictions, contradictions which are themselves inherent in the particularities of the racial ordering of the United States as a modern nation-state. The text exposes and exploits the tension that exists between the internal egalitarian impulse inherent in the concept of nation and the relations of domination and subordination that are embodied in a racially encoded social hierarchy.42 Du Bois recognized that the question of the relation between nationalism and racism was a matter of understanding their historical articulation, and he therefore attempted to rewrite the historical as well as the sociological genealogy of black people, situating them as equal citizens within the national community.43

Du Bois did not contest the claim that black people should be viewed as a race. On the contrary, his intellectual strategy was to utilize the concept of race and transform it into a means of political unification. In The Souls of Black Folk he imagines black people as a race in ways that are conceptually analogous to imagining them as a nation. Processes of racialization are usually understood to be fragmentary in their historical effect on national political communities, and, indeed, The Souls of Black Folk was produced at a time when the nation was internally organized into a system of rigid racial segregation maintained and policed by the politics of terror. Adopting a strategy of direct confrontation with the historical conditions under which he wrote, Du Bois asserted that processes of racialization could create unified communities existing in harmony with the national community. He stated:
Work, culture, liberty,—all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward that vaster ideal that swims before the Negro people, the ideal of human brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of Race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the great ideals of the American Republic. (p. 52)

Conceptual tension arises from the differing inflections of the concept of race in this passage. While Du Bois attempted to avoid the use of the term in the sense of the limited genetic concept which had historically condemned the descendants of African peoples in the United States to exclusion from the framework of national citizenship, he retained the metaphorical and familial language of racial kinship. At this point in his intellectual life, Du Bois used the concept of race to signify cultural difference (a designation now more frequently associated with the concept of ethnicity). He paid little attention to analyzing or criticizing actual material processes of racial categorization, and concentrated instead upon documenting the historical effects of racialization by focusing upon the historically constituted and conventional racialized meanings inscribed in the social and political constitution of blackness.44

In the opening chapter, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” Du Bois challenges the dominant ideological definitions of the historical, sociological, and political position of black people within the boundaries of the national community. His initial philosophical premise is that black people and black cultural forms do not exist in opposition to the ideals of an American republic but, on the contrary, embody them. Consequently, instead of participating in the contestation over categories of racial differentiation, he locates the symbolic power of nationalism, of Americanness, squarely within the black cultural field.

We the darker ones come even now not altogether empty-handed; there are today no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes; there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folklore are Indian and African; and, all in all, we black men seem the sole oasis of simple faith and reverence in a dusty desert of dollars and smartness. (p. 52)

The reference to the “pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence” evokes “the pervasive republicanism of the newly-independent [national] communities” of the eighteenth century.45 Claiming this particular genealogy for black peoples has very particular political and ideological effects. It is a demand for inclusion in the “imagined community” of the nation-state produced by the cultural revolutions of the modern world. This demand contrasts dramatically, for example, with the way in which Marcus Garvey would, in the coming years, structure the U.N.LA., an organization ideologically and politically incompatible with the idea of a modern nation-state: a racialized fraternity, it was conceived in the terms of a premodern dynastic order.46

*The Souls of Black Folk* is organized and framed by the symbolic unification of race and nation, and in its closing pages Du Bois repeats his strategy of placing black bodies at the center of the national discourse. Black people, he asserts, are integral to the very formation and maintenance of the nation-state to which they have donated their particular gifts: “a gift of story and song—soft, stirring melody in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the Spirit... Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation” (p. 275).

In language simultaneously evocative of the history of the frontier and of the industrial cotton mills, Du Bois rejects the marginalization of black people in American national life, whom he sees as integral to the founding and formation of the republic. In *The Souls of Black Folk* it is the descendants of African peoples who are proclaimed the legitimate inheritors of the principles of the Declaration of Independence, and Du Bois inscribes the symbolic power of nationalism directly onto black
bodies. It is the bodies of the previously enslaved which inherit, and therefore become the primary site for, the preservation of national ideals. It is black bodies which offer the only vision of spiritual sustenance in a desert of rampant materialism, and it is the conditions of their social, political, and economic existence, Du Bois asserts, which are the only reliable measure of the health of the national body politic. In the body of America dwells a black soul.

What is at stake for Du Bois is to convince his readership that what appear to be ideologically and historically oppositional categories, namely race and nation, are not, in fact, incompatible. Yet crucial to Du Bois’s structure of thought is the way he uses gender to mediate the relation between his concept of race and his concept of nation. This enables him to negotiate his way between the contradictions of a nationalist discourse of equality, on the one hand, and a fragmentary and hierarchical discourse of race, on the other. The process of gendering at work in The Souls of Black Folk distinguishes not only between concepts of masculine and feminine subject positions but makes distinctions within his definition of masculinity itself.

The multiplicity and complexity of Du Bois’s intellectual project, which integrates the discourses of history, philosophy, and social science, is bound with the thread of an apparently unified gendered subject position. In “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” the title of the first chapter, the opening pages establish the “I” of an autobiographical narrator, an “I” that quickly links itself to the “Our,” the black community, through the experience of being regarded as a problem. The basis for this shared experience, however—a racist social order—is the same ground which establishes the narrator as an exceptional male individual. Du Bois’s intellectual and political intention to integrate his voice with the voice of the wider black community displaces a number of ideological contradictions, not the least of which is his class position. In order to retain his credentials for leadership, Du Bois had to situate himself as both an exceptional and a representative individual: to be different from and maintain a distance between his experience and that of the masses of black people, while simultaneously integrating his existential being with that of his imagined community of the people. The terms and conditions of his exceptionalism, Du Bois argues, have their source in his formation as a gendered intellectual.

The “striving” that was required in order to exist in a racist society was of a different order for Du Bois than for most black men, he states. As a schoolboy, he was able to beat his white classmates at examination time, and this success, he concludes, enabled him to overcome his contempt of them. Attributing to his success in school the source of his emotional maturity emphasizes Du Bois’s intellectual ability and superiority. In this, however, his becoming a man differed from the way most other black boys grew to manhood. As Du Bois describes this distinction: “With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrank into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?” (pp. 44-45). Du Bois’s intellectual and sexual formation are two aspects of the constitution of black masculinity, and their interdependence is manifest in the gendered language of his text.

For Du Bois the “problem” of being black was an issue of both commonality and exceptionalism; it was not just about learning that he was black but also about learning how to become a black man. The story of his first memorable racist incident is also the re-creation of a highly charged moment of gender formation. He describes how all his classmates decided to exchange visiting cards. A white girl arrogantly refused to accept the card Du Bois offered her and at that moment, he writes, he knew that he was “different” from his white peers and became aware of the “veil” that separated their two worlds. This realization disrupts the smooth passage of the formative years of his male adolescence, but the practice of challenging and overcoming such obstacles enables the transition from boy to man.

The conceptual structure of Du Bois’s genealogy of race and nation has, at its center, the dilemma of the formation of black manhood. Gender mediates Du Bois’s presentation of the relation between race, nation, and a fully participatory citizenship for black people. Integral to
the “problem” of simultaneously being black and being American is coming into manhood, and it is the latter that is the most vulnerable to attack. For racism shrank the youth of most black boys into a “tasteless sychophany” which not only disrupts adolescence but dooms these young men to a life of mimicry, to a mere a parody of masculinity, a parody which results in their being denied a full role in the patriarchal social and political order.

Du Bois’s characterization of a parody of masculinity echoes today in Cornel West’s descriptions of the “nihilism” of black America, and in his analysis of the formation of black male sexuality. West makes a clear distinction between “black male sexuality” and “black female sexuality”; he argues, for instance, that “black men have different self-images and strategies of acquiring power in the patriarchal structures of white America and black communities. For most young black men, power is acquired by stylizing their bodies over space and time in such a way that their bodies reflect their uniqueness and provoke fear in others.” West is convinced that it is these “limited stylistic options” which lead to their patriarchal subordination. This stylizing of bodies is “an instance of machismo,” West insists, which “solicits primarily sexual encounters with women and violent encounters with other black men or aggressive police. . . . This search for power . . . usually results in a direct confrontation with the order-imposing authorities of the status quo, that is, the police or the criminal justice system.”

West’s argument about the style of young black men stands in direct contrast to his image of the successful black intellectual in a three-piece suit and is directly analogous to Du Bois’s arguments about the deformation of the process of young black men becoming gendered beings at the turn of the century. What Du Bois regards as a black male style that is a parody of a national discourse of masculinity is equivalent to Cornel West’s “machismo” style of young black men, which “solicits primarily sexual encounters with women and violent encounters with other black men” and brings them into direct confrontation with the authority of the nation-state.

It is significant that Du Bois claims that his first encounter with racism was the moment when his courtly, nineteenth-century advances were rejected by a young white woman. Du Bois clearly believed that women (and, I will argue, certain men whom he regarded as having compromised their masculinity) could become the mediators through which the nation-state oppressed black men. For most black men, he argues, the burden of racism was not only poverty and ignorance but a burden carried through black mothers and imposed upon their sons. “The red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race,” Du Bois concludes, fell upon the shoulders of black men, as they had to carry “the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers” (p. 50). This “hereditary weight” is the burden imposed on black men by history because they could not control the sexual reproduction of black women. Under this weight of betrayal by black women, most black men stumbled, fell, and failed to come into the full flowering of black manhood.

Most black men, in Du Bois’s genealogy, suffer from a deformation in their process of becoming gendered beings; the result is their patriarchal subordination in the national community. Du Bois’s language in The Souls of Black Folk is passionately gendered in its symbolic power as he describes such subordination. In addition to the weight that the black man had to bear because of the defilement of Negro women, Du Bois describes how the “shadow of the vast despair” that darkens “the very soul of the toiling, sweating black man” was made even more unbearable by white sociologists who “gleefully count his bastards and his prostitutes.” For Du Bois the figure of the black woman, whether prostitute or mother, has a surplus symbolic value upon which he liberally draws in his illustrations of the denigration of the black man. The illicit sexuality that Du Bois inscribes upon the bodies of black women contributes to rendering the male impotent, so that the black man “stands helpless, dismayed and well-nigh speechless; before that personal disrespect and mockery, the ridicule and systematic humiliation, the distortion of fact and wanton license of fancy” (p. 50).

Although paralysis of mind and body is the fate of most black men, The Souls of Black Folk stands as evidence that Du Bois is an exception:
he retains an ability to speak in a voice that has overcome the vast despair that defeats lesser men; he has lifted the burden of illegitimacy and female sexual complicity from his shoulders, and he has conquered the impotence caused by such a burden.\textsuperscript{52} It is the process of becoming an intellectual that Du Bois offers as an alternative route to manhood, as a way to avoid gendered and racialized subordination, deformation, and degradation. Indeed, becoming an intellectual is, perhaps, the only sure route to becoming a certain type of man, a man whose "style" is not in direct confrontation with the nation-state. Du Bois insists that it is his intellectual achievements that enable him to make a successful transition from adolescence into a socially acceptable style of manhood, and that it is the power of his intellect which gives him the ability to analyze the burden, the vast shadow, which stunts and deforms the growth of other black men. The practice of intellectual analysis, as narratively encoded within \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}, conquers political impotence and leads to an attainment of masculine self-respect. It is this theory of conquest by intellect that I would now like to consider.

In \textit{The Souls of Black Folk} Du Bois not only challenges his readers to reconsider the ways in which the national community has been historically constituted, but he also creates an alternative cultural identity for the nation-state. Despite the apparent idealism of this project, Du Bois was certainly aware that even if he succeeded, neither the cultural recognition of the historic role of black people in the formation of the nation-state nor their inclusion in the nationalist symbolic order would automatically result in the granting of universal suffrage and political citizenship: acts which would signify their inclusion within the imagined boundaries of the nation-state. Thus it was essential for Du Bois to provide a framework for the future political praxis of black leadership.

Through a series of reflections Du Bois developed what he regarded as the necessary conditions for producing black political and intellectual leadership. In the sixth chapter, "Of the Training of Black Men," Du Bois appraises black education and argues for the importance of producing a college-educated elite, a "Talented Tenth" which would teach and provide leadership for the race. This "Talented Tenth," however, was not to remain an isolated intellectual elite but would evolve in alliance with its constituency, an alliance he describes as a "loving, reverent comradeship between the black lowly and the black men emancipated by training and culture" (p. 138). Black intellectuals are to become the means for inducing the "lowly" into the national community; as teachers, their role becomes that of missionaries for the nation-state.\textsuperscript{53}

In the ninth chapter, "Of the Sons of Master and Man," Du Bois elaborates upon these ideas and insists that leaders who had assimilated "the culture and common sense of modern civilization" play an important role in imagining the "race" as part of the national entity, a role, I have argued, that Du Bois himself was effecting by bringing black people into the boundaries of the national imagination through \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}. However, representing the race as part of the national entity bespoke the obligation to turn the representation into reality: in order to effect change those leaders needed access to political power. The ballot was recognized to be an important \textit{mechanism} for the production of actual and symbolic national subjects but it was through the \textit{practice} of exercising their right to vote that black men could imagine their own relation as subjects to a political community. In 1903, Du Bois regarded the ballot as perhaps the most important means for a black political and intellectual elite to acquire political power and signify black political citizenship.

The philosophy and practice of black intellectual leadership was to be bound by the same limits and commitments that Du Bois imposed upon himself in 1893. Although there are specific passages in \textit{The Souls of Black Folk} where Du Bois discusses the present and future condition of black leadership in the abstract, and occasionally in relation to specific individuals such as Booker T. Washington and Alexander Crummel the narrative is stitched together by an authorial persona who enacts the ideal qualities of intellectual and political leadership and black masculinity. Du Bois himself is textually present in three important ways: first, he acts as an embodiment of his own ideal of an intellectual and graduate of the humanistic education he advocates; second, he appears as a contestant for black leadership whose voice gains authority through...
process of critiquing other male leaders; and, finally, he quite deliberately uses his own body as the site for an exposition of the qualities of black manhood.

In Du Bois’s genealogy of race and nation, black people are both integral to the nation-state and essential to its future. An important political element of his blueprint for black intellectuals is the development and elaboration of a critique of rampant materialism. In a period which gives rise to the global expansion of capitalism and secures the rapid “incorporation” of the United States, black men are “the sole oasis of simple faith and reverence in a dusty desert of dollars and smartness” (p. 52). In chapter five, “On the Wings of Atalanta,” Du Bois elaborates this world view and places himself at its axis.

The chapter opens with his critique of materialism and fear that within the black world as well as the white, “the habit is forming of interpreting the world in dollars” (p. 113). The city of Atlanta, epitome of industrialization and material greed, is what gave birth to the new South, Du Bois asserts. He describes how “the city crowned her hundred hills with factories” (p. 110) and warns that “Atlanta must not lead the South to dream of material prosperity as the touchstone of all success” (p. 112). But in this “desert” bloomed Atlanta University, a world that was not obsessed with the dream of material prosperity and had a vision of life with “nothing mean or selfish” in it.

Not at Oxford or at Leipsic, not at Yale or Columbia, is there an air of higher resolve or more unfettered striving; the determination to realize for men, both black and white, the broadest possibilities of life, to seek the better and the best, to spread with their own hands the Gospel of Sacrifice.—all this is the burden of their talk and dream. Here, amid a wide desert of cast and proscription, amid the heart-hurting slights and jars and vagaries of a deep race-dislike, lies this green oasis. (pp. 115–116)

Using the language of sacrifice and commitment which in 1893 he had confined to his personal diary, Du Bois creates an image of the University of Atlanta as a body politic which could be the source of alternative humanistic values and ideals and, at the heart of it, putting the “air of higher resolve” and “unfettered striving” into practice, Du Bois places himself.

The language and narrative structure of The Souls of Black Folk define the university as being at once the foundation of a civilization under threat and, through its production of professional intellectuals, the promise of a new social order for the nation. As Eric Hobsbawm put it, “the progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism just as schools and universities become its most conscious champions.”

By explicitly situating himself as speaking from the University of Atlanta, Du Bois establishes himself as a professional intellectual in a position of authority from which he could, as an intellectual and as a critic of culture, intervene in and shape debate about the boundaries of culture and civilization, broadening its parameters to imaginatively include black men and black folk culture.

But the professional intellectual needs not only a site from which to speak but a “true self-consciousness” to determine what is spoken. The concept of double-consciousness is generally regarded as one of Du Bois’s major contributions to philosophic thought. Explicated in the first chapter of The Souls of Black Folk, double-consciousness is the product of a world that has allowed the black man no “true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (p. 45). While double-consciousness is, indeed, a product of the articulation between race and nation, I would argue that we need to revise our understanding of how this double-consciousness works in order to understand how gender is an ever-present, though unacknowledged, factor in this theory. For Du Bois, the gaining of the “true self-consciousness” of a racialized and national subject position is dependent upon first gaining a gendered self-consciousness.

In order to explicate this assertion I want to return to the second chapter, “Of the Dawn of Freedom,” and its two contrasting figures which typify the gendered nature of the history of Reconstruction. Each figure is imagined to bear the history of its race in the South. The first
one is white: "a grey-haired gentleman" who, although "his fathers had quit themselves like men," is unable to father future generations or leave a legacy of patriarchal power because his sons "lay in nameless graves." This figure is an unmanned and "blighted, ruined form, with hate in his eyes." The second figure is black: a mother with an "awful face" who "quailed at that white master's command," loved his sons and his wife, and "laid herself low to his lust." Her legacy is a "tawny manchild" born out of an act of submission—an act of racial betrayal which compromises the black man's masculinity because it does not recognize his control over her sexual being.

Two acts of compromise, one political and one sexual, lead to the perpetual subordination of black manhood. The act of sexual compromise by Du Bois's anonymous figure of the black mother, which contributes to the black man's failure to become a man, is deliberately situated in the narrative of Reconstruction so as to parallel the Act of Compromise of 1877 between the northern and southern states, an act which put an end to the work of the Freedmen's Bureau, led to the withdrawal of northern troops from the South, and resulted in further oppression of black men. Each act of compromise renders the nation impotent, unable and unwilling to fully emancipate the black man. "For this much all men know" wrote Du Bois, "despite compromise, war and struggle, the Negro is not free" (p. 77). The integrity and the autonomy of race, of nation, and of masculinity are destroyed by such acts of compromise in which the sexual and political subordination of black manhood are figuratively intertwined.

The gendered nature of the language in chapter three, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," continues to allude to the sexual compromise evoked by Du Bois's figure of the black mother. The "most notable thing in Mr. Washington's career," Du Bois states with undisguised irony, is his "Atlanta Compromise" (p. 80). Washington's body becomes a spectacle set against the landscape described as a "dusty desert of dollars and smartness." Initially, Du Bois characterizes Washington as a sycophant and as destructive as the materialistic idols in front of which he prostrates himself. In a bitter tone he writes of him:

"And so thoroughly did [Washington] learn the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of commercial prosperity, that the picture of a lone black boy pouring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home soon seemed to him the acme of absurdities" (p. 81). Sycophancy and selling out to commercialism are cited as evidence of a stunted or deformed manhood, a masculine style incompatible with the incorporation of the race into the modern nation-state. Because Du Bois makes his narrative of the transition from male adolescence and immaturity to full manhood and maturity so entirely dependent upon becoming an intellectual, Washington's standing as an intellectual and as a race leader is challenged at the same time as his masculinity is undermined.

Du Bois deliberately constructs his figure of Washington as analogous to that of his anonymous black mother: both betray the sons of the race, both undermine the possibility of black patriarchal power, and both of their acts of submission are condemned with equal vehemence. When Washington mimics the speech and ideals of commercialism, he becomes the metaphorical equivalent of the black mother (or the black female prostitute) who succumbs to the lust of white men. Washington also stands accused of succumbing to the lust of his historical moment: his "oneness with his age" is ironically described as "the mark of a successful man" (p. 81), but his "counsels of submission," Du Bois concludes, "overlooked certain elements of true manhood" (p. 82). Not only is the reader left in little doubt that Washington is not a man by Du Bois's measure of black masculinity, but his compromise with the dominant philosophy of his age is to be understood as a form of prostitution.

The chapter on Booker T. Washington immediately precedes the two chapters that I describe as the female symbolic space of the white section of the book. The discussion of Washington is, therefore, separated and excluded from the black masculine world with which the text concludes, and juxtaposed with a feminized symbolic territory of illegitimate and negative sexuality. The city of Atlanta—whether evoked through Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" speech or as the symbolic landscape of commercial degradation in *The Souls of Black Folk*—is a
female entity, historically compromised and starkly contrasted to the modern nation evoked as "this common Fatherland" (p. 91).

Du Bois's gendered language grows increasingly complex and sexually explicit when he considers the future of the Union. "We have no right," he says, "to sit silently by while the inevitable seeds are sown for a harvest of disaster to our children, black and white" (p. 92). Washington is situated at the crux of two illegitimate symbolic sexual unions: he prostituted himself because he sold his soul and betrayed the best interests of black men; and he promoted the national reconciliation of the (female) South and "her co-partner in guilt," the North (p. 94).

Du Bois contrasts Washington's inadequate manliness and consequent lack of the attributes of leadership with a history of black male revolt and self-assertion led by such revolutionary figures as the maroons, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Nat Turner, and other rebels against Washington's acts of compromise. The heirs of these revolutionaries, Du Bois argues, are leaders like David Walker, Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown—a list that excludes Washington but is the genealogy of the progenitors of Du Bois. These revolutionary figures appear in Du Bois's narrative both as "true" black men and genuine leaders of black men.

Washington, in contrast, figures as the equivalent of the bastard child: "Booker T. Washington arose as essentially the leader not of one race but of two—a compromiser between the South, the North and the Negro" (p. 86). He is twice a compromiser, a man who prostrates himself to whites and black alike and is himself a product of a national compromise. Washington's compromise, declares Du Bois, surrendered the civil and political rights of black men in the same way that the compromise between the North and the South betrayed these rights. Washington's policy of submission withdrew "many of the high demands of Negroes as men and as American citizens" (p. 87). His policies were "bound to sap the manhood of any race" (p. 88). They directly undermine the genealogy of race and nation Du Bois constructs in The Souls of Black Folk, just as the historical compromise between the northern and southern states undermines his political and philosophical ideals. In short, The Souls of Black Folk effectively dethrones Booker T. Washington from his position as a pre-eminent leader, questions his political and intellectual integrity, and condemns him as a collaborator.

The complex cultural politics of gender at work in The Souls of Black Folk are an important means of producing political displacement. The narrative demise of Booker T. Washington, of course, significantly advances Du Bois's own claim to speak with the authority of a representative black intellectual, leader, and man. But we should ask, at what cost has this figure of the representative black intellectual been produced? and to what extent do we still live with the politics of gender implicated in its production?
NOTES

Introduction

3. It is interesting to note that in the white press the term “Race Man” appears in quotation marks, whereas in the black press it doesn’t.
5. In 1898 Maritcha L. Lyons was asked to present a paper. It was read by E. D. Barriere, as Lyons could not attend. In 1908, at a panel discussion on education, a woman was asked her opinion. These are the only two occasions in which women were asked to participate. See Moss, *The American Negro Academy*, pp. 78, 134.

1. The Souls of Black Men

American Library, 1982). Page numbers to this edition will hereafter be cited in parenthesis in the body of the text.


5. The use of the phrase “real intellectual work” points to what I believe is the relegation of feminist analysis to the realm of domestic intellectual labor. Male intellectuals do the real work of intellectual labor, whereas feminist or gender analysis applies only to the separate sphere of women.

6. West severely criticizes Du Bois’s model of the “Talented Tenth” for being elitist; see Gates and West, _The Future of the Race_, pp. 65–67. West is equally uninterested in and dismissive of feminist work. See, for example, p. 185 n.20, on Ida B. Wells, which ignores all scholarship on Wells by women. One can only assume that West does not read it.


8. I am, of course, rather freely but I hope not disrespectful, both adopting and revising the term “structures of feeling” from Raymond Williams. While Williams applied this term to the “culture of a period,” I want to retain this sense of history but also to evoke the cultural meanings of a particular text as I apply it to my readings of the essays collected in _Souls of Black Folk_. Though I deviate slightly from Williams in my use of his insights, I am following the spirit and method of the conceptual framework, which he describes as follows: “The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships. Analysis of particular works or institutions is, in this context, analysis of their essential kind of organization, the relationships which works or institutions embody as parts of the organization as a whole.” A keyword, in such analysis, is pattern: it is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns, which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned.” Raymond Williams (1961), _The Long Revolution_ (rpt. London: Pelican Books, 1965), pp. 63–66.


10. It is, however, the case that in his private life, as a father and as a husband, Du Bois was a consummate patriarch, but that is not the subject of my concern in this chapter. For further consideration of the contradictions that existed between Du Bois’s public politics and his private life, contradictions that are not uncommon in the lives of men who publicly support feminist causes, see David Levering Lewis, _W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919_ (New York: Henry Holt, 1993).


13. James Weldon Johnson, _The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man_ (1912) (rpt. New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), pp. 168–169. Johnson also evokes Du Bois’s metaphor of the veil in his Preface: “In these pages it is as though a veil had been drawn aside: the reader is given a view of the inner life of the Negro in America, it is initiated into the freemasonry, as it were, of the race” (p. xii). Johnson, like Du Bois, privileges discourses of masculinity and assumes that these will reveal the inner life of the race as a whole. See Robert B. Stepno, _From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative_ (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), pp. 111–127, for a detailed explication of Johnson’s use of _Souls of Black Folk_. See also Valerie Smith, _Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative_ (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 56–58.


16. In the context of discussing religious pilgrimages, Benedict Anderson argues that “a vast horde of illiterate vernacular-speakers provided the dense, physical reality of the ceremonial passage; while a small segment of literate bilingual adepts drawn from each vernacular community performed the unifying rites, interpreting to their respective followings the meaning of their collective motion.” Anderson, _Imagined Communities_, p. 56. I see _Souls of Black Folk_ as performing a similar interpretive function of bringing a people into existence, and regard the intellectual act of producing the text as analogous to “performing the unifying rites.”


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20. Indeed, I find the text very useful when I address the inherently inter-disciplinary nature of work in African American Studies and American Studies, and as an example of the critical potential of African American cultural studies. However, it is also important to note that other works by Du Bois have not acquired such status and are not always in print. To state the obvious, there is a very real material relation between the process of the academic canonization of a text and the politics of the publishing industry.


24. West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 5. Later, West describes his position as follows: “I began this work as an exercise in critical self-inventory, as a historical, social and existential situating of my own work as an intellectual, activist and human being. I wanted to make clear to myself my own contradictions and tensions, faults and foibles as one shaped by, in part, the tradition of American pragmatism” (p. 7).


27. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 65. “Liberalism and the Enlightenment clearly had a powerful impact, above all in providing an arsenal of ideological criticisms of imperial and ancien régimes. What I am proposing is that neither economic interest, Liberalism, nor Enlightenment could, or did, create in themselves the kind or shape, of imagined community to be defended from these regime’s depredations; to put it another way, none provided the framework of a new consciousness—the scarcely-seen periphery of its admiration or disgust. In accomplishing this specific task, pilgrim creole functionaries and provincial creole printmen played the decisive role.”


NOTES TO PAGES 16–20

29. See, for example, the analysis of Stepto, *From Behind the Veil*, pp. 3–31 and 67–72.


32. For details of previous publication see Blight and Gooding-Williams, *Souls*, p. viii.

33. Cornel West shares this intellectual and political motivation with Du Bois: “I have written this text convinced that a thorough re-examination of American pragmatism, stripping it of its myths, caricatures, and stereotypes and viewing it as a component of a new and novel form of indigenous thought and action, may be a first step toward fundamental change and transformation in America and the world.” *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 8.

34. “...we have seen that the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even ‘world-events’ into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers; and also how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time.” Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 63.


36. It is interesting that Du Bois himself recognizes the temptations of sensuality. “Golden apples are beautiful—I remember the lawless days of boyhood, when orchards in crimson and gold tempted me over fence and field” (p. 112). One can only wonder if writing the essay caused him to reflect upon his sexual relationship with Josie’s mother. See n.37.

37. Du Bois clearly had somewhat ambivalent and complex attitudes toward female sexuality. In his autobiography he claims that when he taught in Tennessee he was “literally raped by the unhappy wife who was my landlady.” David Levering Lewis states that this “unhappy wife” was Josie’s mother. The claim of rape seeks to establish Du Bois’s (male) innocence in the face of a predatory (female) sexuality. Du Bois appears to have considered female sexuality in binary terms as a conceptual dilemma. Whenever “I tried to solve the contradiction of virginity and motherhood I was inevitably faced with the other contradiction of prostitution and adultery.” It is interesting to reflect upon what Du Bois calls here, “a contradiction,” in light of the binary gendered structures of thought and feeling in *Souls*. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois*.

As Claudia Tate has reminded me, Du Bois does later use a female figure for social transformation as the character of Zora in *The Golden Fleece.*

38. West, *Race Matters,* p. 40. As West's clothing duplicates Du Bois's, one assumes that he may be adopting the values that Du Bois imagined went along with the way he dressed. Indeed, the photograph on the cover of *Race Matters* would seem to confirm this analogy. However, one must take issue with West's cavalier dismissal of how other black intellectuals dress, and with the intellectual and political implications he draws from it.

39. David Levering Lewis considers that the "elegiac prose of 'The Passing of the First-Born' verges on bathos today." I have called it "passionate" but we both seem to agree that the focus of the tragedy is Du Bois himself. However, because I see such continuity between this essay and the other essays in *The Souls of Black Folk,* I would disagree with Levering Lewis's opinion that the essay is merely an "apostrophe" in the book. See Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois,* p. 227.


42. As Etienne Balibar has described the particular conditions of racism in the modern world: "societies in which racism develops are at the same time supposed to be 'egalitarian' societies, in other words, societies which (officially) disregard status differences between individuals, this sociological thesis... cannot be abstracted from the national environment itself... it is not the modern state which is 'egalitarian' but the modern (nationalist) nation-state, this equality having as its internal and external limits the national community and, as its essential content, the acts which signify it directly (particularly universal suffrage and political 'citizenship'). It is, first and foremost, an equality in respect of nationality." See Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class,* pp. 49–50. Benedict Anderson has also pointed out the force of these contradictions: the nation "is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* p. 16.

43. Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class,* p. 50. As Balibar describes this process, "the connection between nationalism and racism is neither a matter of perversity (for there is no 'pure' essence of nationalism) nor a question of formal similarity, but a question of historical articulation."

44. See also Du Bois's essay, "The Conservation of the Races," and the discussion of it by Blight and Gooding-Williams in their Introductory essay to *The Souls of Black Folk,* p. 9.

45. Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* p. 53: "The success of the Thirteen Colonies' revolt at the end of the 1770s, and the onset of the French Revolution at the end of the 1780s, did not fail to exert a powerful influence. Nothing confirms this 'cultural revolution' more than the pervasive republicanism of the newly-independent communities. Nowhere was any serious attempt made to recreate the dynastic principle in the Americas, except in Brazil..."

46. I refer to the trappings and hierarchy of Empire that were reproduced in U.N.I.A. parades and costumes and in the titles given to U.N.I.A. officials.

47. It would be an interesting and fruitful project to trace the use of gender as a term of mediation between the concept of race and the evocation of the premodern dynastic order in the work of Marcus Garvey and in the U.N.I.A.

48. Gates's experience as described in his essay "The Parable of the 'Talents'" bears an uncanny similarity to Du Bois's account of his educational success and the failures of the other boys. At the end of the section which includes the passage of loss and mourning quoted above, Gates concludes: "But I was fortunate; I loved the place [Yale]. I loved the library and the seminars, I loved talking with the professors; I loved 'peeping the hole card' in people's assumptions and turning their logic back upon themselves. I had more chip than shoulder, and through it all I demanded of every person with whom I chanced to interact that they earn the right to learn my name... Only sometimes do I feel guilty that I was among the lucky ones, and only sometimes do I ask myself why." For both Gates and Du Bois, their success in negotiating their way as intellectuals lies in the complexity of their formation as particular types of men. Gates and West, *Future of the Race,* pp. 51–52.

49. David Levering Lewis directs our attention to how very many different autobiographical versions of the moment of Du Bois's discovery of the significance of race there are in his writings. However, he also seems to agree that Du Bois's awareness of race is consistently gendered. "Whatever the personal dynamics of racial self-discovery were, by his thirteenth birthday Willie came to have an informed idea of what being a black male meant even in the relatively tolerant New England." See Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois,* pp. 33–34.


51. It is worth noting that Cornel West too treats himself as an exception among other black men in his analysis of the politics of contemporary black male sexuality, and that he consciously styles his body to be a conspicuous sign of that distinction. Of course, using the body to display masculine distinction as "race leader" is not limited to Du Bois and Cornel West. Marcus Garvey, for
example, comes immediately to mind. All three have used their bodies to articulate masculine exceptionalism in particularly interesting ways.

52. David Levering Lewis speculates how possibly “evasive, ambivalent and wretched Du Bois’s feelings for his mother might have been as she became an ‘albatross’ to him.” Levering Lewis, W. E. B. Du Bois, p. 52.

53. I am concentrating upon the function of intellectuals here and following a Gramscian definition of intellectuals practices, as follows: “Can one find a unitary criterion to characterise equally all the diverse and disparate activities of intellectuals and to distinguish these at the same time and in an essential way from the activities of other social groupings? The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations. . . . All men are intellectuals . . . but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals. When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals.” Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 8, 9.


55. Eric Hobsbawm, as quoted in Anderson, Imagined Communities, p. 69.

2. The Body and Soul of Modernism


4. I do not wish to suggest that black women and children were not lynched; they were. My concentration on black male bodies is not intended to neglect this.

5. As always I am deeply indebted to the work and comradeship of Paul Gilroy.


13. See the portrait of Murray taken by Edward Steichen in the Introduction to Murray, Celebrity Portraits.


17. Weiermair, The Hidden Image, p. 13. He continues by describing the “Cult of the Body”: “After World War I, the male nude was seen in a different light. This was due to several factors: modern sport, the Olympic Games, the back-to-nature movement, and the beginnings of modern nudism. The healthy, athletic look, a revival of the Greek ideal of a sane mind in a healthy body had always been beyond suspicion of eroticism. . . . Homosexual pinup magazines