

A Return to W.E.B. Du Bois’s “The Conservation of Races”

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Forethought¹

The world (especially the philosophical world) has not been the same since W.E.B. Du Bois raised the important question, “*What, then, is a race?*” and put forth his first and most systematic definition of race in “The Conservation of Races.” The world has not been the same in two striking ways. First, the world has not been the same because it is literally not the same world. When Du Bois famously characterized the problem of the twentieth century as “the problem of the color line,” he had no way of knowing about or even conceptualizing Rachel Dolezal. He knew about racial assimilation and racial passing, and even had to contend with the implication of his fair skin and biraciality. Yet, he could not conceive transracialism and the havoc it would wreak on racial discourse. More than sparking a highly divisive discussion on Black and trans identity in the era of #BlackLivesMatter and #WontBeErased, Dolezal’s transracialism made American racial theorists deftly aware of how our current conceptual repertoire is incapable of thinking her identity. This case alone exposed the incoherence of our current philosophical and societal resources within the localized unfolding of American life. Dolezal has shown the need for racial identity to be “retheorized:” updated to fit such inconsistencies; reconsidered on the basis of artificial boundaries separating racial groups; and expanded to include a thorough explication of transraciality. Additionally, Du Bois lived in a world with races and we live in a world where we can seriously explore the possibilities that “there are no races” and pose the consideration that Barack Obama brought with his 2008–2016 presidency, our post-racial present.²

The philosophical world has not been the same since “The Conservation of Races” because of the series of invective essays Kwame Anthony Appiah began writing in 1985 in response to Du Bois’s definition of races from that address. There is a way to read the previous twenty-five years of Critical Philosophy of Race discourse as being sparked by the first of Appiah’s essays, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race.” In “The Uncompleted Argument” Appiah argues that Du Bois’s definition of race did not transcend the scientific conception of race

but relies on it, returning race to the domain of biology. By analyzing the six characteristics contained in Du Bois's definition—*common blood, common language, common history, common traditions, impulses, and strivings*—Appiah argues systematically that they each refer back to science and systems of heredity. Furthermore they are, more or less, all discredited for the same reason: they cannot explain what binds people together. Therefore, Appiah famously concludes, "there are no races" because there is nothing in the world that can do what we need the concept of race to do or accomplish. Since 2006 Appiah's publications have moved away from an explicit focus on race to reflect on the larger question of ethics that, at least for Appiah, preconfigure any expressed concern one might have for particular identities. However, one year shy of the thirtieth anniversary of "The Uncompleted Argument" (1985), Appiah published a new book on Du Bois, *Lines of Descent: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* (2014), signaling, at least for Appiah, a necessary return to Du Bois's "The Conservation of Races."

So, why return to "Conservation"? For those like myself who are persuaded by Du Bois's definition, in its ability to reflect their own experiences, reading "Conservation" always offers a fresh reminder of the value of (Black) identities at a time when this value is only octothorpicly asserted (#BlackLivesMatter, #AfricanLivesMatter, #SayTheirNames, #WontBeErased), therefore, canonizing "The Conservation of Races" as an essential contribution to the theorizing of race. But to a theorist who thinks that the conceptualizing racial project assumes the reality of a concept (race) whose veracity is in question, what do Du Bois and the emergence of (a racial) identity offer to Appiah? What can Du Bois offer to us, today? This final question is not a trivial one, and I contend, it is the most important question of our time.

In, "The Figure of Du Bois as a Problem for Thought," Nahum Chandler offers us a reason why we should read Du Bois today:

Du Bois's texts [...] have, for the most part, yet to become the object of our full and most patient attention. If nothing else, my suggestion here is that a new reading or rereading of the writings of Du Bois should or must be undertaken and sustained in our contemporary moment. Not only should this be so for the generations of scholars, thinkers, and activists just emerging, but also for those generations at the apogee of their wisdom and understanding; not only within the Americas and the Caribbean, but globally; not only in Europe or Africa but also in Asia. For Du Bois

was truly, in a metaphorical sense, a citizen of the world. And he was an intellectual, a thinker and writer, whose concern was the whole of what we can call our world. His ultimate concern was the possibility of another world, not one that has existed in the past, and not the repent in the future, but another world—one that has not yet been and remains yet to come. I propose that in order to understand this Du Bois, we must think with him, allowing his questions to become our own. (33)

Du Bois was first and foremost a theorist of race and race-thinking. He “began publishing at the age of 15” and

his last published texts were prepared at the age of 95, three days before he died. He published in every major genre of literature, including poetry, drama, and fiction; his collective works include five novels, numerous short stories, a biography and above all, many essays. [...] We can estimate that Du Bois wrote an average of six pages of publishable text each day for some 80 years” putting the total of writings he produced over the course of his lifetime to over 175,000 pages. (Chandler 32)

In these pages we see him working and reworking his sociohistorical definition of race throughout his life. This paper seeks to return our philosophical gaze back to “The Conservation of Races” and offers a close and careful reading of the text that will reanimate Du Bois’s sociohistorical definition of race as the world celebrates the 150th anniversary of his birth.

Introduction

At the inaugural meeting of The American Negro Academy, Du Bois presented his proposal to raise the Negro race to “higher planes of thought and action.” “The Conservation of Races,” as he entitled his address, anticipates the *new* Negro, one whose identity was not grounded in the indeterminable physical characteristics that oppressed the Negro, but whose place in history was to be found in the common ideals that those of Negro descent allegedly share. Du Bois’s address was an argument to preserve the idea of the Negro race on the basis of these common ideals against alternative political projects attempting to counter white supremacy. Though he references the

Negro race, his employment of race does not engage the term in its conventional uses primarily because "back of most discussions of race with which he is familiar, have lurked certain assumptions as to his natural abilities, as to his political, intellectual and moral status" (Gutenberg).³ Instead race serves to express a more "human striving" common to a sect of people.

In this preliminary discussion of Du Bois I will detail the structure of "Conservation" by explicating the six distinct parts of the address: (1) the Announcement; (2) "the final word of science," or the scientific conception of race; (3) the sociohistorical conception of race; (4) existentialist critical reflections on the predicament of the Negro; (5) a defense of a "conservation" of races; and (6) the purpose and credo of the American Negro Academy.

I. The Announcement

The publication of Du Bois's address in The Academy's second occasional papers is preceded by an Announcement, probably written by Alexander Crummell. This Announcement is a formal call to order conveying the program of The American Negro Academy to the wider audience beyond those in the room. It intimates that these papers are a continuation of an ongoing discussion, in which members contribute and extend contemporary debates on race and the status of the Negro. Crummell imagines his fellow members to be part of a larger historical context and sees the contributions as responding to two great obstacles to the sociopolitical mobility of the Negro race. He declares that "the surrounding political situation are crucial to an understanding of his argument" (Bernasconi 520) and identifies this situation as "(a) The lack of unity, want of harmony, and absence of a self-sacrificing spirit, and no well-defined line of policy seeking definite aims; (b) The persistent, relentless, at times covert opposition employed to thwart the Negro at every step of his upward struggles to establish the justness of his claim to the highest physical, intellectual and moral possibilities" (Gutenberg). From these observations we can conclude that all papers presented (and subsequently published) by the Academy, including "Conservation," were intended by Crummell to serve two purposes: (1) to "uplift the race to higher planes of thought and action" and (2) to prescribe a plan for the "growth and development of the Negro along right lines, and the vindication of that race against vicious assaults" (Gutenberg). When Du Bois was invited to address the American Negro Academy, he was assigned the topic, "The Duty of Cherishing and Fostering the Intellect of the Race" (Bernasconi 525).

Therefore, I begin my analysis of “Conservation” with the Announcement because it foreshadows the content of Du Bois’s address. There is a sense of urgency that moves throughout his speech. His topic is the identity and future of the Negro race. His plan is to unite three temporal stases: to speak to the highly educated, culturally advanced Negro men in the audience about a phenomenon he carries forward historically, towards a future (Negro race) they are part of and responsible for. Du Bois thought the founding members had the same responsibility that “those of the race who have had the advantage of higher education and culture”—the Talented Tenth⁴—have to “uplift the race to higher planes of thought and action” suggests that, *prima facie*, “Conservation” serves a primarily ethical role.⁵

II. The Scientific Conception of Race

The first major section of “Conservation” begins with the opening lines of the address (“The American Negro has always felt...”) and ends with Darwin’s defense of Human Brotherhood: “It [the final word of science] declares, as Darwin himself said, that great as is the physical unlikeness of the various races of men their likenesses are greater, and upon this rests the whole scientific doctrine of Human Brotherhood” (“Conservation” 117). This section includes his discussion of what Du Bois terms “the final word of science.” Du Bois does not begin by rehashing the arguments of science. Rather, he frames his discussion of the scientific conception of race in terms of the psychosocial effects these ideas have had on the Negro spirit. This psychosocial trauma has prevented the Negro from claiming “the highest physical, intellectual and moral possibilities” and has prompted them to consider their identity in terms of their “natural abilities” and “political, intellectual and moral status,” underscoring their apprehension about their own identity and future. He magnifies these assumptions in this section. He acknowledges that these “discussions” have had deep-seated effects on the Negro sentiment, but presumes his reader’s familiarity with these discussions without explicitly identifying them.⁶ By the end of this analysis I will show that the content of this address should be attributed to these theories about race amalgamation that predicted the annihilation of the Negro race. I argue that Du Bois used “Conservation” to assuage fears that the Negro race will become extinct, fears that undergird feelings of inferiority and oppression in the Negro community.

These fears were exacerbated by rumors that the Negro race will become extinct through biological weakness or assimilation. This picture “speaks of human brotherhood as though it were

the possibility of an already dawning to-morrow" ("Conservation" 108). The fraternity of races alluded to here does not bespeak the future of race relations but a continuous present where differences are "deprecated and minimized," bringing about the disappearance of the Negro race.⁷ One proponent of this view was Frederick Douglass. The future of the Negro, as Douglass expressed it, "is that he will not be expatriated nor annihilated, nor will he forever remain a separate and distinct race from the people around him, but that he will be absorbed, assimilated, and will only appear finally in the features of a blended race" (45). Douglass's claims, while mollifying some of the apprehension felt in the Negro community, were not successful in fostering "calmer moments."⁸ Douglass's arguments did not settle the anxiety in the Negro community because, as he emphasizes, his discussions about race mixing focus on the future of the Negro community without addressing the present state of the Negro experience and how they are to cope with, handle, and develop race relations as they currently encounter them.

The American Negro Academy was created two years after Douglass's death in 1895. William H. Croghan and Richard R. Wright approached Alexander Crummell in 1894 with the idea of a national academy but Crummell decided against it possibly because such an organization did not have Douglass's support (Moses 275–276). Why Douglass's support factored into Crummell's decision is quite perplexing especially considering that they often stood on opposing sides when it came to the issue of racial separatism and the question of whether race amalgamation is the future for Negroes. Crummell stalwartly criticized the view that assimilation had the ability to end race and racism and equated race amalgamation with extermination⁹ stating that "[t]he race-problem cannot be settled by the extinction of race" (Crummell 48). Crummell further argued that an amalgamation of the races, in the sense of an "already dawning tomorrow," is an inappropriate pretention for the Negro and has in fact never occurred.¹⁰

Du Bois's address responds to the confusion and fear that Douglass's assimilationist comments and Crummell's collectivist and separatist views initiated. Their investigations into the "origins and destinies of races" created certain assumptions about the American Negro that they "felt were wrong." When the Negro was not incited or confounded by these arguments, that is, "in our calmer moments," Du Bois argued that "we must acknowledge that human beings are divided into races; that in this country the two most extreme types of the world's races have met [...]" ("Conservation" 108). It is in these words that Du Bois summarizes his anti-assimilationist views. Du Bois was against the notion that amalgamation would dissolve the races into one single race by producing a

singular identity among the vast polity of the human species where no differentiation, no variation exists between peoples.¹¹ He strongly opposed assimilation where identity is left undetermined, serving as a proxy for absorption and substitution—the Negro identity replaced by the white identity. Du Bois believes that Douglass advocates a substitution, calling forth an indeterminability that prevents the identity of races to be retained. He affirms a type of amalgamation that merges races while preserving racial identity, a merging of like-striving peoples to form a community. Du Bois echoes Crummell in his refutation of the notion that the future of the Negro race will be reduced to extinction because of the burgeoning numbers of mixed race persons. This is why he mentions the variation in color “from the marble-like pallor of the Scandinavian to the rich, dark brown of the Zulu, passing by the creamy Slav, the yellow Chinese, the light brown Sicilian and the brown Egyptian.” And also why it is important that the final word of science includes a theory of racial creation based on the intermingling of races. It is not until he presents the sociohistorical conception of race that he provides a final answer to Douglass: “their destiny is *not* absorption by the white Americans.”¹² The prescient undertone of his words is not accidental but instantiates the importance of futurism to his analysis.

Wilson J. Moses argues that “Conservation” is an instance of “hero worship,” an encomium similar to the eulogy Du Bois writes for Crummell in *The Souls of Black Folk* entitled “Of Alexander Crummell.” He describes the address as a “specific endorsement of Crummell’s ideas and an attack on those of Douglass” and calls it a declaration of “his support of the strict puritanical values that Crummell had long preached” (281). While I do interpret this text as a fervent repudiation of Douglass’s assimilationism I stop short of reading it as an atavistic commemoration of Crummell. I do not have the space to detail this position here, but suffice it to say that Du Bois’s project of “conservation” extends beyond the assimilationist-separationist rhetoric awash in Crummell’s writings. Even though “Conservation” appeases Crummell and causes him to describe “Conservation” as “essentially good,” “Conservation” goes further than Crummell could anticipate. Du Bois subordinates the practical questions and raises the more philosophical pertinent ones causing Walter B. Hayson to exclaim that “the day for the work of Mr. Douglass have passed!” (Moses 282). This statement was not made in reference to the anti-assimilationist arguments offered by Crummell, even though he had given his inaugural address (“Civilization, The Primal Need of Race”) (Moses 281) the day before Du Bois presented “Conservation.” Du Bois went further than Crummell had in his racial politics. The future was not a foray into a thought

experiment, a place to cast future concerns. The future was a philosophical conundrum, a silence that can never be spoken because to speak about the future is to condemn one to it. Although their positions were very different, this is the hubris Douglass and Crummell appealed to that Du Bois's address critiques, their manner of speaking about the future as though it was already in sight, as "an already dawning tomorrow." In this section Du Bois signals that his address will be future without ignoring the current sociopolitical climate. As he writes in this section, "the resulting problem as to the future relations of these types is not only of intense and living interest to us, but forms an epoch in the history of mankind" ("Conservation" 108).

Du Bois's address references these debates affecting the Negro community and invalidates the conclusions that have been derived from them. He proposes a way to address the present state of the Negro experience and provides the means to handle and develop race relations as African Americans currently encounter them. He argues that the solution to the Negro problem cannot be resolved by focusing first on the material questions. Rather, we must

rise above the pressing but smaller questions of separate schools and cars, wage-discrimination and lynch law, to survey the whole question of race in human philosophy and to lay, on a basis of broad knowledge and careful insight, those large lines of policy and higher ideas which may form our guiding lines and boundaries in the practical difficulties of every day. ("Conservation" 108)

In other words, the practical questions must be subordinated to the philosophical questions. Du Bois takes particular aim at the way the scientific notion of race has been able to extend "certain assumptions as to his natural abilities" to the Negro's "political, intellectual, and moral status." The continuity between the biological and the psychosomatic was what a trait in both Douglass and Crummell's arguments. Insofar as biological claims served as the explicit basis for the maltreatment of Negroes (and contributed to the legalistic and social separatism called for by the *Plessy* decision and Jim Crow laws) part of Du Bois's concern was that scientific assumptions did not end with the final word but that these arguments were recast to legitimate an ontological conception of the Negro, one that united the metaphysical and the ontological. Du Bois sought to sever this connection, and to minimize the impact the metaphysical had on the ontological, as it has been arrogated by science.

Du Bois's account of the "final word of science" culminates in a reference to determination that "we have at least two, perhaps three, great families of human beings—the whites and Negroes, possibly the yellow race" and the supposition that "other races have arisen from the intermingling of the blood of these two" ("Conservation" 109). The suggestion that all races are formed through the intermingling of the two or three great families of human beings is connected in Du Bois's mind with the extinction question and the mixed race question.¹³ Du Bois challenges any suggestion that science has the last word and in particular its use of race to both emphasize and minimize racial distinctions. It emphasizes racial distinctions by essentializing difference, making race a manifestation of different types of human beings on the basis of language, skin color, hair texture, and cranial measurements. It minimizes racial distinctions by establishing a type of human fraternity based on the idea that "out of one blood God created all." But Du Bois stops short of denying that "race" is a term that forms our guiding lines and boundaries around and between groups of people. He accepts a certain racial separatism (conservation of racial distinctions) and at the same time sets out to provide a rival account to the scientific view. As he explains:

Many criteria of race differences have in the past been proposed, as color, hair, cranial measurements and language. And manifestly, in each of these respects, human beings differ widely. [...] All these physical characteristics are patent enough, and if they agreed with each other it would be very easy to classify mankind. Unfortunately for scientists, however, these criteria of race are most exasperatingly intermingled. Color does not agree with texture of hair, [...] nor does color agree with the breadth of the head [...] nor, again, has the science of language as yet succeeded in clearing up the relative authority of these various and contradictory criteria. ("Conservation" 109)

The insurmountable problem for science is establishing clearly the criteria for identifying races. The intermingling of blood, according to the scientific mainstream of the day, is what makes it difficult to establish such criteria. Appealing to linguistics, the science of language, does not succeed in clearing up the "relative authority of these various and contradictory criteria." And insofar as *subtle forces* account for all the variations in history, they are better able to explain racial differences. Transcending the limits of biology (natural law) requires a move beyond science to

understand how these inconsistencies operate and constitute the world. Du Bois introduces the distinction between the "real meaning of race" and "what scientists say it is." And it is on the basis of this distinction that he develops the sociohistorical conception of race.

The first question Du Bois poses is, "What is the real meaning of race?" He contends that this question must be determined by "what has, in the past, been the law of race development, and what lessons has the past history of race development to teach the rising Negro people" ("Conservation" 109). By asking this question Du Bois has given us the means with which to answer to the question of how to understand race. He also institutes a temporal continuity of "race" that charts its development over time, taking into consideration the past (couched in legal decisions, including the decision of the Supreme Court a year earlier in *Plessy v. Ferguson*), its current societal impact, and how these meanings will inform the Negro posterity to come. In a way the entire address can be read as a response to this initial question and the six remaining questions he asks throughout "Conservation" as elaborations of this central question: What, then, is a race?; What is the real distinction between these nations?; What shall be its [race difference] function in the future?; How shall this [full, complete Negro] message be delivered?; What, after all, am I?; and, Have we in America a distinct mission as a race, or is self-obliteration the highest end to which Negro blood dare aspire?¹⁴

The purpose of this first section of "Conservation" is to reflect on the future of the Negro community and address what he will later describe as the issues of black annihilation and expatriation, as well as the concerns of racial mixing and racial purity. Du Bois directs his address to this growing Negro sentiment under the veil of a conservation of races and a criticism of the biological notion of race.

III. The Sociohistorical Conception of Race

The next section of "Conservation" begins with Du Bois introducing a concept that manages to distinguish his sociohistorical conception of race from the scientific conception of race and explain what races are—*subtle forces*. He writes, "Although the wonderful developments of human history teach that the grosser physical differences of color, hair and bone go but a short way toward explaining the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress, yet there are differences—subtle, delicate and elusive, though they may be—which have silently but definitely separated men into groups" ("Conservation" 109–110). This section presents all the major tenets

of Du Bois's sociohistorical definition and ends with a final nail in the coffin of the scientific conception of race: the Negro's "destiny is *not* absorption by the white Americans [...] is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals" ("Conservation" 113). Because of its major contributions to racial theorizing this section has naturally received the most attention from its readers. This is understandable because it is in this section that we find Du Bois's definition of race. But, as I have shown, there is an important discussion of the scientific conception of race and the historical context that precedes and sets the tone for this infamous discussion of race. Beginning one's reading of "Conservation" at the point where Du Bois defines race is an unsuitable place to commence an analysis.¹⁵ Furthermore, race is not defined until after history is introduced as a plausible explanation for racial differences. To begin a discussion of "Conservation" at this section leads one to overlook the sequence of this text. This is why the divisions in "Conservation" I am detailing here are crucial. They allow a more rigorous understanding of Du Bois's motivation for defining race with such convoluted criteria. Later Du Bois will reveal the implications of his sociohistorical conception of race as providing a *reason for being* (similar to the way Emmanuel Levinas makes the distinction between the struggle for survival and a reason for being in his early writings). For now it is important to understand its placement and its meaning (as he maintains that the "real meaning of race" is the only question which must be considered seriously in this context) keeping in mind that, although part of the larger question of meaning, the definition Du Bois provides is the conclusion to the metaphysical question of what race is.

At this point in the address Du Bois has officially moved away from the biological notion of race¹⁶ and is beginning to investigate its real meaning through "the eye of the Historian and Sociologist." He starts with the benefits of the sociologist's and historian's perspectives. First, they follow the progression of human history to explain differences and are not only concerned with physical differences, as the scientists are, but also seek to explain "the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress" ("Conservation" 109). Second, they are not deceived by the "subtle, delicate, and elusive" differences which definitively cause these separations in human groups. Third, they do not conceive these differences on individual, biological, or national levels but are able to elevate them to include the larger collective, ideological trends that have been central to human history and human progress. Finally, social historians understand that collective ideals override physical characteristics.¹⁷

Objections have been raised against Du Bois's taxonomy of eight great families of human beings as opposed to three, as if he merely replaces one system for another.¹⁸ But these objections are severely misguided. Du Bois was not erecting a new system of race on the basis of eight races. In fact there was nothing new about his categories of race or his racial definition.¹⁹ Du Bois informs us that he is not responsible for why we can think of eight races where we once thought of three but that *history* has revealed to historians the existence of eight races. The divisions science relied upon had to give way to history's determination of the course of events. And it is with the lens of historians and sociologists that Du Bois instantiates the commonplace use of eight main races, explains the divisions of humans, and responds to the struggle for existence with a reason for being, that is, an affirmation of racial identity in terms of a conservation of race.

The word "history" reoccurs most often in this section compared to the rest of the text indicating that history is the operative term in Du Bois's analysis of race. Before he provides his definition of race Du Bois does something curious: he relays the purview of history. The "history of the world" he tells us "is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races, and he who ignores or seeks to override the race idea in human history ignores and overrides the central thought of all history" ("Conservation" 110). History concerns itself with the movement and progression of human groups, and these groups are constituted not by national affiliations but by their racial identities. Therefore, the domain of history is the concept of race. And with that explained, Du Bois defines race: "What, then is a race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life" ("Conservation" 110).

Kevin Thomas Miles argues that "Conservation" presents Du Bois's theory of history and the goal of this theory was to "mobilize Black Americans in a bid to have them recognized as fully enfranchised citizens in the United States" (19). Making a stronger claim than I do, Miles argues that Du Bois is not primarily concerned with rethinking biology, rather his interests lay in "rewriting historiography." He establishes the parallels between Du Bois's and Hegel's notion of history²⁰, in that history for them implies "world history" and history is worked out on a spiritual plane. The Du Boisian notion of history is revisionist, not simply because he wishes to rewrite the past—biological notions, ideas about the mental, physical, political nature of Negroes, etc.—to say something that no one writing on Negroes (including Hegel) has ever said before, but because

he wants to write a history (in the present tense) of a people that has not yet come into view and open up a future “silenc[ing] those fabricat[ed] narratives in which black people have no role in history’s past or future” (23). This is the story of a people no one has seen “except for those possessed by the vision of Spirit’s goal.” Du Bois’s mention of the physical suggests his concern with “existential bodies that are shaped by the world that they occupy even while they give shape to it” (26).

As I have argued, there is nothing new about Du Bois’s definition of race and he did not mean it to be understood as new. So if the point of this definition was not to “diverge greatly from the way the term was used by those of his contemporaries engaged in writing philosophical histories,” and if it did not run counter to the “use of the concept of race in ordinary life” (Bernasconi 521–522), *what exactly did this definition achieve?* The answer hinges on the difference between the scientific notion of race and the sociohistorical. One finds in Du Bois’s definition of race two definitions of race brought together under one common moniker: the concept of race that apprehends the aspect of race that the scientists have given (vast family, inheritance schemes, common blood and language) and that aspect of race that is “clearly defined to the eye of the Historian and Sociologist” (common history, traditions and impulses, strivings, and ideals of life) (“Conservation” 110). What Du Bois has done by offering this binomial definition of race is to insist that any examination of the idea of race must take up this fundamental twoness, the presence of “two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in a black body” (Du Bois, *Souls* 7) and apprehend the permanence of this experience. This fundamental twoness—a psychosomatic dualism in Fanonian terms, and the “duality in unity” in Sartrean terms—was first mentioned in the opening lines of “Conservation” as the prevalence of “certain assumptions” against “feelings that these assumptions are wrong.” He will come to describe this sensation six years later in *The Souls of Black Folk* as a “strange experience—peculiar even for someone who has never been anything else” (7) to which he ascribes the term *double consciousness*. Double consciousness is the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (7). Reading Du Bois’s definition of race alongside his notion of double consciousness exposes his definition as the very instantiation of this twoness. Contained within Du Bois’s definition of race are the insights that science has given (“a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language”) and what sociologists and historians can see (“always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain

more or less vividly conceived ideals of life"). Du Bois means for us to see the convergences and divergence, the meaningfulness and imprecision in the concept of race. As he remarks, "The term Negro is, perhaps, the most indefinite of all, combining the Mulattoes and Zamboes of America and the Egyptians, Bantus and Bushmen of Africa" ("Conservation" 111). And he reinforces this unification of science and sociohistory when he describes the "whole process which has brought about these races differentiations" as "a growth, and the great characteristic of this growth has been the differentiation of spiritual and mental differences between great races of mankind and the integration of physical differences" ("Conservation" 111). One can begin to comprehend in the indeterminacy of race the sense that the term "Negro" encapsulates a wide swath of "blackness." This will begin to explain his reasons against Douglass's amalgamation and his argument that the borders of "Negro" should be opened up to include mixed race persons.

For now he tells us that it requires a keen eye—the eye of the "Historian and Sociologists"—to "teach that the grosser physical differences of color, hair and bone go but a short way toward explaining the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress" and to know that "yet there are differences—subtle, delicate and elusive, though they may be—which have silently but definitely separated men into groups" ("Conservation" 109). More importantly, it requires a keen eye to move beyond kinship schemas of race and understand that what binds nations of people together are "similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life" ("Conservation" 111). Du Bois never denies that the sociohistorical view relies on the scientific view; the history of the concept of race requires this relationship. The "deeper differences" of which he characterizes his sociohistorical definition is "are spiritual, psychical, differences—undoubtedly based on the physical, but infinitely transcending" it. What he does believe is that it is necessary to surpass biology in order to allow for the possibility of a future.

"Turning to real history," he concentrates on a new opponent: individualism. He writes, "We who have been reared and trained under the individualistic philosophy of the Declaration of Independence and the *laissez faire* philosophy of Adam Smith, are loath to see and loath to acknowledge this patent fact of human history" ("Conservation" 110), namely that we have been mesmerized by history to think that individuals make history—the Pharaohs, Caesars, Toussaints, and Napoleons. But Du Bois calls us to remember that "the history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races." Under the "individualistic philosophy"

we invent human progress as the history of the victors. But this assumption “can not be established by a careful consideration of history” (“Conservation” 110). In *Dusk of Dawn* he writes that superiority of the races was due to that race which had a history: “Which was the superior race? Manifestly that which had a history [...] Africa was left without culture and without history” (49–50). Du Bois’s task in using history was not to write the Negro into history or to narrate their historical lineages, but to correct an “assumption of which the Negro people are especially fond” (“Conservation” 110) and assert that they are and have always been a part of history, thus contributing (in a substantially understated way) to human progress.

The connection I would like to point to now exists between the precariousness of an internal dualism and the preoccupation with origins and destinies. As argued earlier, Du Bois sought to demystify competing arguments about the extinction and preservation of a Negro future. Though Du Bois contributed to this conversation on the side of Crummell his address signaled a different preoccupation than the one Crummell and Douglass seemed to entertain. The burden to assimilate and the Darwinistic omen of natural (un)selection spoke in tones that echoed a *struggle to survive*. Du Bois, on the other hand, chose to speak in the theme of a *reason for being*.²¹ Du Bois ties the meaning of race ineluctably to the existential condition of the Negro, revealing the implications of this theory of race: the question of what race means, and by extension his definition of race, provides the Negro with a *reason for being*. I want to suggest that similar to how the ontology of race takes priority over the metaphysics of race, his defense of the *raison d’être* is also anterior to a definition (or, the metaphysics) of race. In fact, the very vernacular of “race identity”—messages, strivings, ideals of life—all conspire to defend the historicity of the Negro and, accordingly, their reason for being. Du Bois returns to this *raison d’être* in the final section of the address, this time in the service of the American Negro Academy: “This, is the reason for being which the American Negro Academy has. It aims at once to be the epitome and expression of the intellect of the black-blooded people of America, the exponent of the race ideals of one of the world’s great races” (“Conservation” 115).

Difference is essential to Du Bois’s characterization of race. From what he has said thus far we know that it is integral to the assigning of group roles in human progress, explains the variances of group history, is clearly observed physically, mentally, and spiritually, and is the shared domain of science, sociology, and history. But what is especially interesting to Du Bois are the many ways differences are usurped by a force that binds people together with others. This force is primarily a

spiritual one and Du Bois's references to the spiritual should not be attenuated. The deeper differences are spiritual and psychological and as he explains, the "[s]ociohistorical races each have a "message" for humanity—a message which derives in some way from God's purpose in creating races" (Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument" 25). When we dismiss his "spiritual messages" and the gaze of the social-historian, we ignore the transcendent spiritual criteria informing Du Bois's recognition of *Volk* as races. Returning to "One Far Off Divine Event," when Du Bois states that Negroes have a spiritual message that has yet to be given it, Miles argues that it is "semantically correct but conceptually mistaken" (27) to take this to mean that he has identified a Negro race. Du Bois identifies as Negro people who have their identities as a question, those who are not yet conscious of themselves, and those who have not achieved the self-consciousness and freedom that is their history. In order to understand his common history, traditions and impulses, strivings, ideals of life and allusions to "spiritual messages" it is vital to understand that *the people are the message*. Rather than connecting the present to the past Miles thinks that Du Bois connects the present to the future. This is how the present and the future are intertwined. Du Bois's notion of history thinks the past, present and future at the same time. And we can hear the interpenetration of temporal states in the following remark: "the history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races, and he who ignores or seeks to override the race idea in human history ignores and overrides the central thought of all history." And what, then is a race? A "vast family [...]," a conglomeration of *people*. Therefore, any denial of race, according to Du Bois, is ahistorical.

Du Bois defines vast families as a group of "closely related individuals" that reflect the "maximum of physical differences," and he notes in this historiography that "there were as many groups as families" (Gutenberg). There are two points that are necessary to Du Bois's familial structure. The first pertains to how these maximally physically different people are bound together, and requires an examination of Du Bois's thoughts on the mixed race problem. The second concerns the third question Du Bois asks in this address—*What is the real distinction between these nations?*—and will necessitate another look at his sociohistorical criteria—messages, strivings, traditions, impulses, and ideals of life—as well as a consideration of nation-building as it develops out of this familial structure.

On the first point we must acknowledge that Du Bois does not think that a new race has manifested in America²² to be found in mixed race individuals. Those of mixed race are not

products of the diverse elements of the Negro, requiring a separation from the race, but share a common blood, language, history, tradition, impulse, and ideal with the Negro that allow them to share in the common message that the Negro has yet to deliver. The idea that the Negro would be “abruptly swept away” was supported by the steady decline in the numbers of “pure” Negroes and the vast increase in populations of mixed race individuals (mulattoes, quadroons, etc.). Even those in the Negro community advocated for the integration of races as a plausible solution to race relations in America disregarding the fear of others that elimination of Negroes would come as a result of their absorption and assimilation. So menacing and entrenched were these suggestions that Du Bois calls for “calmer moments.” To bring the Negro into “calmer moments,” two questions need to be answered: (1) How will the Negro race avoid extinction?, and (2) How will the Negro handle the burgeoning population of mixed race persons? Du Bois answers these two questions with one answer: include those of mixed race in the greater Negro community.²³ This resolves the problem in two ways. First, the litmus test employed by society for inclusion into the Negro community already presumes “pure” Negroes and mixed race persons as part of the same community.²⁴ Because the exponential population growth of mixed race persons affords the community they belong to amass a larger populace, the steady decline of the Negro race can rebound by adding mixed race persons into their community, resolving the extinction of the race that seems inevitable (and possibly creating a colossal power). Second, the survival of the Negro race is safeguarded if mixed race individuals are included in the greater Negro community. It also has the added advantage of bringing about “calmer moments” as Negroes no longer have to fear the intermingling of the races for they now share in the progression and nascence of the greater Negro community.

However, this answer is not explicitly stated in Du Bois’s address, but can be read from “Conservation.” One way to read his response to Negro sentiments as support for the greater Negro community is to highlight his response to the race amalgamation problem. Another is to focus on the “who” that possesses the common ideals and message that he proposes to conserve. According to the second account, Du Bois proposes that the commonalities of both groups advocate the inclusion of mulattoes into the Negro race. Mixed race individuals were not exempt from the prejudices and racism that followed the Negro. Their biological proximity to Negroes afforded them participation into the oppressive circumstances of Negro existence. Even Douglass agreed with this reality.²⁵ Their association with whites was not enough to excuse them from the *lived*

*experience of the Negro.*²⁶ The blood that traveled through their veins were derived from Africans who journeyed through the Middle Passage, however removed they claimed themselves to be. Colored individuals share the common blood, language, the history of oppression and discrimination, traditions and impulses that their Negro brethren share among themselves. They share similar ideas about the proprieties of life, parallel sentiments about their survival, and endure the daily struggle of their existence as the Negro. They are part of the greater Negro community.

Near the end of this section Du Bois seems to move from using "race" to describe this vast family of Negroes, or the greater Negro community, to using "nations." It is clear that, against Hegel (and Douglass) who privileges "nations," Du Bois prefers the descriptor "race." So why does he then ask, *What is the real distinction between these nations*, and why is this question posed after he lists the "eight distinctly differentiated races" and the "other minor race groups"? The link between "race" and "nation" is forged by a rather lengthy explanation:

The forces that bind together the Teuton nations are, then, first, their race identity and common blood; secondly, and more important, a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life. The whole process which has brought about these race differentiations has been a growth, and the great characteristic of this growth has been the differentiation of spiritual and mental differences between great races of mankind and the integration of physical differences.

The age of nomadic tribes of closely related individuals represents the maximum of physical differences. They were practically vast families, and there were as many groups as families. As the families came together to form cities the physical differences lessened, purity of blood was replaced by the requirement of domicile, and all who lived within the city bounds became gradually to be regarded as members of the group; i.e., there was a slight and slow breaking down of physical barriers. This, however, was accompanied by an increase of the spiritual and social differences between cities. This city became husbandmen, this, merchants, another warriors, and so on. The *ideals of life* for which the different cities struggled were different. When at last cities began to coalesce into nations there was another breaking down of barriers which separated groups of men. The larger and broader

differences of color, hair and physical proportions were not by any means ignored, but myriads of minor differences disappeared, and the sociological and historical races of men began to approximate the present division of races as indicated by physical researches. At the same time the spiritual and physical differences of race groups which constituted the nations became deep and decisive. The English nation stood for constitutional liberty and commercial freedom; the German nation for science and philosophy; the Romance nations stood for literature and art, and the other race groups are striving, each in its own way, to develop for civilization its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help to guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life for which we all long, that “one far off Divine event.” (“Conservation” 111)

For Du Bois nations are formed first by their racial identity and common blood, and then by their common history, laws, religion, habits of thought, conscious striving and ideals of life. The story Du Bois tells us displaces physical similarities and heredity as symbols of nationhood. When families came together to form cities they were constituted on the basis of their lineage and phenotypic continuities, but as more and more families came together “purity of blood was replaced by the requirement of domicile.” So borderlands supplanted the physical differences that used to separate groups of people eventually territorializing the concept of citizen. Borders no longer represented individuals but “spiritual and social differences” reflecting the varying purposes and contributions of those within its limits: “this city became husbandmen, this, merchants, another warriors, and so on.” And the differences were not mere variations but sources of “struggle” (Du Bois will replace “struggle” with “striving”), conflict, discord, reinforcing the necessity of city limits. By the time these boundaries graduated to demarcate national lines they further abated city difference represented the “sociological and historical races of men began to approximate the present division of races as indicated by physical researches,” that is, national spiritual and physical differences coalesced around the concept of race. Accordingly, race seems to be a byproduct of nation building but charted alongside human progress in history.

At the beginning of this section I argued that Du Bois does not define race until after history is introduced as a plausible explanation for racial differences. Two questions arise: *Why is history paired with the scientific notion of race?* and *What does the inclusion of history offer to a definition*

of race? This first question was addressed by the rather lengthy explanation in the previous paragraph. However, it seems necessary to add that spiritual and physical differences have always, in tandem, been the cause of the "deep and decisive" differences within racial groups. So Du Bois is doing nothing more than reiterating the ordinary usage of race that seamlessly pairs sociohistory with biology. But the significance of history, as opposed to the socio-historical *mélange*, is not as commonplace. From these observations we can conclude that all papers presented (and subsequently published) by the Academy, including "Conservation," serve two purposes: (1) to "uplift the race to higher planes of thought and action" and (2) to prescribe a plan for the "growth and development of the Negro along right lines, and the vindication of that race against vicious assaults" (Gutenberg). Not to reverse history but to bring the Negro into calmer moments:

If we carefully consider what race prejudice really is, we find it, historically, to be nothing but the friction between different groups of people; it is the difference in aim, in feeling, in ideals of two different races; if, now, this difference exists touching territory, laws, language, or even religion, it is manifest that these people, cannot life in the same territory without fatal collision; but if, on the other hand, there is substantial agreement in laws, language and religion; if there is a satisfactory adjustment of economic life, then there is no reason why, in the same country and on the same street, two or three great national ideals might not thrive and develop, that men of different races might not strive together for their race ideals as well, perhaps even better, than in isolation. ("Conservation" 113)

History "remind[s] us how deeply impersonal racism is, how automatically, unreflectively, race and racism are learned, but they also reveal how strong and tenacious is the struggle to be freed of its imprisoning constructs" (Holt 2).

Dispersed throughout this section of "Conservation" are the characteristics from the social historian's contribution to the definition of race: common history, traditions and impulses, strivings, ideals of life, and message. Du Bois elaborates on each one and shows how each expands and explicates the ideological development of the concept of race.

IV. Existential Reflections on the Predicament of the Negro

What I refer to as “Existential Reflections on the Predicament of the Negro” is the shortest section in “Conservation.” It begins with the first appearance of the word “situation” (“Conservation” 113) and concludes at the end of the paragraph where Du Bois makes reference to “incessant self-questioning.” My examination here is limited to the overarching themes presented in this fourth main division of “Conservation.” Du Bois concluded the last section with an incisive proclamation about the future of the Negro—“their destiny is not absorption by white Americans”—and with a final charge: “if in America it is to be proven for the first time in the modern world that not only Negroes are capable of evolving individual men like Toussaint, the Savior, but are a nation stored with wonderful possibilities of culture, then their destiny is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals” (“Conservation” 113). This proclamation serves as an answer to Douglass’s prediction that the future of the Negro is to be “absorbed, assimilated, and [...] appear finally in the features of a blended race.” But there is an ambiguity in his response to Douglass (and consequently, an ambiguity in his understanding of assimilation) that makes it clear that Du Bois is going beyond the debate between Douglass and Crummell over assimilation. Recall that Du Bois was in favor of certain forms of assimilation. As noted, the assimilation he opposed was an assimilationism in the sense that often prevented differentiation and variation between people.

In his essay “The Ethics of Assimilation,”²⁷ Eamonn Callan discusses the difference between two strands of assimilation: *voluntary assimilation* and *coercive assimilationism*. He examines the ethics surrounding this debate over assimilation within the discourse of multiculturalism and the culture of diversity. Callan understands assimilation as a person’s decision to leave the culture they are a part of and immerse themselves in another proximal culture. On this basis he defends the voluntary act of assimilating to another culture as ethically acceptable. Voluntary assimilation claims that assimilation is not wrong because it is neither harmful to others or to the self. Callan goes on to claim “black people do not have a duty to self-segregate, that self-segregation and assimilation pose no dilemma, and furthermore that compulsory racial segregation is unjust” (Gines 1). By making the distinction between assimilation and complicity (in oppression) Callan brings out the positive transcultural possibilities inherent in voluntary assimilation and presents it as an expected result of cultural proximity over time:

Consider for a moment the widely used but little considered metaphor for what is sometimes the intended outcome of assimilationist policies: cultural genocide. The metaphor suggests that coercive assimilation is tantamount to cultural murder. Fair enough. But is it also true that voluntary assimilation is an instance of cultural suicide? Is assimilation a terrible thing, like death, regardless of the reasons it comes about? Should we try to dissuade prospective assimilators as if they were would-be perpetrators of suicide? I would think that the answer to these questions is very obviously no, though the metaphor of cultural genocide might reasonably be taken to suggest otherwise. (Callan 473)

In her response to this essay Kathryn Gines argues in "The Ambiguity of Assimilation" that Callan defends assimilation (voluntary) against *assimilationism* (coercive) "which occurs whenever a dominant social group appeals to the superiority of its culture as the license for its domination and seeks to entrench its power through the selective assimilation of outsiders" (472). Gines's interest in Callan's argument for voluntary assimilation pertains to "the ambiguity of assimilation, the relationship between race and culture (or racial assimilation and cultural assimilation), and finally the relationship between assimilation, assimilationism, and complicity" (Gines 1). For these reasons she is particularly interested in his "distinction between people who regard race as something that 'properly recedes' with the end of racism and those who value race beyond strategies against racism and for whom 'the imagined community is cherished in part as an end in itself, a source of belonging and direction in people's lives whose value would persist beyond the end of racism'" (Gines 2). Callan contends that what counts as assimilation or not depends on the "self-styled insiders" which draw (and redraw) the boundaries around those imagined communities. In a world of "promiscuous culture mixing" it become untenable to maintain the argument or to read the ethics of assimilation as somehow in conflict with the social idea of diversity (Callan 474). The idea of voluntary assimilation suggests a lot of agency, but the role of cultural insiders policing imaginary cultural borders poses a limit to such agency. But, as Gines explains, this produces a false dichotomy between racial and interracial solidarity. As she explains, "he [Callan] assumes that one would have to reject racial solidarity if one were in favor of interracial solidarity; however, the two forms of solidarity do not have to be mutually exclusive" (Gines 2). Those who enter a new culture may be as apt to diversify that culture as to passively

adjust to it. Here Callan asserts, “there is no conceptual gap between the supposed duty to avoid assimilation and a duty to avoid what cultural insiders take to be assimilation” (Callan 481).

The main duty Du Bois advocates is the Negro’s duty to conserve race. But as Du Bois informs us the duty to conserve is not only a dilemma, it is a puzzle. I would like to argue through Gines’s critique of Callan that this ambiguity is found not only in the multiple uses of assimilation but more primordially in the very possibility of assimilation. Stated differently, assimilation can only be a destiny for those beings who are able to have it as a possible free mode of being. The situation of the Negro disallows their freedom and limits their possibilities. The destiny of the Negro is not absorption because the situation of the Negro is one who cannot escape their facticity in either direction—cannot escape to the freedom of originality and cannot escape the condemnation of imitation. Neither assimilation nor transcendence are possibilities for the Negro. The status of the Negro is an inescapability from themselves: “the situation of our race in America renders this attitude [servile imitation or stalwart originality] impossible” (Du Bois, “Conservation” 113). This section is primarily about that situation²⁸—the precarious existential condition of the Negro. Every Black person in America must confront the perils of this situation. Du Bois writes,

No Negro who has given earnest thought to the situation of his people in America has failed, at some time in life, to find himself at these cross-roads; has failed to ask himself at some time: What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? If I strive as a Negro, am I not perpetuating the very cleft that threatens and separates Black and White America? Is not my only possible practical aim the subduction of all that is Negro in me to the American? Does my black blood place upon me anymore obligation to assert my nationality than German, or Irish or Italian blood would? (“Conservation” 113)

We have already heard Callan’s answer to these questions—self-separation and assimilation are not duties. Curiously enough, Du Bois does not provide an answer to these questions. Instead he returns to the situation of the Negro and recasts it as an “incessant self-questioning” and “hesitation” that renders the condition of the Negro a sequence of “vacillation and contradiction.” To understand the Negro is to understand their perpetual vacillations and contradictions, and to

understand them as an instantiation of an "incessant self-questioning."²⁹ The Negro is an eternal question, the oldest question in history. And "the grappling with indeterminate questions is one of the inevitabilities of life" (Moses 280).

V. Our Duty to Conserve

In Section II of "Conservation"—*The scientific conception of race*—Du Bois states that we must suspend the practical questions of "separate schools and cars, wage-discrimination and lynch law" in order to attend to the philosophical question of race. His hope is that the philosophical analysis of race, once treated, will "form our guiding lines and boundaries in the practical difficulties of everyday." Having outlined with "broad knowledge and careful insight" his philosophical response (i.e., the sociohistorical conception of race) to the race question he returns in Section V of "Conservation" to those practical questions he bracketed earlier. This section is marked by (1) a return to practical questions, (2) a definition of racism (race prejudice), (3) a defense of our "duty to conserve," (4) an emphasis on the "ideals of life," and (5) the final, but equally salient, guiding question in this address: "Have we in America a distinct mission as a race—a distinct—or is self-obliteration the highest end to which Negro blood dare aspire?" It begins at the point in the address where Du Bois asks this final question and ends right before his discussion of the American Negro Academy ("Conservation" 115).

This section begins with great intensity, as the frustration and anxiety of being a problem to others and being a question to oneself proves to be inescapable. The heavy exasperation that fills this point of the address is comparable to the burdened cry that hurtles from Fanon as he weeps near the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*. And out of that heaviness Du Bois asks a most piercing question: "Have we in America a distinct mission as a race or is self-obliteration the highest end to which Negro blood dare aspire?" The question Du Bois asks conjures "The Destined Superiority of a Negro" (1877), an essay in which Crummell enquires, "Is this a race doomed to destruction? Or is it one possessed of those qualities, and so morally disciplined by trial, as to augur a vital destiny, and high moral uses, in the future?" (Bernasconi 526). Bernasconi has speculated that Du Bois intends to juxtapose the threat of self-obliteration with his proposition to conserve race, and suggests that "Conservation" was in fact a response to this final question (Bernasconi refers to it as "the question to which "The Conservation of Races" was the answer" (520).³⁰ I hesitate to accept this interpretation wholesale because it recasts "Conservation" in the Douglass-Crummell debate

and, as I have argued, I see this essay capable of much more than a response to the question “to assimilate or not.” Regardless, it is important to flesh out the implications of Bernasconi’s reading for no other reason than to unpack the utility of “our duty conserve” as the focus of these final two divisions. Furthermore, emphasizing “the threat of self-obliteration” concretizes Du Bois’s encouragement to “deprecate and minimize race distinctions” that begins “Conservation” (recall that the threat of self-obliteration was introduced at the beginning of the address with Du Bois’s brief remarks on Douglass and Crummell).

By “self-obliteration” Du Bois had in mind the after-effects of race mixing. Recall that the first lines of the address begin with “intense personal interest in discussions as to the *origins* and *destinies* of races.” As I argued in Section II against Moses, and in disagreement with Bernasconi, Du Bois was more aligned with Douglass than often claimed, and he bought into the idea that race mixing was a possible future for the Negro race, but disagreed with the supposed implications of that line of thinking. However, and a point I agree with Bernasconi on, the practical concerns made assimilation impossible. Du Bois was not a pure separatist and his inclusion of mulattoes into the Negro race offered more than just a statement that they shared a similar condemnation. Similar to how careful Du Bois is to write the Negro into history, he takes equal care to include mulattoes in the “distinct mission of the Negro race.” To include them would pose the eventuality of “lighten[ing] the race” or “weaken the race” and could quite easily draw a “wedge between mulattoes and “pure” Negroes. However, Du Bois believed that a more dangerous annihilation of Negroes was taking place, one more relentless and pervasive than the slow ascension to a blended race Douglass conceived, and one more pernicious to the future history of humanity. Because each race had a message to give and that message was for the uplifting of humanity, the obliteration of this message would effectually mean the demise of humanity. Therefore, his answer to the question of self-obliteration in the form of the conservation of races spoke to the legality and political atmosphere that suffocated the Negro and mulatto alike. It is that they possess protections under the laws that separates white America from Black America. As Americans, Blacks share the same ideals as their white national counterparts but as Blacks they do not share the same laws. This is why he returns to the “pressing practical questions.” As he explained, “If there was any statistical evidence suggesting the possible extinction of the Negro in America then it was because of the policies being directed against them” (Bernasconi 534). The connection between amalgamation

and obliteration could not be understood if we began arbitrarily from the middle of the address, that is, from his definition of race.

As noted briefly in Section IV, Du Bois abstains from using the language of "racial purity" to undergird his intervention. When he writes about the Negro's situation in America he selects the language of racial identity and race pride to capture what sustains this group, refusing to engage with the politics of purity. What is most curious about the politics of purity is that it relies more so on the ever-tightening enclosure around the category "Black" as it does on the policing and protection of the category "white." Bernasconi reminds us that although "[e]xisting races were defined by their purity [...] what was important in the United States was the exclusion of a significant black component" (522). The assimilation debate occludes the root of self-obliteration—the exclusion of Blacks—the effects of which play out once the practical concerns are illuminated.³¹ "Our duty to conserve" gestures towards the triviality of assimilationism mainly because, as argued in Section IV, assimilation, as Douglass and Crummell conceived it, was impossible for the Negro. It is useless to debate an impossibility; what requires attention are those matters that are actual, pressing, and occurring. Racial purity too was an issue that was transpiring, active because it was "not so much inherited as it was a goal to be achieved" (Bernasconi 522) and this most pressing concern was enforced by the social program of Jim Crow and evidenced in the diminishing social status of Blacks. So the matter of racial purity differed in kind from assimilationism, and it is the politics of purity that Du Bois had to contend with.

Du Bois utilized ideas that stem from the politics of purity without the eugenic undertones and the plans to breed out difference they require. Appiah is correct to point out (in *Lines of Descent*) Du Bois's "need for partiality and the value of difference with the recognition of the value of encounter across identities" ("Ethics" 33). By "focusing on the 'ideals of life' as the primary agents of history he sought to draw attention away from the conviction that racial purity was the main power in history" (Bernasconi 523). There was a more powerful historical catalyst—ideology. The conception of racial identity that Du Bois argued for conserving was based on the racial ideas one might conceive that served to both capture the ideals of life and propel that life into the future. Du Bois boldly declared, "Tomorrow would be black!" ("Conservation" 114). Pushing back against Miles who argues that Du Bois was primarily concerned with "rewriting historiography" I contend that Du Bois's theory of racial identity was forward looking. Like an archer who must pull her arrow backwards in order to launch it expansively into the eternal future, Du Bois looked

backwards but was directed to the future. Because the Negro belonged to the future it was not up to Du Bois to stipulate the content of this unknown future—the Negro message and the Negro ideals—but to announce it, to *address* the future as “The Conservation of Races.” But as I note in my discussion of Section I, the future he predicted accomplished two things: (1) to “uplift the race to higher planes of thought and action” and (2) to prescribe a plan for the “growth and development of the Negro along right lines, and the vindication of that race against vicious assaults” and it was up to the individual and the community (through race organizations, racial politics, etc.) to usher in that future to come.

For Du Bois the onus of the present is to conserve racial identity. The future of this greater Negro community rests in its ability to retain its identity. This identity is lost when it becomes indistinguishable from the identity of other races. It is within this fear of what the future might become that Du Bois emphatically calls for “our duty to conserve”:

It is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals; as a race we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities of development. For the accomplishment of these ends we need race organizations: Negro colleges, Negro newspapers, Negro business organizations, a Negro school of literature and art, and an intellectual clearing house, for all these products of the Negro mind, which we may call a Negro Academy. Not only is all this necessary for positive advance, it is absolutely imperative for negative defense. Let us not deceive ourselves at our situation in this country. Weighted with a heritage of moral iniquity from our past history, hard pressed in the economic world by foreign immigrants and native prejudice, hated here, despised there and pitied everywhere; our one haven of refuge is ourselves, and but one means of advance, our own belief in our great destiny, our own implicit trust in our ability and worth. There is no power under God’s high heaven that can stop the advance of eight thousand thousand honest, earnest, inspired and united people. (“Conservation” 114)

Referring to this passage in "Conservation," Bernasconi points out that "on the one occasion when he used the term conserve in the main body of the essay, he referenced not only physical powers but also intellectual endowments and spiritual ideals" (522). He concludes that to "conserve a race was to conserve all three together" (522).³² This is why his return to practical questions, his mention of racial prejudice (what we now understand as racism), his reification of the "ideals of life" seem to interpenetrate the justification for Black existence. But as we must incessantly remember, this justification not only serves the Negro spirit, it serves all humanity. In other words, we should collectively accept as a common ideal the preservation of the Negro. This is why the existential drama is so essential to "our duty to conserve"—it makes us conscious of the necessity of Black life as coextensive with the consciousness of our shared humanity. Put in its purest vulgarity, Black existence is the justification for our conception of human dignity.

Halfway through this section Du Bois rehashes the existential puzzle he introduced in Section IV, but this time he employs more definitive terms:

We are Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship, but by our political ideals, our language, our religion. Farther than that, our Americanism does not go. At that point, we are Negroes, members of a vast historic race that from the very dawn of creation has slept, but half awakening in the dark forests of its African fatherland. We are the first fruits of this new nation, the harbinger of that black to-morrow which is yet destined to soften the whiteness of the Teutonic to-day. We are that people whose subtle sense of song has given America its only American music, its only American fairy tales, its only touch of pathos and humor amid its mad money-getting plutocracy. ("Conservation" 114)

Du Bois subordinates nationalism and reifies racial groups. He claims that it is by being Negro that we are American, so the order of priority and the order of socialization does not begin with a national identity but with a racial identity. And it is at the end of this declaration that he triumphantly states,

As such, it is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals; as a race we must strive by race organization, by

race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities of development. (“Conservation” 114)

We can now understand what Du Bois meant when he said that we “deprecate and minimize our race distinctions.” He did not mean an abandonment of racial identity towards a radical humanism. Rather, he intended to deprecate the inequality that disallows the Negro race from opportunities because of their phenotypic features. “Race could be minimized or it could be emphasized” but Du Bois saw a “need to emphasize it because until they had fulfilled their mission as a race, African Americans would be unable to assert their equality from a position of strength” (Bernasconi 523). More than this, as has been the trend throughout the entire address, this duty is necessary for all of humanity. The practical concerns place humanity in jeopardy. The Negro’s ability to define what it means to be American is comparable to their contribution to the “broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men.” If Americans are able to engage in a healthy politics of difference they will become active contributors to humanity. Otherwise their nationalism is both stifling and insular.

Du Bois ends Section V with an interesting turn: the underside of Black life. He writes:

There is no power under God’s high heaven that can stop the advance of eight thousand thousand honest, earnest, inspired and united people. But—and here is the rub—they *must* be honest, fearlessly criticizing their own faults, zealously correcting them; they must be *earnest*. No people that laughs at itself, and ridicules itself, and wishes to God it was anything but itself ever wrote its name in history; it *must* be inspired with the Divine faith of our black mothers, that out of the blood and dust of battle will march a victorious host, a mighty nation, a peculiar people, to speak to the nations of earth a Divine truth that shall make them free. And such a people must be united; not merely united for the organized theft of political spoils, not united to disgrace religion with whoremongers and ward-heelers; not united merely to protest and pass resolutions, but united to stop the ravages of consumption among the Negro people, united to keep black boys from loafing, gambling and crime; united to guard the purity of black women and to reduce the

vast army of black prostitutes that is today marching to hell; and united in serious organizations, to determine by careful conference and thoughtful interchange of opinion the broad lines of policy and action for the American Negro. ("Conservation" 114)

Noting the filiopietism in Du Bois's relationship to Crummell, William J. Moses posits that "racial awareness was not the only concern of this paper ["Conservation"]" but that Du Bois used this medium to articulate "strict puritanical values" as "the first and greatest step toward the settlement of the present friction between races—commonly called the Negro problem—lies in the correction of the immorality, crime and laziness among the Negroes themselves, which still remains as a heritage from slavery" (Moses 282). Indolence, self-ridicule, sexual immorality and other perversions were seen as impediments to vitality and needed to be eradicated in order for the Negro race to be viable. It is in the final words of this section and in the next that we get the judgmental, moralizing tone of Du Bois's black leadership ideology, and, eventually, an insistence on the need for Black organizations like the American Negro Academy and the Talented Tenth. The insistence that the Negro's "particular message, its particular ideal, which would help to guide the world nearer to that perfection of human life for which we all long, that 'one far off Divine event'" was immersed in the "rhetoric of Christian idealism and theological racism" (Moses 285) that renders his statements in "Conservation" inseparable from his Christian beliefs. Lastly, our duty to conserve serves as the meeting ground for morality and vitality. This is why Appiah's disregard of the spiritual undertones in "Conservation" leads him to miss the thrust of Du Bois's argument.³³

VI. The American Negro Academy

"Conservation" was presented at the inaugural meeting of the American Negro Academy. In the final section of this address (from "the reason of being which the American Negro Academy has" to the final lines of "Conservation") Du Bois defines the purpose and activity of the Academy as he understands it. And in this section he proposes a seven-point Academy Creed.

1. We believe that the Negro people, as a race, have a contribution to make to civilization and humanity, which no other race can make.
2. We believe it the duty of the Americans of Negro descent, as a body, to maintain

- their race identity until this mission of the Negro people is accomplished, and the ideal of human brotherhood has become a practical possibility.
3. We believe that, unless modern civilization is a failure, it is entirely feasible and practicable for two races in such essential political, economic and religious harmony as the white and colored people in America, to develop side by side in peace and mutual happiness, the peculiar contribution which each has to make to the culture of their common country.
 4. As a means to this end we advocate, not such social equality between these races as would disregard human likes and dislikes, but such a social equilibrium as would, throughout all the complicated relations of life, give due and just consideration to culture, ability, and moral worth, whether they be found under white or black skins.
 5. We believe that the first and greatest step toward the settlement of the present friction between the races—commonly called the Negro Problem—lies in the correction of the immorality, crime and laziness among the Negroes themselves, which still remains as a heritage from slavery. We believe that only earnest and long continued efforts on our own part can cure these social ills.
 6. We believe that the second great step toward a better adjustment of the relations between races, should be a more impartial selection of ability in the economic and intellectual world, and a greater respect for personal liberty and worth, regardless of race. We believe that only earnest efforts on the part of the white people of this country will bring much needed reform in these matters.
 7. On the basis of the foregoing declaration, and firmly believing in our high destiny, we, as American Negroes, are resolved to strive in every honorable way for the realization of the best and highest aims, for the development of strong manhood and pure womanhood, and for the rearing of a race ideal in America and Africa, to the glory of God and the uplifting of the Negro people. (“Conservation” 116–117)

Moses describes the *Academy Creed* as “a practical illustration of the ‘idealistic’ belief that race problems could be greatly ameliorated by intellectual activity” and the belief that “the burden of

reform must be carried out by black people working through black institutions" (Moses 285). Rather than focus on Du Bois's credo, an examination that usually overshadows most discussions of Section VI, I want to highlight two characteristics of the American Negro Academy that Du Bois emphasizes in this section. The first pertains to how the reason for being of the American Negro Academy is related to yet distinguished from the reason for being of the Negro. The second concerns the implications of Du Bois's collectivist project that some have interpreted as a radical humanism.

To begin with, Du Bois ascertains that the reason for the formation of the American Negro Academy was to "determine by careful conference and thoughtful interchange of opinion the broad lines of policy and action for the American Negro." And he identifies the reason that the Negro exists is to deliver a distinct message that will uplift humanity. Accordingly, when we combine these aims we get the personal and collective goals of life. Our collective pursuits should aim to impart "the *best* thought, the most unselfish strivings, and the highest ideals"; they should be honest, earnest, inspiring and able to unite people towards a Divine truth, and should exalt people "by truth—not by lies, by honesty—not by flattery"; they should reform as they transform and should establish laws that express ecumenical standards of policy and right ("Conservation" 115). Our personal pursuits should articulate ideals of life that place us in proper communion with humanity. They should celebrate the wonderful possibilities of our cultural backgrounds, differences and experiences, fully subjective and unmarred by any badges of insult and discrimination, and they must be rooted in history, our current situation and our hope for the future. The most striking aspect this is that, opposed to the existential drama detailed in Section IV, we do not get the image of two warring ideals in one body but compatible political agendas and strategies. Though they remain at war their friction is neither problematic nor odd. Rather it is productive and necessary. By the end of "Conservation" we find that the collective and the subjective have been reconciled.

If it is true that the "duty to conserve race was not for all time" (Bernasconi 523) then how can I possibly justify the claims just iterated? Apparently, "maintaining their race identity was imposed on African Americans primarily because of the need to organize in the face of racism and oppression" but it was also "attached to the Herderian idea that each people has a mission to fulfill for the sake of humanity as a whole" (Bernasconi 523). And if maintaining racial identity was a requirement only for the time being, then like a message once delivered, racial identity would soon

be inutile. Even the American Negro Academy was included in this impending expiration date. If these statements are true then it is imperative that we end this examination of “Conservation” with an inquiry into the purpose of this final section that legitimizes the Academy. Other than presenting at the inaugural meeting, why did Du Bois use this occasion to stipulate the American Creed when his address would have been complete without this addition and these remarks did not exactly fit into his assigned topic? In other words, why the need for the American Negro Academy? Why use this occasion to defend the existence of this body of intellectuals?

I alluded to an answer in my discussion of the first characteristic of The American Negro Academy above. I contend that this discussion of The Academy and adumbration of its credo provides insight into Du Bois’s collectivism. To be sure, this is not Appiah’s cosmopolitanism. Du Bois’s collectivism is a form of political grassroots organizing that provides us with the type of ingenious interventions to ensure that each individual and racial group can give the full and complete message of their genius, complementing the individualistic portrait necessary to progress human life. The condemning tones he uses to describe (the underside of) Black life is extrinsically linked to his desire to transform Blacks. This theme hangs over “Conservation”; it is the exhortation that whispers quietly after every word in this address, beginning from the first and concluding with the last. Moses describes Du Bois’s desire to rehabilitate the Negro, to present a positive account of Negro being and identity, and to rewrite the Negro back into the story of humanity as an obsession: “Du Bois, Crummell, Frances E. W. Harper, and numerous other black men and women were just as obsessed as Washington was with puritanism as a panacea for the cultural reform of the black masses” (Moses 288) and “like Crummell, he [Du Bois] believed that the burden of reform must be carried out by black people working through black institutions” (Moses 285). The point here is this: transformation does not occur at the individual level but at the collective level. The individual has an important part to play but they do not and cannot move history. Du Bois is clear that The Academy, as an organizing structure, should devote itself to reformation and transformation, making it the paragon for what collective humanism should aspire.

Notes

1. Du Bois entitled his Preface to *The Souls of Black Folk* his "Forethought." Following this Du Boisian gesture I refer to my reading of his famous address to The American Negro Academy as my Forethought because, like *Souls*, this critical reanalysis of "The Conservation of Races" is the beginning of my first extended discussion of Du Bois's theory of race and racial identity.
2. This article is developed from a paper presented at the panel "What Can W.E.B. Du Bois Teach Us about Contemporary Controversies?" at Villanova University on November 19, 2018, organized by the Villanova Center for Liberal Education.
3. I cite quotations from the version printed in *The American Negro Academy Occasional Papers* archived by Project Gutenberg as "Gutenberg" in my text. Quotations from the version printed in *The Idea of Race* I cite as "Conservation."
4. Robert Bernasconi has argued that Du Bois thought The Academy should be inclusive but that he charged the talented tenth as a larger group with this responsibility to uplift the Negro race as a whole. See Bernasconi ff. 10.
5. This goes against the interpretation Lucius Outlaw details in his famous retort to Appiah. In "'Conserve' Races? In Defense of W.E.B. Du Bois," Outlaw argues that Du Bois's project is fundamentally political, and supports this by emphasizing Du Bois's references to justice. He contends that Du Bois's statement that the "history of the world is not about nations but of races" alludes to a rewriting of history that "prescribe[ed] norms for the social reconstruction of personal and social identities and for self-appropriation by a people suffering racialized subordination, which norms were to aid in mobilizing and guiding members of the race in their efforts to realize emancipatory social transformation leading, ultimately, to a flourishing humanism" (28). I am inclined to see the political undertones in the way Outlaw details but am also mindful of the ethical overtones—the mention of spirituality, the allusions to responsibility, and the emphasis on the Negro's reason for being. I think it is more fruitful to consider the interfolding of the ethical and the political, than to read Du Bois linearly as a political theorist.

6. We should follow the instruction of Robert Bernasconi who encourages us to “restore his lecture to its historical context [...] less than one year after the U.S. Supreme Court had handed down its decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*” in order to understand “that certain social Darwinists had recently pressed the issue of the survival of the Negro race [...] and it was against them, as well as Frederick Douglass’s pursuit of assimilation through amalgamation, that Du Bois wrote his essay” (Bernasconi 519, 520).
7. Kwame Anthony Appiah takes this idea a bit further in his arguments calling for racial eliminativism. Continuing the project of “deprecating and minimizing” differences he argues in “The Uncompleted Argument” not only for the disappearance of the Black race, but because the concept presents a vast array of inconsistencies, the disappearance of race altogether. It is only in his essay contribution to *Color Conscious* that he tempers his stance and advocates for a racial identity *without* races. Even still this is as pernicious as social Darwinism and racial absorption.
8. Du Bois states that “in our calmer moments, [Negroes] must acknowledge that human beings are divided into races; that in this country the two most extreme types of the world’s races have met, and the resulting problem as to the future relations of these types is not only of intense and living interest to us, but forms an epoch in the history of mankind” (“Conservation” 84).
9. In “The Race-Problem in America,” Alexander Crummell states that the intermixture of blood is taken by some “as the indication of ultimate and entire amalgamation. But the past in this incident is no sign of the future. The gross and violent intermingling of the southern white man cannot be taken as an index of the future of the black race” (45).
10. “Amalgamation in its exact sense means the approach of affinities. The word applied to human beings implies will, and the consent of two parties. In this sense there has been no amalgamation of the two races; for the Negro in this land has ever been the truest of men, in marital allegiance, to his own race. Intermixture of blood there has been—not by the amalgamation, which implies consent, but through the victimizing of the helpless black woman” (Crummell 45).

11. This claim would seem to be in conflict with his second proposition in *The American Negro Creed* where he writes, "it is the duty of the Americans of Negro descent, as a body, to maintain their race identity until this mission of the Negro people is accomplished, and the ideal of human brotherhood has become a practical possibility" ("Conservation" 117). His writings towards the end of his life intimated his pessimism about a near future where race and racial identities were no longer necessary. Some readers of Du Bois, like Appiah, have suggested that the futility of this project is what prompted his emigration to Ghana. The issue of Du Bois's call for radical humanism as an end to racial identity is a related issue that I do not have the ability to explore in this current project.
12. "[T]he advance guard of the Negro people—the 8,000,000 people of Negro blood in the United States of America—must soon come to realize that if they are to take their just place in the van of Pan-Negroism, then their destiny is NOT absorption by the white Americans. That if in America it is to be proven for the first time in the modern world that not only Negroes are capable of evolving individual men like Toussaint, the Savior, but are a nation stored with wonderful possibilities of culture, then their destiny is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals" (Du Bois, "Conservation" 112).
13. Wilson J. Moses tells us that weeks after the inaugural meeting T. Thomas Fortune and Richard T. Greener criticized The Academy as being "hostile to mulattoes and that Crummell was determined to keep them out." Even though he states that Crummell denied the charges and pointed to Du Bois's address as "an excellent defense of the principle of racial conservation" Moses, in his defense of his claim concerning Du Bois's hero worship of Crummell, suggests that Du Bois intentionally took on the issue of mulattoes in his address to provide Crummell with a counterargument to such claims, even though Du Bois knew Crummell was in fact suspicious of mulattoes (Moses 286).
14. "Conservation" asks seven questions in total. It is important to add that he rounds these questions with a list of questions pertaining to the "pressing, but smaller questions" he stated we should rise above. By doing this he attended to the philosophical questions before attending to the practical questions.

15. As I have mentioned before, this is one of the most perplexing aspects of “The Uncompleted Argument.” It both stimulates my critique of Appiah’s essay as well as my growing suspicion of its sequel, *Lines of Descent: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity*.
16. Beginning with the first full paragraph on page 108 (the paragraph beginning, “Although the wonderful developments of human history”) there is a shift in emphasis from a detailing of the biological assumptions of race to a concern with history and a presentation of the sociohistorical account of race. I argue that Du Bois’s definition of race contains both the scientific and sociohistorical beliefs about processes of racialization and necessarily does so in order to capture the “two warring ideals in one body.” This is why Appiah does not think Du Bois has transcended the scientific conception of race because he thinks it has been subsumed in the sociohistorical definition of race.
17. It is important to note that Appiah hears these concerns in a transcendent way. For Appiah collective concerns are the only ones that are important, hence, why he follows up with cosmopolitanism.
18. Appiah, in his 2004/2005 address to the W.E.B. Du Bois Lecture Series held at Humboldt University, he writes, “The three races—black, white and yellow—are replaced once we take this historical view, by eight groups of which only one, the English, is uncontroversially a nation (even though Du Bois then, more controversially, takes it to be spread over two continents.” (“Ethics in a World of Strangers” 26).
19. Robert Bernasconi has argued that Du Bois’s definition of race was far from original simply because there was no need for him to defend a radical definition as the concept of race was not being “seriously contested.” He also argues that his use of eight main races “was actually not such an unusual concept at that time” (521–522).
20. It is important to note alternative interpretations of Du Bois’s relationship to Hegel. See Bernasconi.
21. Levinas makes the distinction between the struggle for survival and a reason for being in his essay “On Escape” and in *Existence and Existents* where he critiques traditional

Western philosophy for their obsession with survival without attending to the reason why certain beings exist (while others do not). Western philosophy forgets that there is purposiveness (in a non-Darwinistic way emphasizing survival) in the very fact of being. He writes that traditionally philosophers have devised elaborate plans of escape—to escape being, to escape death, etc.—but fail to address how we are riveted to being; they cannot deal with the condemnation that being is. I take Du Bois's emphasis on a reason for being to be making a similar claim.

22. This question is a variation of a question Crummell asked in his essay "The Race-Problem in America." Du Bois was influenced by Crummell and many of his comments in "The Conservation of Races" can be traced to similar remarks made by Crummell. The question was, "Has a new race, the produce of our diverse elements, sprung up here in America?" (Crummell 45–46; see also Bernasconi 113).
23. By "greater Negro community" I mean the inclusive notion of Negro that includes all those with even the least amount of Negro blood that the society included as representative of the Negro.
24. The One Drop Rule: This rule stated that a person with as little as one drop of Negroid blood in their genotype was to be considered a Negro.
25. Frederick Douglass: "It is only prejudice against the Negro which calls everyone, however nearly connected with the white race, and however remotely connected with the Negro race, a Negro. The motive is not a desire to elevate the Negro, but to humiliate and degrade those of mixed blood; not a desire to bring the negro up, but to cast the Mulatto and the Quadroon down by forcing him below an arbitrary and hated color line" (46).
26. It is not a coincidence that this phrase, found in Du Bois's address, also heads the fifth chapter of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* where he discusses Negro identity and where a majority of the material for this current essay draws from.
27. For similar defenses of assimilation see also Bernard R. Boxill's *Blacks and Social Justice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 1984, 1992) and Tommie Shelby's *We Who Are*

Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2007).

28. The word “situation” appears only four times in “Conservation,” and two of those times are in this section. The other two mentions of this term are noteworthy. In the first he reminds us “not to deceive ourselves at our situation in this country” (“Conservation” 114), which he begins to pull together the descriptions he has recounted throughout the address, and in the second he condemns The Academy to an “immediate work” that must have practical and direct “bearing on the situation of the Negro” (“Conservation” 116).
29. See also Outlaw 30, wherein he provides the same reading of this paragraph.
30. It is unclear whether Bernasconi meant quite literally that Du Bois answered the question, “have we in America a distinct mission as a race [...] or is self-obliteration the highest end to which Negro blood dare aspire” as a phrase or with an extended argument. In other words, whether he literally retorted with the phrase “the conservation of races” as to imply that our distinct mission as a race was to conserve races, or whether his entire address was his longwinded response and “our duty to conserve” was a mere catchphrase in a larger argument. More than likely Bernasconi meant the latter as he implies throughout this essay that the address was framed “with reference to this dichotomy.” My goal in this section is to explore the significance of this phrasing within the larger context of his address and to provide a reading that supports as expressed following the validity of the former option (i.e., “the conservation of races” as a mission statement). It is only by executing this hypothetical that we see the impact of the words “our duty to conserve” reflecting a weighted emphasis on the title of this address.
31. See Lucius Outlaw’s “W.E.B. Du Bois on the Study of the Social Problems,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568, *The Study of African American Problems: W.E.B. Du Bois’s Agenda, Then and Now* (March 2000): 281–297.
32. Bernasconi aptly describes each element: “By physical powers, Du Bois meant above all the virility necessary to perpetuate the race; by intellectual endowments, he meant the fits a race inherits; and by referring to spiritual ideals, he meant to open the race to hop in a possible future, the thought of which would sustain it in unpropitious times” (Bernasconi

534).

33. Appiah writes in "The Uncompleted Argument," "We do not need the theological underpinnings of this argument. What is essential is the thought that through common action Negroes can achieve, by virtue of their sociohistorical community, worthwhile ends which will not otherwise be achieved" (25).

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