

CHAPTER TWO

W. E. B. DU BOIS: MODERNITY IN BLACK LIVES

Soul and race
are private dominions,
 memories and modal
songs, a tenor blossoming,
 which would paint suffering
a clear color...
–Michael S. Harper, “Here Where Coltrane Is.”

Since the study is deeply contextualized and restricted to the African American Intellectual Tradition, I place W. E. B. Du Bois at the beginning of it. This positioning again is in the light of the fact that he is at the forefront of a line of thinkers that has placed Africa as a potent culture, independent of relations to the West.

The aims of this chapter are

- (i) to show how W. E. B. Du Bois spearheads a tradition that is rooted in an African American experience;
- (ii) to show how oral tradition, so as to say folklore and music are viable records of African struggle and hence an alternative, unrecorded (but passed on) history;
- (iii) to show how Du Bois’ stint in journalistic writing paved the way for the assertion of African American identity through art and social commentary; and
- (iv) to show how art, in the sense of a “visual vocabulary” became a modernist experiment both to assert African American identity and write one’s own history.

Du Bois spearheads a tradition that does not depend merely on social commentary, on highlighting the history of slavery (of course this is intrinsic to the racial history and hence an unavoidable frame within which the African American discourse is contextualised) but assumes a role for itself that determines to assert the historical identity of the African Americans.

Borrowing from Dussel, the Spanish philosopher, the idea that a philosopher’s or for that matter any person’s life can be understood only through a relation to the “concrete historical period(s) through which that life extends” (Mendieta xiv) can be applied to Du Bois’ life to understand the great diversity of positions he took up in his

life, and also the movement through places. This is a subject of his autobiographies, which documents the historian- sociologist's passage from a scholar activist to someone who instigated Pan Africanism. In line with this, his formative years can be taken to cover 1868-1883. This period covers his boyhood years in Great Barrington, that happy period of a middle-class upbringing in the north where he had received a comparatively happy childhood. This is with reference to the fact that he had not faced racism first hand. After being abandoned by his father, he was under the guardianship of his mother who insisted on him acquiring a degree and that would be the gateway to a better life. It is on this upbringing that Du Bois' later-in-his-life insistence on education of the Negro child and not pushing him/her to work just to contribute to income can be owed. These years also acquainted him with the "essence of democracy: listening to the other man's opinion and then voting your own, honestly and intelligently" (Du Bois, *Autobiography* 92). There are small instances during this period which he mentions in his *Autobiography* and *Souls* too, where a tall newcomer in school while exchanging visiting cards refused his. Barring such small confrontations and an initial realisation being 'different', these years in the town and its surroundings were a "boy's paradise" (93).

Du Bois himself insists on the importance of birth time rather than birth place in his autobiography. This reasserts the passage of a person's life through various historical moments and being shaped by it. In Du Bois however, the geographic matrix too is important because he was born and brought up in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, that northern town where slavery and racism were not experienced first-hand. It is only through shifts and movements that Du Bois is acquainted with the misery that racial subjugation is.

The next stage can be taken to cover the years he confronts racism. Moving South, which was inflicted with racism, poverty, hunger and prejudice, all of these with blacks at the receiving end, Du Bois's perspective on what it meant to be black and how s/he is seen received a coloured subjectivity. Moving to Fisk University in 1885 bestowed this consciousness upon him:

So I came to a region where the world was split into black and white halves, and where the darker half was held back by race prejudice and legal bonds, as well as by deep ignorance and dire poverty. But facing this was not a lost group, but at Fisk a microcosm of a world and a civilization in potentiality.

Into this world I leapt with enthusiasm. A new loyalty and allegiance replaced my Americanism: henceforward I was a Negro. (Du Bois, *Autobiography* 108)

This passage to the south made him aware of how ‘being a problem’ gnawed on the existence and identity of the African American: tinted with poverty, bastardy, homelessness and ignorance. His stint at teaching summer school while at Fisk made this confrontation more pronounced, away from the “protected vantage ground of a college campus” (114). These experiences in the South can be taken to characterize Du Bois’ confrontation with “racial time,” a term used by Michael Hanchard to define “the inequalities of temporality that result from power relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups” (Hanchard, “Afro-Modernity” 280).

The temporal disjuncture between the whites and blacks, between the college and log cabins for schools are easily evidences of inequality in access to basic facilities made available by modernity:

I travelled not only in space but in time. I touched the very shadow of slavery. I lived and taught school in log cabins built before the Civil War. My first school was the school held in the district since Emancipation. I touched intimately the lives of the commonest of mankind- people who ranged from barefooted dwellers on dirt floors, with patched rags for clothes, to rough, hardworking farmers, with plain, clean plenty. (Du Bois, *Autobiography* 114)

The time spent in the South testify to these differences between the African Americans there and Great Barrington, the educational facilities availed at a university and the one at southern countryside. This ‘denial of coevalness’ is one of the vantage points through which the experience of modernity and availing its putative benefits can be considered. Again, that racism can be understood beyond phenotypic terms, extends the contours of the enquiry into its interfaces with time and modernity, like in these passages just quoted.

Writing in Modernity

In a life that spanned nearly ten decades, Du Bois’s concentration on the resolution of social ills remained consistent. What cannot be ignored from the perspective of the dissertation is his journalistic career. He says:

no man [is] so important and no cause so triumphant that *The Crisis* will not attack them in the defense of right; but the attack will be on principle and not on personalities. (Du Bois, “Personal Journalism” 29)

Du Bois’ fusion of sociology, history and autobiography is not a statement of an extreme Afrocentricism. However, his thesis on a black modernity is premised in relation to nothing else than the people/ culture concerned.

Michael Hanchard speaks of “significant leadership” (“Afro-Modernity” 288) taken up by journalists among many others, in sync with the demands of the generation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was Du Bois’ consistent attempt to give shape to a journal for intelligent African Americans as well as an editorial role for himself so that issues glossed over like race, segregation, inequality could be focused. In Herbert Aptheker’s words:

The greatness of Du Bois lies in the fact that he centered.... his life upon the fundamental questions of his time- and of our time: racism, colonialism, imperialism, war, illiteracy, poverty, hunger, exploitation, and that he did this with astonishing persistence, absolute integrity and historic effectiveness. (qtd. in Green 672)

The proposals for a black periodical and an editing role for himself did not find the right reciprocation. First, Martin Luther King Jr. was the leading intellectual voice and Du Bois had already had a few differences with him. But an editorial role he fancied for himself was considered both “undiplomatic” and “dogmatic” (Du Bois, *Autobiography* 242). A Martin Luther King Jr. intervention would mean incorporation of the Tuskegee philosophy. Perhaps with a bit of experience in the field, Du Bois’ correspondences with influential people of the time would be met with the desired response:

They asked me about the possibilities of my editing a periodical to be published at Hampton. I told them of my dreams and plans, and afterwards wrote them in detail. But one query came by mail: that was concerning the editorial direction. I replied firmly that editorial decisions were to be in my hands, if I edited the magazine. (Du Bois, *Autobiography* 242)

In a letter to Jacob Schiff, a liberal financier, Du Bois writes for the need of a black periodical stating ‘critical condition’ of the African Americans as the impetus for this. This condition, the crisis the African Americans placed in, is further reflected in the

naming of the magazine that Du Bois eventually came up with, that served as the mouthpiece of the NAACP and has continued its circulation even today. However, *The Crisis*, the magazine which addressed the critical condition and situation of the African Americans had its predecessor in *The Moon Illustrated Weekly*. *The Moon* had a short life span though, circulating only in the year 1906 for the African Americans of the time were not ready to contribute financially and it suffered the same fate as any other African American periodical of the time. In spite of its short span of circulation, *The Moon*, in its weekly publications offered glimpses into the social conscience of Du Bois who commented freely on social issues important for the African American audience: civil rights for the African Americans, Niagara platform and racial issues. Du Bois himself has attributed the limited span of *The Moon* to his responsibilities as a teacher, owing to which he could not devote the required attention and time. Of course, much had also to do with the blacks being unable to pay a high subscription fee for the weekly journal (Green 673).

The Horizon succeeded *The Moon* in 1907, and Du Bois along with his partners in the project made up for any deficits from their personal savings. It became an organ of the Niagara movement and paved the way for *The Crisis* in that it stopped mid-way, after a circulation for three years and the remaining subscription for it credited towards a subscription to *The Crisis*. In 1910, Du Bois resigned from Atlanta University and became a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He accepted the editorial role of the organization's publication, *The Crisis*. In the editorial of the first issue, the goals of the magazine are stated, as also the *raison d'être* of the name itself:

The object of this publication is to set forth those facts and arguments which show the danger of race prejudice, particularly as manifested toward colored people. It takes its name from the fact that the editors believe that this is a crucial time in the history of the advancement of men. (Du Bois, "The Crisis" 10)

The editorial years of W. E. B. Du Bois which extended from 1910-1934 saw *The Crisis* voicing the personal opinion of its editor. Of course, this mode of expression was not popular with the Board of Directors, since it started off as the journal of the NAACP. However, on looking back, Du Bois had his defences:

...because I argued, no organization can express definite and clear-cut opinions; so far as this organization comes to conclusions, it states them in its annual resolution; but *The Crisis* states openly the opinion of its editor so long as that opinion is in general agreement with that of the organization. (Du Bois, *Autobiography* 261)

The various stints at editorial roles consolidated into a widely circulated and popular periodical. Responsibilities increasing manifold and demands for relatable material contributed in a quality magazine that became more than a print articulation of the NAACP or a group of people. In keeping pace with the new life that the African American was subjected to, deliberate efforts were made to generate the African American interest towards reading and participating in scholarly events. Precisely for this reason may be, in opening up the African American mind and in realising the importance of moulding one's aptitude, Du Bois's engagements with a reading public through journals and periodicals did not end with *The Crisis*. The impact that *The Crisis* had on young African American minds is very aptly articulated by Langston Hughes:

So many thousands of my generation were uplifted and inspired by the written and spoken words of.... Du Bois that for me to say I was so inspired would hardly be unusual. My earliest memories of written words are those of Du Bois and the Bible. My grandmother... read to me as a child from both the Bible and *The Crisis*. (qtd. in Green 675)

The Crisis being read to young children comes as no surprise, for the magazine included short stories and material meant for education of the young. It is from here that Du Bois took up the role of an editor to a children's magazine called *The Brownies' Book*, which was in circulation from January 1920 to December 1921. Always a believer in the fact that children need to be taught empathy, and black children particularly need to be taught self-esteem and a sense of pride in his/ her history, he stated that its purpose was "to seek to teach universal love and brotherhood for all little folk, black and yellow and white" (qtd. in Green 675). The necessity of some magazine for African American children which could facilitate them to adapt themselves to those crucial years when "displacements and deferrals" (Hanchard 280) marked the African American lives, imposed by racial slavery and imperialism. It is but obvious that the children were the silent sufferers of the appalling state of educational facilities that were reserved for

African Americans. Under the circumstances, such projects filled them both with hope and a sense of history of their African past.

A brief history of Du Bois' journalistic career not only shows the route to *The Crisis* but his intention of a strong African American presence in journalism. This is both in terms of an editorial role for himself as well as the participation of an African American audience as readers who could identify with the themes and concerns of these magazines. As Michael Hanchard says in terms of 'Afro modernity', the technologies, discourses and institutions of the modern West are incorporated within "the cultural and political practices of African-derived people to create a form of relatively autonomous modernity distinct from its counterparts of Western Europe and North America" (274). This 'incorporation' of the journalistic mode to the discourse of an African American culture is central to Du Bois' thesis on modernity. Also central to such ventures is how modernity, which is marked by "an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own" (Berman, *All That Is* 16). This holds specially true for an event in history like Du Bois' stint at journalism for in fast changing times, both reportage and creative exercises of Du Bois' as well as African American participants in the magazine endowed them to contribute meaningfully to each other and to the times, if not completely change the world. *The Crisis* years are historically important because the creative impetus of a growing African American reading public found expression in various sections of the magazine.

***The Crisis* and "Visual Vocabulary"**

Even in his role as the editor of *The Crisis*, the assertion of the black aesthetic that has continued even today was the focus area. If history threatened an erasure of the black culture, art was the means through which Du Bois made sure that it was written. The self-fashioning aspect of modernity remains the most potent way in which one group strives towards modernity. Art, in Du Bois' take, demonstrated more often than not, what is important, what hurts and what heals put on display, through "visual vocabulary". This "visual vocabulary," a term borrowed from Amy Kirschke's work *Art in Crisis* (2007), is an alternative module taken to spread and propagate black art, black education and social commentary. While overglorification of Africa runs the risk of minimising historical data

leading to a “portrait of the past painted with broad strokes and bright colours of our own choosing” (Lefkowitz, *Not Out* 49), Du Bois does away with fanciful colouring of the past. Instead, he launches an identitarian project that builds on the present and situates the African American as a contributor to American culture and not a brute identity.

Du Bois orients his position through the concept of “double consciousness,” by way of articulating an identity for African Americans. This position establishes a sort of continuity with the Americanness of America, yet a different experience (African) rooted in its past/ racial experience. It can be suggested that this ‘twoness’ is paradoxical, for though it consists of a split, it also means not a lack of something (consciousness) but double. It is in striving to accommodate both of these that the challenge is to the African American. He resists the typification of blacks as the irrational ‘other’ of the rational white world. This he did in his endeavours in *The Crisis* through a parallel insistence on the American in the African American as well as the frequent reminders of the ‘back to Africa’ project that he believed in all his life. Founded in 1910 by Du Bois, *The Crisis* became the platform to assert the African American voice and affairs as well as to address the evils of racism, prejudices and discrimination. If modernity encapsulates and aims at self- fashioning, *The Crisis* was an African American answer to art that grossly portrayed the blacks and their experiences in derogatory terms.

It would be important to look at a few magazine issues. The February 1927 issue of *The Crisis* not only initiated the practice of giving away prizes to the new artists and offered a clear roadmap on the kind of art (covers, cartoons or otherwise) that it would encourage. The NAACP’s Amy Spingarn, for example, laid down that these drawings “must portray colored faces or suggest allusions to the history, art or experience of colored peoples” (Du Bois, “Krigwa 1927” 193). In the same issue, Du Bois laid down the criteria for selection of entries to *The Crisis*. He was firm in his dismissal of any “careless” or “half finished matter” (192). In holding contests and distributing prize money to the ones selected, the objective was to “stimulate effort, set a standard of taste and enable persons to discover in themselves capabilities” (193). *The Crisis* emphasized the African American’s contribution as laborer, as usually done. Du Bois wanted a shift in this view in the contests proposed already, for he firmly believed that the African American blood had much to offer beyond physical labour, in painting and sculpture. These contests would, in turn, build a refined aesthetic taste for the readers and make the foundation of African American art strong. He fully understood the lack of support

(financial) to artists as well the necessary publicity for their work. The magazine thus became the venue through which the upcoming artists would showcase their work. Once these annual contests were started, Du Bois also made it a point to highlight the distinctive heritage of black art in Ethiopia, Egypt and Africa. Du Bois' idea of black aesthetic was different in that he insisted on black artists setting their own standards of beauty and then judge art on the basis of the standards set for the black aesthetic.

The Crisis also provided a platform to rewrite history. The existing historiography was prone to obliterating facts, a biased rendition of the outcome (Emancipation) in bold letters and an avoidance of condemnation for every injustice that was meted out to the blacks. A logical outcome of such historiography is evasion of responsibility on the part of whites in exercising injustice. In choosing to forget history thus, in dodging the collective responsibility for the past, a glorification or valorisation is focused on overshadowing "truth". Another major facet of such writing is an ignorance of the contribution of the blacks to the American past. This, along with skimming over every embarrassing truth only facilitates such acts to be perpetrated in the present.

While *The Crisis* addressed and critiqued these issues, it built a platform based on African American art practices through writings, illustrations and images. It provided a different kind of reading to the masses, who wanted to see and read a respectful, realistic and sympathetic portrayal of the blacks as individuals, not the readings preferred and presented by the whites of blacks who are "fools, clowns, prostitutes, or in any rate, in despair and contemplating suicide. Other sorts of Negroes do not interest them because, as they say, they are 'just like white folks'" (Du Bois, "H. L. Mencken." 276). While Frederick Douglass defined racism as "diseased imagination," Du Bois was aware how deep rooted this disease was in the written accounts of the Negroes by the white historians. In a sense, Du Bois initiates a black revisionist history because he realised early on that this is what shapes and determines the future. For him, it is important to see how a culture is encoded in history as representations determine how a culture is empowered or forbidden to take care of itself and the world in times to come. Du Bois praises African American artists of the past, say, Henry O Tanner; but he also says that artists like him have in no way contributed to African American art: "He is a painter of biblical subjects, a great American painter, or more truly, he ought to be classed as a great French painter or a cosmopolite" (qtd. in Kirschke 24). This establishes Du Bois's agenda for *The Crisis* and its selections. It would focus on the African American

expression and experiences of slavery, memories related to it, the post- Emancipation trauma of endless prejudices and formal and informal discrimination. *The Crisis* was committed to voicing these opinions and experiences, a visual repertoire of what happens around the American landscape, as well as writing that retains the colour and glory of the past in order to enable African Americans to see themselves as contributors to American culture. The idea was to look for a continuity from the older African to the African American models of self-consciousness not acknowledged earlier.

Visual Vocabulary and the Past in African American Modernity

The visual archive at the disposal of research in slavery is exhaustive to say the least. Some of these are iconic and define the ways in which African American life is recorded, with slavery as a veritable account of the past. A problematic with this discourse is the rootedness in the past in the visual archives. However, this removal from the present could be a handicap if the present is not simultaneously researched and recorded. In a way, Du Bois revived the visual culture in African American literature and journalism. This visual archive, if one can use such an expression, consisted of photographs of injustice, oppression, suffering, lynching, abductions and other dehumanizing acts. While this window to the past is unavoidable in terms of historical evidence, Du Bois used popular elements at his disposal that were mostly underutilized, more so if one thinks of an African American perspective. Cartoons, sketches, paintings, etc., most of these submitted by participants in competitions organized by *The Crisis* utilised the visual in an accessible and reader friendly manner. Given that the records of missing people, of slavery, of injustices at the hands of slaveowners and colonizers prefigured a distance from the instances involved, *The Crisis* offered a new platform to take stock of the prevailing situation of the period. In essence, it encouraged art inspired by the contemporary and indigenous materials. It foregrounded thought and research that extended beyond the regular reports of lynching, or representations informed by vague and patronizing thoughts and rhetoric.

It is interesting to note that Gilroy calls Du Bois' writings polyphonic, given that he did not restrict himself to black sociology he pioneered. That is to say, though reputed to be the first black sociologist, he combined a variety of genres to develop his own modernist version of writing. This was a deviation from the anti-slavery tracts of the earlier times that had a strictly political undertone and preaching from the Church. The

fact that his sociology is supplemented by personal history, poetry, autobiography, journalistic writing and fiction, etc. points to the fact that the existing modes of writing fail to capture the African American ethos and identity. It is necessary to show how *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) that established him as a distinctive voice in African American literary culture through the use devices that are original in a variety of ways. There are chapters divided according to his primary concerns, each of these with epigraphs that consist of lines both from the western canon and from black folklore and black music. As Du Bois often saw himself as pamphleteer, cultural historian and propagandist, this chapter offers a reading of Du Bois' texts that explore African Americans in not 'subordinate' terms, but by way of tracing alternative histories of their contribution and through a productive reconsidering of methodologies. From the perspective of modernity studies, it is important to note how intellectual traditions across the world mostly engage in a struggle between analyzing the west (and its ways) and the resistance to the west by the 'other'. This perspective situates Du Bois' speaking within the precinct of African American history. In stark contrast to considering the past as a handicap, Du Bois situates the history of African Americans in line with the making of the American nation: "Before the pilgrims landed we were here" (Du Bois, *Souls* 222). The black experience shapes the music and spirituality of America.

Du Bois attributes his interest in African art to his time at Fisk: "Fisk was a microcosm of a world and a civilization in potentiality" (Du Bois, *Autobiography* 108). Fisk acquired its first collection of African art in the 1870s, and this had a pronounced impact on Du Bois's appreciation for African art and culture. This appreciation also strengthened his allegiance to Africa and he saw the problem of racial injustice as a global problem that pervades all the peoples of diaspora. A speaker at important events, he focused on voicing the opinion that slavery cannot be seen as a wrong perpetrated by gods and destiny, but as a real event owing to the actions of a few men; that it was time to "face the fact that this problem arose principally from the cupidity and carelessness of our ancestors" (qtd. in Kirschke 133). As regards his interest in the influence of images/visual vocabulary, it can be attributed to Du Bois's dissertation (which he completed in 1896) on the suppression of the African slave trade which inadvertently involved images of Africans on posters and notices in the slave market. These images would not be just demeaning but screaming of "a stolen past, a history and memory taken by whites" (Kirschke 133). The importance of the images was two-fold: it could express both the

joys and sorrows of African people. Du Bois decided on illuminating the joys and possibilities in an African past. This extended to his vast interest in African art and educating the masses about it.

As regards African art and its relevance, Du Bois promoted it as not just a shred of history but as an inspiration for the “high culture” of modern art. For this purpose, he included articles focusing on the African influence in modern art. The May 1925 issue of *The Crisis* in its section “African Art” included excerpts from Paul Guillaume who mentioned that “the modern movement in art gets its inspiration undoubtedly from African art, and it could not be otherwise” (qtd. in Du Bois, “African Art” 39). The authority and influence of African art can be understood by the insistence to trace from it a “state of universality and not the exotic and savage” (Hutchinson 147).

Cover pages of *The Crisis* in subsequent issues included arts and figures which were a powerful combination of its contemporary trends and movements as well as an African influence. Kirschke makes a study of two such figures, “A Flight into Egypt” (Fig. 1) by Zell Ingram and “Excelsior” (Fig 2) by Celeste M. Smith from March 1933 and January 1929 numbers of *The Crisis* respectively:

A Flight into Egypt, by Zell Ingram, shows two figures in modern garb; the simple white lines on their black bodies give the impression of woodblock or linoleum-cut prints. They lunge forward in silhouette, a barren tree branch behind them. The title alludes to the flight into Egypt of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to escape from Herod’s threats. There is little detailing to their muscular, taut bodies, but their faces, which have the slit eyes and full lips of African masks of the Ivory Coast, were clearly inspired by artist Aaron Douglas’s use of Egyptian silhouette and Dan masks of the Ivory Coast. Their wavy hair alludes to a natural hairstyle and their African origins...It is symbolic of blacks freeing oppression. (154)

The deciphering and study of the image have important aspects of turning to Egypt and Ivory Coast and especially Dan masks to substantiate an African-inspired modernist art. Likewise, the second (Excelsior) is a “nude figure, arms reaching out, balancing on the world, standing on an outline of the continent of Africa” (Kirschke 154). This is an amalgamation of the influences of Aaron Douglas, Cubism, Orphism and modernism in its uses of the rays of light and creating shadows of different colours, all providing a

glimpse to the diversity of African people. While the use of modernist art techniques is pervasive, it also points as to how African style gives it a distinctive touch and a unique identity. Du Bois made in the pages of *The Crisis* concerted efforts by including artists and thinkers who could reclaim the authority of the African art that could easily co-exist (and influence) cutting edge developments of contemporary trends.

Songs of the Past

In his writings too, just like his choice of art and images, Africa and her cultural repertoire are a striking presence. It is imperative here to examine how Du Bois introduces to his readers the force of indigenous African images and ideas. His epigraphs, for example, owe both to folk melodies, indigenous sayings and masterpieces of western canon. “Of Alexander Crummel,” for instance, has Tennyson’s lines as its epigraph:

Then from the Dawn it seemed there came, but faint

As from beyond the limit of the world,

Like the last echo born of a great cry,

Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice

Around a king returning from his wars. (qtd. in Du Bois, *Souls* 183)

Again, Biblical references, specifically, “The Song of Solomon” is invoked in the epigraph to “Of the Black Belt” to highlight the presence of black people in scriptures:

I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,

As the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

Look not upon me, because I am black,

Because the sun hath looked upon me:

My mother’s children were angry with me;

They made me the keeper of the vineyards;

But mine own vineyard have I not kept. (qtd. in Du Bois, *Souls* 97)

Again, “Of the Sorrow Songs” has a ‘Negro Song’ as its epigraph:

I walk through the churchyard
To lay this body down;
I know moon-rise, I know star-rise;
I walk in the moonlight, I walk in the starlight;
I’ll lie in the grave and stretch out my arms,
I’ll go to judgement in the evening of the day,
And my soul and thy soul shall meet that day,

When I lay this body down. (qtd. in Du Bois, *Souls* 212)

These borrowings spell out the quest for a modern self and speak for the world’s relatedness, which is a defining feature of modernity. The admixture is intentional, uncommon to the times for it focuses on a common humanity, where diverse cultures—in supposedly racial extremes like blacks and whites—are consolidated by an integration of the two. In providing a template for such integration, he posits a thesis of ‘one world,’ unaffected by the barriers of race, birth and privilege.

Du Bois makes a paradigm shift in incorporating ‘Negro song,’ a change of methodology so as to say. In the chapter titled “Of Sorrow Songs” in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois reflects on the rich legacy of African American music and its unique contribution to the American land. The “soul” in *Souls of Black Folk* speaks to men as “voices of the past” (213). With the use of the word “stirred,” he captures the reaction that is induced in him every time these songs play, pouring from the South and making him conscious of his connection with it. Du Bois, not having experienced slavery, nevertheless feels a solidarity with an African heritage. The songs remind him of a history that has no life outside words in motion, that is in these folk songs. In placing these songs on a pedestal, this oral culture/ folk music is in contrast to “the Enlightenment assumption of a fundamental distinction between art and life, these expressive forms reiterate the continuity between art and life” (Gilroy 57). The African American, to Du Bois, is the stalwart of cultural heritage in America, and that land

having had nothing else but whatever God had already thrust upon it, the Negro music resounds as the “singular spiritual heritage of the nation” (*Souls* 213).

Du Bois imagines the intimate ways in which the African American music has been passed on through generations: his grandfather’s grandmother seized by a Dutch trader, exposed to the harsh lands she sings these songs while shivering and shrinking, yet singing it to her child who then sings it to her children and her children’s children and the chain goes on. This transmission also goes a long way in which generations of people are bound by solidarity to the ancestors’ common suffering. It is important to note how music imitates and then preserves life. While this form of music has been appropriated and distorted by generations across cultures, the original conveys sadness, disappointment and longing while also resonating with hope and spirituality. In his autobiography, he relates his experience of first hearing it:

I heard too in these days for the first time the Negro folk songs. A Hampton Quartet had sung them in the Congregational church. I was thrilled and moved to tears and seemed to recognise something inherently and deeply my own. (Du Bois, *Autobiography* 106)

There are implicit subtle hints both through presences and absences, perhaps reflecting on who sang, what was sung of and in what mood: the subjects are mother and child, but rarely father; there are cries of pity and affection, but never of weddings and celebrations; rocks and mountains are familiar landscapes, ‘home’ is a strange place, hence unknown. Despite everything, the African American music thrives with some hope too: a faith in the concept of justice in varied ways, in this world as well as beyond. The positioning of this chapter on sorrow songs at the end of *The Souls of Black Folk*, and the hope that lingers at the end of sorrow songs as Du Bois calls it, is also his belief at the end of what he has written so far. From his initial aim to show “the strange meaning of being black at the dawning of the Twentieth Century” (Du Bois, *Souls* 5) is the hopeful preacher’s voice of imagining and looking forward to a world where “men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins” (222).

Du Bois’ modernity appears to be one of romantic and spiritual striving that tends to undo the colour line when confronted with the ethos of racism and prejudices. It may be useful here to consider Dipesh Chakrabarty’s views on how the subalterns could be made “subjects of history” (Chakrabarty, *Habitations* 7). If the conditions/requirements

of modernity are already decided by a dominant culture, the subaltern occupies a secondary position right from the beginning. Since the subaltern's position is not usually an intellectual hotspot, a historiography by the powerful centre would not try to actually learn from the subaltern. One should remember here that Du Bois is very much a product of western education. It is in his position as an African American and not simply an American, as a member of the subjugated culture that he critiques the distortions that history and men have imposed on the African descendants. The historiography thus developed is from the point of a western educated man, nevertheless, an African American.

Modernity and the Future Past

In the discussion here of the music and oral tradition, Du Bois upholds the past, so much so that the preponderance of the future over the past as an element of modernity is contested. In "Modernity and Intellectual Life in Black," Kirkland chronicles the portrayal of the past by the African Americans (writers) themselves and Du Bois' thesis against these. Kirkland cites specifically Frances W Harper, Alexander Crummell and Booker T Washington as intellectual forces which were critical of morbid remembrance of the African American past. In fact, Kirkland's piece starts with Patterson's claim of a black modernity that is plausible only because of a lack of past. While he endorses the fact that blacks not having a sense of the past is not equivalent to an absence of past altogether, he terms it a "culture of poverty". That is to say that what is acknowledged as black culture is a milieu; and that the blacks' passage to modernity is characterized by a choice motivated by the exigencies of capital. This necessarily follows that the black culture per se has nothing to offer in the group's passage to modernity. In the subsequent parts of the essay, Kirkland delineates and thereby distinguishes the views of black thinkers and writers on what the African American past does for its people. The essay delineates the ontology of the past, and Du Bois's distinctive take on it. Alexander Crummell's idea of the African past is recalled thus:

The duty of educated black folks lies in the future.... [Yet] there is an irresistible tendency in the Negro mind in this land to dwell morbidly and absorbingly upon the servile past.... What I would fain have you guard against is not the memory of slavery, but the constant recollection of it, as the commanding thought of a

new people, who should be marching on to the broadest freedom in a new and glorious present, and a still more magnificent future. (qtd. in Kirkland 140)

Taking Crummell's quote as an instance, Kirkland traces how the past has been understood under the compulsions to thrive in a modernity. In an essay that begins with quoting Orlando Patterson's quite indicative title "Toward a Future That Has No Past", a piece that seeks to establish that blacks can assume the challenge of becoming the most truly modern of all people because they do not have a sense of the past, the idea is to provide insights into how the past makes and shapes intellectual forces that entertain the idea of a black modernity. In the light of Crummell's views on recollection and the dangers it pose towards a future, it becomes necessary to distinguish between memory and "unnecessary recollection" of it. This view of modernity prescribes a severance with the legacy of slavery, in conformity with the principle of modernity to work towards the future. Crummell's assumption and in a sense, belief, is that the possibilities of a black modernity will be shunned by a morbid dwelling on the past. In a repudiation of the past, Crummell negates the past of African Americans as a "distinctive mark of their sociocultural identity" (143). That presupposes race as a marker and a determiner of modernity and the passage towards it. However, modernity, remaining true to its ideals, strives primarily at a world where "race or any other natural determination cannot legitimately inform modern structures of human interaction" (143). Crummell never outrageously disavowed this concept. His cultural chauvinism does not emanate from an expectation of "moral obligation for African Americans to develop what is distinctive and commendable in their culture and to promote their cultural worth" (144).

However, it takes a chauvinist turn with Crummell's fear that African Americans are prone to dissolve their moral and cultural ties by interracial sexual encounters (144). Among many other thinkers that Kirkland takes up, I focus on only two as a passing reference here so that Du Bois' thesis of modernity and the inevitability of the past and the importance of remembering receive focus. As a thesis that traces at an understanding of the possibilities of black modernity envisioned by twentieth century intellectuals, Kirkland builds his argument according to a world view (out of many) in which modernity is "enabling a person's sociopsychological disposition to be open to the future and shaping the conviction that a person's hopes and expectations need not be anchored in the context of her previous experience" (140). This definition is in sync with the very presumptions of the basis of an impossibility of black modernity that Du Bois seeks to

dismantle. In the discussion of the Sorrow Songs, one apparent phenomenon is the bestowal of hope in the future. Categorized as “the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas” (Du Bois, *Souls* 213), Du Bois loads it with meaningful aspirations of modernity later in the chapter. Despite being songs of death and suffering, these are also “unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways” (215) and “assurance of boundless justice in a fair world beyond” (222). Herein lies the clue: Du Bois questions immediately whether such hope is justified. Kirkland features importantly in the discussion here for he uses an interesting phrase, “future past” (156), to show the disparity between hope and truth.

The term can be read as an endowment of grammatical sense (as in tense) to show the fulfilled/ unfulfilled expectations of a particular group/ thing. To make it clearer, one needs to understand that these songs once rang of hope and faith, which have been shattered time and again. If modernity calls for a future oriented present, the future past of these sorrow songs cannot be glossed over too:

The sorrow songs lead him to represent that past as itself once a future, since the songs conveyed that future in terms of the hopes and expectations of enslaved Africans, hopes and expectations that were suppressed and went unfulfilled. (Kirkland 156)

The sense of a future past captured here is a nullification of the hopes and expectations of an African American history. This future past makes the West assume rather reductively that the said period was the probationary period for the African Americans during which they failed to prove their efficiency. Du Bois attributes this to a limited sociological understanding of the meaning of progress and the ineluctably fastened adjectives of ‘swift’ and ‘slow’ attached to it. These assumptions arise from “the arrogance of peoples irreverent toward Time and ignorant of the deeds of men” (Du Bois, *Souls* 222). The irreverence towards time can be attributed to the Veil and its distorted understanding of African American cultural forms and history as a void. The Sorrow Songs to Du Bois is a punctuation to the continuum of a history that reeks of whirl and chaos (223). For a moment, an otherwise hopeless state is reverberated with hope and faith in justice of things, only to be dissatisfied in its unfulfillment. The future present that modernity seeks to take as its locus is referred to as “second slavery” by Du Bois in the light of the African American plight (say, lynching) even in the post-

Emancipation period. This view, however, has been dealt with criticism by the likes of Zora Neale Hurston, in that such an outlook robs the African American of her future happiness and affects her disposition to utilise opportunities for individual development (Kirkland 157). While this can be true, in favour of Du Bois it can be said that it is not clear whether he meant the criticism he is subjected to, but what is clear is the belief that in the enchantments of a future present, the past of the African Americans cannot be ignored. In accordance with the definition of modernity through which Kirkland channels his essay, the grain of discontent and a non-racist co-existence and participation are expanded and flouted in the West's treatment of the blacks. It cannot be ignored, as Du Bois chooses to 'remember' that a future oriented present has consolidated itself at the cost of injustice and violence perpetrated to a huge chunk of population. The past needs to be redeemed in the sense that one does not just recount the horrors inflicted on past generations but how these brutal incidents were punctuated by forms of art and expression (like music) that remained committed to the belief in an eternal good. To put it most precisely, the African American notion of a future oriented present (and hence modernity) hinges on a retrieval of the past. The future past that Kirkland talks about endows the African American with "dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect" (Du Bois, *Souls* 13). The future oriented present, laden with ignorance and poverty in a "land of dollars" (13) necessitates a retrieval and understanding of the future past and what it upheld, albeit unfulfilled. It entails for the educated African American a sense of responsibility not just for future generations but also for past generations who have endured the trials of slavery. The future that modernity seeks to establish is, in the African American context augmented by a remembrance and retrieval of the past, what Kirkland calls, the future past.

The Veil and Training of the African American

If black suffering and an awareness of the same is indispensable to the African American experience, race remains one of the important registers to analyse the same. "The Dawn of Freedom," opening with "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line" makes racism a global problem. In including Asia, Africa, America and the islands of the sea, he focuses on the magnitude of the problem and the global prevalence of the relation between the white skin and the non-white ones. This was the beginning of his pan Africanism that culminated with his desire to see all African nations free from colonial rule. He defines an African identity inhabiting different spaces through a

common heritage of suffering in racial slavery. This viewpoint also legitimizes his correspondences with leaders and intellectuals throughout the world that he carried out. He engages in a sort of dialogue between the deprived and the perpetrators of inequality. The colour line evokes a paradigm through which Du Bois thinks and rethinks about modernity in *Souls*. He channels it through his “term of art” (Kirkland 150) for it, the “Veil”. Kirkland numbers two implications of the Veil: one that separates two groups of people and hence a barrier that is impregnable and the other, the “fabric, so to speak, that conceals from white people an understanding of the legacy and currency of African American forms of life wrought by it” (150). Hence the Veil connotes for African Americans not just a common ancestry but segregation that leads to gross economic and educational inequalities and hence impoverishment as well as a “self-imposed moral and religious discipline” (Kirkland 150) sustained by music which is the “stifling of centuries” “more ancient than words,” yet in which are scattered the signs of development (Du Bois, *Souls* 215). The Veil hence segregates and restricts, education being the most important sector where opportunities are thwarted for any tangible improvement of the African Americans. But above all, the Veil produces in African Americans the disposition “double consciousness,” mentioned vaguely in this chapter already, in relation to visual vocabulary in *The Crisis*. It is necessary to delve deeper into it, like Kirkland dissects three distinct senses inherent in the notion of double consciousness: duplicitous, duellistic and dyadic. The first sense thwarts any attempt at “authentic self-presentation” and instead, is shaped by “a false self-interpretation” (151), the natural result of looking at one’s self through the eyes of others. The second sense produces disorientation, as a result of “unreconciled strivings,” “two warring ideals in one dark body” (Du Bois, *Souls* 9). Kirkland considers the third sense, the dyadic, most significant; for it represents merging one’s double self into a better and true self. The three implications of double consciousness are indicated in this passage in Du Bois’ text:

...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with secondary sight in this American world,- a world which yields him no true self - consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled

strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, *Souls* 9)

The Veil is important in the discussion here because Du Bois establishes in *Souls* that the Veil distorts the African American's participation in modernity:

First, we must remember that living as the blacks do in close contact with a great modern nation, and sharing, although imperfectly, the soul-life of that nation, they must necessarily be affected more or less directly by all the religious and ethical forces that are to-day moving the United States. (171)

This elucidates the differences in experience that modernity entails. The African Americans can at best be said to exist "in contact" with modernity, but the pace of progress is not in tandem with the "modern nation" that they are placed in. The uneven distribution of modernity, as regards availing the benefits of it and the ambivalence of the African American regarding her situation in it is evident in their struggle with the Veil. The Veil makes it next to impossible to dwell on the life of the African American beyond the Negro Problem: "must live, move and have their being in it, and interpret all else in its light or darkness" (171). The sweeping currents of the nineteenth century, and the struggles in the vestiges of the fifteenth century create an individual with a tarnished self-confidence. An overwhelming bitterness characterises one's identity at having observed the differences between the worlds within and without the Veil. The dyadic sense of double consciousness gains importance here, in rending the Veil so that the twoness can be merged into something meaningful. This calls for a specific training for the black people. Though couched in the racism and inequality of the era, one needs to identify one's duty in comprehending the twoness and using it to one's own advantage for the greater good rather than being crippled by it. For the greater challenge is the rending of the Veil and to be "a co-worker in the kingdom of culture" (9). This is simultaneously a struggle to exercise one's agency within the general human condition and mould it in ways that renders it more accommodative of diversity in varied groups and communities.

If training is pivotal to the development of the black man, Du Bois in "Of the Training of Black Men" analyses "thoughts" and "afterthoughts" (much like every doubled-up conjecture and proposition characteristic of African Americans) that the black activist has to confront in order to take the first step, that of giving the Negro the

right to proper training and education. From the landing of the first slave ship in Jamestown till the time Du Bois writes, he is an observer of three strands of thought that have characterised the manner in which black white relations are evaluated or the Negro is placed in the concept of “men”/ universe. The first line of thought accommodates coloured population, arising a “human unity,” “pulling the ends of the earth nearer” (Du Bois, *Souls* 79). This is supplemented by an afterthought of “force” and “domination”. The second line of thought concerns itself with a prejudice that is akin to that of the Old South, where the Negro is all that Mbembe, as reflected at the start of the chapter, thinks the African American is always portrayed, as incomplete, mutilated. Du Bois uses the term “tertium quid” for the South’s perception of the Negro, a creature stunted in the process of evolution, “between men and cattle” (80). The afterthought here is that some of them might be able to evolve and educate themselves but any such attempts must be nipped in the bud as a mode of what he calls “self- defence”. The third line of thought concerns the object of the previous thoughts itself, who, in clamouring for the ideals of “Liberty, Freedom, Opportunity,” has internalised the previous two thoughts and ‘other’s itself from the western Self, losing any certainty of the prospects of claiming rights that are thoroughly enjoyed by the fair world.

In conjunction with this line of thought, any attempt at education has its share of challenges to overcome and Du Bois’ own take on education has changed over the years, from a clear challenge to Booker T Washington in the initial years and his insistence on vocational education to a dismissal of separate Negro schools to supporting the same. This long-standing commitment to education and changing affiliations have been subject to much criticism. With regards to separate Negro schools specially his position has been fluctuating. In *Souls*, specifically in “Of the Training of Black Men,” Du Bois focuses on education as a means to shift focus from the temporary and contingent to permanent uplifting and civilization. This is with reference to the boom in industrial education perpetuated by the problematics of work and economic opportunities following the abolition of slavery. In his editorial section in the July 1915 issue, he cites, “The result of limiting the education of the Negroes under the mask of fitting them for work is the slow strangulation of the Negro college” (Du Bois, “Editorial: Education” 133). Sketches and pictures also accompanied to accentuate his belief in an education for the African American which is based on both her formal education as well as her cultural (African) roots. In the August 1927 cover (untitled) by Charles C Dawson (Fig 3), this two-fold

base of African American education is visible. There is the figure of a young person emerging out of higher institutions of learning in the background, and a second figure, an Egyptian woman with her nemes headdress holding a torch leads him, tying this product of modern education to his African roots.

The Crisis became the platform both to encourage and spread education, as well as to publicise the college graduates and colleges that were imparting commendable training to black Americans. The June 1912 issue mentioned that though ‘experience’ counts big in education and training of young minds, relying solely on it would make the race stagnant and shun any possibilities of evolution from the previous generation. Hence, “technique of earning a living, doing a part of the world’s work” and “general intelligence” (74), above everything else should be the focus area.

Education and Modernity

The potential of the young African Americans was both promising and perplexing for Du Bois. Though he never doubted their potential, he was aware of their low self-confidence, created and perpetuated under the weight of white standards. The products of modernity, even its scientists made a conscious effort to proclaim the mental inferiority of the African American. His concerns regarding the same and the way to overcome are evident in this:

.. [I] have become curiously convinced that until American Negroes believe in their own power and ability, they are going to be helpless before the white world, and the white world, realizing this inner paralysis and lack of self-confidence, is going to persist in its insane determination to rule the universe for its own selfish advantage. (Du Bois, “Does the Negro” 11)

Du Bois’ shifting position regarding the need for separate schools for African Americans has been criticised much. His critics often ask why he could even entertain the thought of absolving the American nation from the responsibility of educating its people and placing it on a homogenous community. However, Du Bois’ claims and concerns cannot be altogether dismissed. The self-confidence of the black learner suffered heavily because they were taught in mixed schools where black boys and girls were never treated decently: “A separate Negro school, where children are treated like human beings, trained by teachers of their own race... is infinitely better than making our boys and girls

doormats to be spit and trampled upon and lied to by ignorant social climbers, whose sole claim to superiority is [the] ability to kick ‘niggers’ when they are down” (Du Bois, “Does the Negro” 14). Du Bois acknowledges that the “mixed school” failed in creating self-confidence and opportunities. This was because the general prejudice of what was clearly a racist educational environment made it impossible for young minds to learn. However, if segregated schools entailed “ignorant placeholders” in the sense of teachers who lack training and acumen and just fill up places as well as poor funds compromising the quality of education, then it was not an option to be entertained at all. Weighing all the pros and cons, Du Bois concludes with his earlier conviction on the necessity of education in its truest sense, making individuals whole and capable and connected to her roots: “The Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools. What he needs is Education... There is no magic either in mixed schools or in segregated schools” (14). In other words, education is seen as the roadway to modernity. Here the product and the process are not thought of as either contestatory or complementary, but as necessary.

Modernity: Speaking Rationally

When Du Bois says that one is not interested in what a black man says, he is also hinting at the indispensability of a black magazine/ journal/ periodical that would cater to pressing but undiscussed American issues like racism, colonialism, hunger, lynching, poverty. Throughout his editorial tenure, *The Crisis* retained its status as the platform of African American art and commentary. If uncomfortable truths found place in *The Crisis*, lynching headed such issues. It wasn’t discussed among the blacks too, for it was considered embarrassing that such gross outcomes could be directed by whites to their community. If it was at all covered, there was a racist bias to it, where the lynching carried out was given a served-the-victim-right touch.

Achille Mbembe in his *On the Postcolony* (2001) speaks about the difficulties involved in speaking ‘rationally’ about Africa. This involves two perspectives. The first is a “negative interpretation” (Mbembe, *Postcolony* 1) that focuses on the primitive and elementary nature of Africa, something that is seen as incomplete in most presentations of the process of evolution, when discussed in the light of intellectual abilities and examined in terms of the ability to think rationally. Even if the attributes expected are found to be manifest in it, it is seen in a stage that is “incomplete,” “mutilated,” and “unfinished” (1). The second perspective concerns Africa as a “beast” (1). This

framework purports to think Africa as an object of experimentation for the west, hence difficult to be intimate with. These models of analysis inexorably make Africa and the African subject to training and domestication in order for it to reach completion, civilization and rationality. Mbembe's central idea is that in the location of Europe by Europe/West as self, it has disabled itself from sharing a common humanity with peoples and cultures different from it. He makes use of the term "absolute otherness" (3) to highlight this process of complete denial of scope of a shared humanity to Africa. In fact, he goes on to show Europe has developed its own image of perfection -curating 'ideal' cultural and civilizational imperatives- and should-bes by making use of Africa. In denying stability, subtlety, civilization to Africa thus, the West has survived on a set of 'invented' terms, a set of signifiers that has a twofold aim. First, it legitimizes its own notions of perfection, and secondly, this practice refuses to include Africa in a shared humanity. This devious logic operates as a self-validating tool for western modernity, legitimizing its 'concerns' for the dark world. This model of modernity is meant to civilize an apparently 'brute' space of the world. It is clear that alternative models and modules needed to come from somewhere. Du Bois traces it to Africa. It may be useful to discuss here the "crime of blackness" (Kirschke 48). In treating lynching as taboo, the whites were adopting a mendacity that blocked any attempt of justice in the face of crime. Du Bois' incessant campaign against lynching was preceded by the criticism faced on his quietness regarding the Atlanta race riots of September, 1906 and what was seen as his absence from the scene. Law and justice too were to no avail. As he writes in "Of the Sons of Master and Men", "Negroes came to look upon courts as instruments of injustice and oppression and upon those convicted in them as martyrs and victims" (Du Bois, *Souls* 153). Blacks are criminalised for the mere fact of being blacks. Again, they are rarely seen as individuals but as a community, and as Mbembe has noted, a shared humanity was denied. This in the long run legitimizes gross acts of violence done to blacks sometimes for petty crimes and sometimes for being related to a criminal. Newspapers too portrayed lynching not extralegal but biased with an underlying pleasure at mentioning every little detail, sensationalising the crime to attract readership. The consequence was a devouring vulnerability that rendered the African Americans unsafe in the new South and every one of the accused was, in an attempt at distortion, coloured as "fiends", "wretches" and "desperadoes" (Kirschke 53). In this campaign against lynching, Du Bois received hardly any support from the whites, except Ray Stannard

Baker, who in his writings condemned the white perpetration of African American lynching.

Traditionally, the evasion of criminal treatment meted out to African Americans in any leading daily or newspaper insinuated the NAACP campaign against nationwide lynching with *The Crisis* as its venue. From cartoons to illustrations to a stating of facts, the magazine remained committed to showing that education and social standing are not useful in addressing white prejudices against African Americans. In a strategic use of visual imageries, Du Bois in his editorial tenure incorporated elements that presented lynching as a practice that undermined and compromised basic American values and law. In November 1910, in the very first issue Du Bois' editorial piece addressed the lynching of two Italians in Florida and it moved to a condemnation of lynching as a practice in general:

Two Italians were lynched in Florida. The Italian Government protested, but it was found that they were naturalized Americans. The inalienable right of every free American citizen to be lynched without tireless investigation and penalties is one which the families of the lately deceased doubtless deeply appreciate. (Du Bois, "Editorial" 11)

Cartoons and illustrations, both borrowed and original, found their place once the discussion received its impetus from powerful writings. In these visuals and write-ups, the magazine showed how lynching was viewed as entertaining 'episodes' and the victim a "comedic buffoon" (Kirschke 56). This 'sport' of sorts denigrated the status of the African Americans in addition to putting their lives at stake. In the "Opinion" section of the December 1910 issue, *The Crisis* used a cartoon from *L'Assiette au Beurre*, Paris which while "illustrating the life of Mr. Roosevelt shows something of prevailing European opinion of America" (15). The description follows thus:

"I was born October 27, 1858 in the midst of indescribable enthusiasm.

"A great banquet was given. Each guest brought a present of ale, whisky, mutton, chops, ginger ale, or corned beef. The poor people having nothing of this sort to offer decided to burn a Negro alive under our windows." (Du Bois, "Opinion" 15)

The illustration (Fig. 4) captures the spectacle of entertainment at display: a black man with bulging eyes and lips exaggeratedly full and white, his tongue hanging out. The lyncher is a white man who looks amused, and a crowd gathers around the lynched man. This is an extension of the whites' attempt at rationalizing their acts of violence in order to attain the 'civilizing' mission of modernity for these 'sub-human' creatures worthy of nothing else but a spectacle even at their death. The words that accompany this image also highlights how these were viewed as entertaining episodes by the rich and privileged. Lynching in intellectual discussions and magazine images backfired for the whites themselves. In always associating the African Americans with "brute" and "uncivilised", the hypocrisy of the whites was exposed for they were themselves initiating brutal practices under the garb of 'civilizing' to validate their inhuman practices. Images of women and children terrorised by this cruelty as well as a report of every incident like this were rampant in the pages of *The Crisis*.

Representation of Women

David Levering Lewis in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race* (1993) documents a rather unflattering picture of Du Bois' relation to women in his personal sphere. His wife, though college educated, was expected to be an "effaced and dutiful wife" (435) and his daughter was controlled by his father and weighed under the pressure of the death of his first-born with hopes which were "exalted and unrealistic" (451). Kirschke makes an observation on his relationship with the women at his workplace:

Du Bois could be a highly controlling individual, both at home and in the workplace. He ran a very tight ship at *The Crisis* and although prominent women in his editorial offices, such as Jessie Fauset, had important responsibilities, he did not regard them as equals. (210)

The distinction between the public intellectual and the private family-man can be deciphered through these instances. In the public sphere though, he was an advocate of women's rights. As regards the place of women in the African American experience, abuses suffered by women under the impact of racial slavery form an important part of any of its discourses. Du Bois found his support for women's rights through his advocacy of women's suffrage. There were racist strands of politics within the suffrage movement too which stated that "if black men and paupers were allowed to vote, why not educated women?" (Gilmore 212). In his editorial—specifically, in the section titled

“Woman’s Suffrage”— published in *The Crisis* in May 1913, Du Bois maintains strongly: “Let every black man and woman fight for the new democracy which knows no race or sex” (29). It is interesting to note how modernity, which attempts to secure egalitarian democracy deprives one section of the population from participating in its affairs based on race or sex. *The Crisis* included scathing attacks on the duplicity of white leaders in the women’s suffrage movement, that started with Anna Howard Shaw, President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association who stated blatantly and was quoted in *The Crisis* “Do not touch the Negro problem. It will offend the South” (Du Bois, “Forward, Backward” 244). It is important to mention here that Du Bois, supposedly owing to his own paradoxical position of preaching and practising as regards the issues and rights of women, did not pursue or convince his readers in a way he did with racism. This does not mean that *The Crisis* during his editorial role refrained from highlighting the injustices suffered by women. In fact, it did, though in a limited way. There is, for example, the cover of the August 1915 issue (Fig. 5) with the sketch of Abraham Lincoln and Sojourner Truth sitting in the front of an open book. It most probably suggests the participation of women in the democratic process, with Lincoln by then becoming a representation of emancipation. Besides this limited advocacy of women’s causes, and racism, lynching, education of the African Americans etc. being issues that outnumber women’s issues, Du Bois’ position is quite suggestive of a ‘gendered’ modernity. While discourses on modernity have favoured the role of the ‘masculine’ in the determination of models of modernity, be it Berman’s hailing of Goethe’s Faust as a modern man in *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, women are conspicuously absent from such discourses on what constitutes the modern (Felski 4). Rita Felski in *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) makes a case for women who channelised their own modernity in domestic and ‘emotional’ spaces, commonly deemed non-modern. It can be suggested that Du Bois, or *The Crisis* in the initial years had a limited role in covering ‘feminist’ concerns. The obvious reason would be the heaving presence of issues of racism and intellectual debates on it. The other reason was the stereotype expectation of women as a civilizing force, restricted to domestic duties and antagonistic to ‘masculinist’ expectations of modernity. Despite its limitations, and Du Bois’ own contradictions between his public and private selves, *The Crisis* managed to give voice and space to the years of the women’s suffrage movement.

Booker T Washington and Criticisms

Since the thesis focuses on ‘tradition,’ and certain thinkers like Booker T Washington precede Du Bois, the latter veered away and insisted on the necessity of criticism in intellectual life. The times he lived in was characterized with a growing number of writers who realised the importance of education as well as its intended aims. The diversity of perspectives brought in different strands through which black leadership and its consequent influence found a ground. “Of Mr. Booker T Washington and Others,” been read as an attack on Washington and his beliefs, is also an appreciation of the Negro leader for bringing to light the issues everyone was dealing with in the dark. However, he resists any hagiographic portrayal of the leader and critiques the ideals of “triumphant commercialism” and “material prosperity” implicated in his ambitions for the African American. Du Bois bases his criticism on the democratic principle of “honest and earnest criticism”: “criticism of writers by readers, of government by those governed, of leaders by those led,—this is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of modern society” (Du Bois, *Souls* 44). Du Bois here entertains the idea of the ‘alternative’: a democratic way to resist the dangers of unquestioning followers. Though *Souls* can be and should be read as a text that espouses the philosophy of an African American thinker, at the time of its publication it was his criticism of Washington that created quite a stir. However, the references to Washington are relevant in this thesis to achieve an understanding of what African American modernity meant to different thinkers and where they placed history/ past in the shaping of it. Also important in the determining of a tradition is an acknowledgement of people who have led an intellectual movement, whether or not ordered. In his small tribute to Alexander Crummel, he identifies the “tragedy of the age”, which is not poverty, or wickedness of men, for these are ever present in most of our lives to some extent, but that “men know so little of men” (192). This amply suggests the voice of black people who bothered to visualize a change in the modern nation being rendered unheard. Moving back to Kirkland’s essay, which is pertinent to an understanding of how modernity was conceptualised by black leaders and intellectuals of the twentieth century, the following premise is important:

Du Bois’s critique of Washington’s “New Negro” has much less to do with the difference in significance of the two kinds of education than with the ability or inability to bear a sense of modernity distinctive of African American forms of life. (Kirkland 149)

To illustrate this, it should be mentioned that Du Bois' Talented Tenth is in essence a belief in the exceptional men of the African Americans who would save the Negro race. In his criticism of Washington, he takes recourse to Washington's policy of education that seeks to make vocation its supposed goal for the African Americans. Du Bois' Talented Tenth has, on the other hand, as its modus operandi an awareness of Life. He insists on them to be made "leaders of thought" and "missionaries of culture" among the African American people. In highlighting these prospects for the "exceptional men," Du Bois reaffirms his faith in an African American culture that needs retrieval and remembrance to foster a sense of modernity. Du Bois traces Washington's fancy for material advancement as a continuum to the days of slavery and if not conceptualized in that spirit, at least holding close to it. In his critique of his contemporary educational methods, he ascribes the material impetus to a tendency "born of slavery and quickened to renewed life by the crazy imperialism of the day (Du Bois, *Souls* 84). In an analysis of *The Crisis* in the former sections of this chapter, the one takeaway is a conscious lending of autonomy to a black culture and shunning any efforts to obliterate the wrongs perpetrated to previous and present generations. Washington's notion of a modernity and its relation to the past is also the analysis of Kirkland's essay in an attempt to decipher how an African American is prescribed to move up from slavery in Washington's model. The analysis hints at the accommodationist idea of Washington, placing the responsibility of moving up on the African Americans themselves and not really seeing it as Du Bois does, an American wrong meted out to its population. This is Du Bois' criticism of Washington:

His doctrine has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders and stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators; when in fact the burden belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we bend not our energies to righting these great wrongs. (54)

In his discussion of slavery, Washington acknowledges that the African Americans reaped certain benefits out of it, which renders them more advanced than any African descendent in any part of the globe: "we (African Americans) went into slavery in this country pagans; we came out Christians. We went into slavery without a language; we came out speaking the proud Anglo- Saxon tongue. If in the providence of God the

Negro got any good out of slavery, he got the habit of work” (qtd. in Kirkland 147). Elsewhere, in his autobiography, he counts the material benefits of slavery:

Then, when we rid ourselves of prejudice, or racial feeling, and look facts in the face, we must acknowledge that, notwithstanding the cruelty and moral wrong of slavery, the ten million Negroes inhabiting this country, who themselves or whose ancestors went through the school of American slavery, are in a stronger and more hopeful condition materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe. (Washington 34)

Du Bois’ criticism goes back not just to Washington’s industrial schools which has vocation as its locus to prepare African Americans for a materialistically advanced future, but to his philosophy of conceptualizing slavery as a school from which the enslaved reaped benefits. This hinges on the possibility of absolving the whites from any guilt of once enslaving one’s own countrymen. Du Bois’ modernity rests basically on this: a realisation of the injustices meted out to the African Americans and hence their advancement too resting on the nation as a whole rather than the wronged population themselves. In Washington’s dreams of the future, the onus lies on the African Americans themselves. This specific route, in which he throws off the psychological manacles of slavery, acquires education, charts a plan for social uplift which would contribute to the advancement of African Americans and then establish himself as an important political figure by sticking to and executing the plan, very pardonably spares the whites. Washington’s modernity (if at all) sees slavery as a school that trains African Americans for a modern world and contribute to the future meaningfully (and materialistically). Of Du Bois though, enough has been analysed in the previous sections of the chapter which repeatedly tries to prove a historical past for African Americans retrieved and preserved in various art forms and necessary to make any sense of a specific modernity.

Conclusion

In placing Du Bois at the start of an intellectual tradition, and beginning it actively in the twentieth century, the chapter tries to look at the challenges to African Americans in the post-Emancipation period. In highlighting his contribution to journalism and helping to garner a first of its kind readership among the African Americans, Du Bois opened up

ways in which the benefits of western modernity could be appropriated for their use. While his significant endorsement of faith in the Talented tenth is subject to criticism (of elitism, as the next chapter will highlight), Du Bois channelised his intellectual fervour and set an example for later generations. His body of work—sociological texts, autobiographies, magazines—and the target audience, ranging from children to academics to the general public of the time made the literary word accessible and engaging. The post-Emancipation scene called for a consolidation of efforts by African Americans to know themselves better and establish their own identity. Du Bois, in going to his/ their African roots capitalizes on a past that was subjected to constant attempts at oblivion. In the process, he resurfaces the search for the past and channelizing the present in accordance with it, while remaining true to modernity's cherished ideals of a future. While later writers taken up in this thesis experiment with genres of fiction, a delving into the interplay of race and gender etc., Du Bois touched upon many of these without delving too deep, which subsequent generations do. For example, would gender be a matrix through which modernity receives a distinctive interpretation? The problematization of such beliefs opens avenues for discussion regarding modernity and its relationship with class and gender.