

Reproducing Racial Globality: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Sexual Politics of Black Internationalism *

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The symbolic kernel of the idea of race...is the schema of genealogy, that is, quite simply the idea that the filiation of individuals transmits from generation to generation a substance both biological and spiritual and thereby inscribes them in a temporal community known as 'kinship.'

Etienne Balibar

It may be African-Americans, supposedly those Americans with the most sketchy genealogical records, who have most consistently constructed racial identities for themselves that do not rely on myths of racial purity.

Harryette Mullen

In my life the chief fact has been racenot so much scientific race, as that deep conviction of myriads of men that congenital differences among the main masses of human beings absolutely condition the individual destiny of every member of a group. Into the spiritual provincialism of this belief I have been born and this fact has guided, embittered, illuminated and enshrouded my life.

W.E.B. Du Bois

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In the United States black maternity has been persistently constructed as antithetical to national belonging. In a nation whose ideology of inclusion has grounded itself in notions of biological, reproductive, and thus genealogical connection, being “American” has often required having been born to a white mother, herself descended from an esteemed American family whose Anglo-Saxon pedigree is free of the contamination of so-called interracial sex or miscegenation. Indeed, insofar as the concept of Americanness has been regarded as co-extensive with whiteness, the exclusion of blackness and the castigation from the nation of those women thought to reproduce it, have been mainstays of U.S. culture (Roberts 1997). By the turn of the twentieth-century, when the activist and public intellectual William Edward Burghardt Du Bois began writing, this ideological construction had found a safe home in a variety of discourses—scientific and legal as well as popular. In view of this situation, this article reads Du Bois’s work as an evolving response to the ideology of racial nationalism, and as the articulation of a genealogical counter-narrative that argues at times for African American inclusion in the nation, and at others for black belonging in the world.

Perhaps the most explicit rendition of the reproductive themes against which Du Bois wrote was the discourse of “race suicide.” As the argument put forth by pundits such as E. A. Ross, Francis Amasa Walker, Lothrop Stoddard, Madison Grant, and others went, the birthrate among those who had come to call themselves “native Americans” was plummeting, and unless Anglo-Saxon mothers could be recruited into the reproductive service of the nation, the United States would quickly become a land comprised of the darker-hued progeny of prolific foreign-born immigrants from southern and eastern

Europe and the descendants of African slaves. As Ross, a prominent sociologist, averred, “the superiority of a race can not be preserved without pride of blood and an uncompromising attitude toward the lower races” (85). Expressing precisely such an “uncompromising attitude” in horror-struck, stuttering syntax, one doctor wrote in the pages of *the Pennsylvania Medical Journal*, “American families’ having no children and the increase of foreigners with large families means ... that the [national] majority will be the foreign and their children” (Guthrie 1909-10:858). For such proponents of “race suicide,” white women were to be appealed to in order to solve the dilemma. They were to be guided into the role of nation builders, national reproducers to be exact, and given incentives to steer clear of childless marriages, labor outside the home that might impact on their fertility, and of course sexual liaisons across racial lines. As for black mothers, their total erasure from the pages of most “race suicide” tracts conveys the message eloquently: cease to reproduce! For unless a mother could bestow white skin privilege on her offspring, her child would not be embraced as a national, as a citizen with legitimate claims to residence, and equal protection within the nation’s borders and under its laws.

Although the case is seldom interpreted through either a reproductive or genealogical lens, the Supreme Court’s watershed ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896), like the discourse of “race suicide,” viewed black maternity as anathema to national belonging. In the Court’s decision to uphold the constitutionality of the doctrine of “separate but equal,” *Plessy* cemented the correspondence of white racial identity with full entitlement to citizenship, effectively transforming a *de facto* system of dual racial citizenship into one that was also *de jure*. In other words,

even though *Plessy* does not dwell on issues of genealogical inheritance explicitly, in disqualifying all those with “black blood” from full and equal legal protection, the case put a number of implicit notions about reproduction, genealogy, and pedigree into play: to be entitled to full citizenship one had to prove one’s freedom from blackness, that one was not of black descent. Although Albion Tourge, the lawyer for the defendant, sought to reveal Jim Crow segregation as unconstitutional, in constructing his defense of Homer Plessy’s right to ride in the white’s only railroad car in Louisiana, he argued that Plessy, who was “seven-eighths white” according to the racial (il)logic of the day, had a right to preserve his reputation, his claim to his whiteness as “personal property” because of this genealogical inheritance. In an argument that was appropriated by the opposition and turned back against Tourge, he insisted that nothing less than Plessy’s “pedigree” be regarded as a reasonable guarantor of his race.¹⁾ Plessy’s invisible drop of “black blood” proved a stumbling block. As Harryette Mullen has argued, “‘Pure’ whiteness has actual value, like legal tender, while the white-skinned African American is like a counterfeit bill that is passed into circulation, but may be withdrawn at any point that it is discovered to be bogus” (80). In the eyes of the Court, as in those of many U.S. citizens, Homer Plessy was a fake, and the United States a nation in which full citizenship was contingent on the inheritance of reproduced whiteness and the collective disavowal of blackness.²⁾

1) Tourgée wrote, “the preponderance of the blood of one race or another is impossible of ascertainment, except by careful scrutiny of pedigree” (*Plessy* 1896, 37).

2) Though the court turned the question of racial classification back to the states,

For their part, Du Bois scholars have not adequately acknowledged the fact that Du Bois wrote within and responded to what he calls in the epigraph with which I began, “the spiritual provincialism of this belief” systema system in which sexual and reproductive politics played as a great a role as racial politics precisely because they were inextricable from them (Du Bois 1986[1940]:656). As Etienne Balibar helps explain, “the symbolic kernel of the idea of race” within the context of the modern nation is “the schema of genealogy,” a schema in which issues of reproduction, maternity, and kinship play starring roles (Balibar 1991:93). United States nationalism, starting in the period following the formal end of Reconstruction, came to depend on what might be understood as reproductive racism; the nation’s dominant population, it was tacitly assumed, was reproducible as a racially pure kinship group.

Such a view constructs racial minorities as genealogical outcasts, and, just as importantly, highlights the reproduction of racial kinship as central to the self-conception of the national majority. As Du Bois well understood, the nation in which he resided was a majoritarian racial entity and the majoritarian memory of the nation was racist insofar as racialized reproduction was viewed as the motor of national belonging. And thus his insight: reproductive politics are internal to both nationalism and racism. In this article, I depart from other Du Bois scholars and argue that in order to fully understand Du Bois’s

the consistency with which concepts of descent, heritage, and pedigree were used to determine the existence of “black blood” in individuals suggests the pervasiveness of genealogical belief systems. In fact, Jim Crow legislation depended on identification and classification of blackness, on notions of “one drop of black blood,” and thus on genealogical ideas about the reproduction of race (Davis 1991; Harris 1994; Hickman 1997; Saks 1988; Welke1995).

life-work on “the race concept” that he claims “guided, embittered, illuminated and enshrouded [his] life,” it is necessary to explore Du Bois’s negotiation of the reproductive concerns that undergirded the concept in his time, particularly the reproductive dimension of the racial nationalism by which he was surrounded and against which he wrote.

In response to the genealogical imperatives that secured belonging in the United States, Du Bois produced various literary figurations of black maternity, reproduction, and genealogical continuity that have yet to be examined. Two strategies, though there are others, are my focus in the following the pages: In his early work, in protest of the failures of Reconstruction, Du Bois refuses to represent the black maternal body as a source of belonging for African Americans. He refuses to participate in the dominant reproductive logic of racial nationalism. *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), elaborates this approach, especially in Du Bois’s eulogy for his son, “Of the Passing of the First Born.” In the 1920s, as Du Bois wearied of the struggle for black inclusion within the United States, he began to look outward toward a larger global theater, and his treatment of black reproductivity changed once again. In a text marking this shift in his thinking, the romantic novel, *Dark Princess* (1928), Du Bois reinserts the black mother into a discourse on belonging, but this time appropriates this vexed figure in order to argue for black inclusion in the world. This expanded horizon of belonging, this alternative approach to the question of racial reproduction, allows Du Bois to articulate the robustly revolutionary and internationalist goal of black belonging in the world, or what may aptly be called racial globality.

National Genealogies

In reading Du Bois's work as gender conscious, even feminist in its persistent attention to maternity, reproduction, and genealogy, I build on the work of a growing number of scholars who have sought to theorize the gendered and sexual dynamics of nationalism (Davin 1987; McClintock 1995; Parker et al 1992; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Kaplan et al 1999). At the same time, in pushing discussion of Du Bois in this direction, I depart from the two dominant interpretations of Du Bois's writings on women. For the most part Du Bois's readers have been divided over how to assess his representation of black women, especially mothers. Several extol his portraits of womanhood, particularly those of the figure he repeatedly refers to as "the black All-Mother," while others reserve praise, and claim Du Bois as a "profeminist" (as opposed to feminist) voice (Aptheker 1982; Gilkes 1996; James 1997; Marable 1983; McKay 1990 and 1985; Morton 1991; Warren 1993).³ Though important, this work of assessment is not completely germane to this study because of its tendency to focus on images of women instead of the sexual logic of texts. Rather than assessing whether Du Bois's representations are realistic or romanticized, I examine them in relation to Du Bois's political and rhetorical claims about racism and nationalism, and the meaning of being black in the twentieth-century. Even though Du Bois's

3) Recently Carby and Tate have moved the discussion in new directions. Carby focuses on black masculinity and the construction of the black male intellectual, arguing that Du Bois's central concern was the "reproduction of race men." Tate offers a psychoanalytic interpretation of Du Bois's images of women, especially mothers (Carby 1998:9-44; Tate 1998:47-85).

representations are often mythopoetically idealized and/or stereotypically reductive, the question of their (de)merits is separable from that of their rhetorical function in articulating a series of inextricable relationships between gender and race, sexism and racism, and feminism and anti-racism.

Du Bois's account in "Of the Passing of the First-Born" of the untimely death of his first child, Burghardt, may seem an unlikely place to begin discussion of the reproductive politics that structure Du Bois's conceptual edifice. After all, the figure of the mother hardly appears in this eulogy at all. And yet her spectral presence, her lack of embodiment, allows Du Bois to work out questions of paternity and paternal filiation, while at the same time exposing the political valence of a refusal of maternal genealogical narration as racial connection. Miming and in the process exposing the prototypical white male national who secures his whiteness, his belonging within the nation, through the assertion of paternal epistemological authority over reproduction and misrecognition of his black progeny, Du Bois willfully refuses to recognize himself in his son.

In transforming his account of his tragedy into an occasion for considering a different vision of racial and national belonging, one that re-appropriates rather than consolidates the logic of national reproduction, Du Bois's personal story in "Of the Passing of the First-Born" becomes larger than itself, and thus inseparable from the more overtly political chapters and ideas advanced in *Soul*. Of particular significance for an understanding Du Bois's elegiac account of the death of his son is "Of the Dawn of Freedom." In this early chapter, Du Bois foregrounds rather than forgets the history of miscegenation in the United States and the black maternal body's

central place in it. Using two archetypal figures to emblemize an emergent—though still divided—nation, Du Bois retells the story of the unfulfilled promise of Reconstruction. Describing these figures, he writes:

One, a gray haired gentleman whose fathers had quit themselves like men, whose sons lay in nameless graves; who bowed to the evil of slavery because its abolition threatened untold ill to all; who stood at last, in the evening of life, a blighted, ruined form, with hate in his eyes;—and the other, a form hovering dark and mother-like; her awful face black with the mists of centuries, had aforetime quailed at that white master’s command, had bent in love over the cradles of his sons and daughters ... [and] aye, too, at his behest had laid herself low to his lust, and borne a tawny man child to the world, only to see her dark boy’s limbs scattered to the winds by midnight marauders riding after “cursed Niggers.” (Du Bois 1986 [1903], 383)

In replacing a racist memory of the white nation with its history of miscegenation, Du Bois claims the progeny of white masters and enslaved women as the legitimate inheritors of America and implicitly situates black maternity as the “medium through which two great races [have been] united” in the United States (Du Bois 1924:268). As for the “tawny man child,” the babe born to the formerly enslaved woman and her master, he remains the trace, the vestigial symbol of violent beginnings, he who must straddle the color line as it obscures the real—and yet inadmissible—heterogeneity of the nation he inherits.

In creating his portrait of his son Du Bois imbricates his personal narrative with this story of miscegenation on a national scale, describing his son in terms that echo his portrait of “the tawny man child.” He self-consciously writes of his new born child: “How beautiful he was, with his olive-tinted flesh and dark gold ringlets, his

eyes of mingled blue and brown, his perfect little limbs, and the soft voluptuous roll which the blood of Africa had molded into his features!” (507). Immediately after describing his baby he provides us with his first reaction to his son’s body: “[I] held him ... and felt a vague unrest. Why was his hair tinted with gold? An evil omen was golden hair in my life. Why had not the brown of his eyes crushed out and killed the blue?—for brown were his father’s eyes, and his father’s father’s” (507).

What is striking is not only that Du Bois acknowledges the violent history embedded in his son’s genealogy, but that he casts genealogy as a visual confusion precipitated by the body of his child. Even as his father love awakens, Du Bois struggles with the reproductive dimensions of racialization, with the complexity of genealogical belonging for African Americans, and the relationship of both to the dominant scopic economy of race, in which physiological marks constitute a visual index of life chances, as well as the attendant affective repercussions of Du Bois’s paternity.

As Du Bois’s eulogy proceeds he persistently returns to and reworks optical moments and figures as a sign of his own evolving thoughts about fatherhood, reproductive racialization, and the connection of both to the ideology of racial nationalism. In the opening sentences of the chapter, as he receives news of his son’s birth, his first thought is to wonder how his baby looks. In passages that follow he marks the descent of the Veil separating the white world from the black as a transformation in the visual field, as a process of shadowing. As he recounts the circumstances of his son’s death and describes his funeral procession the use of darkness and light becomes most intense: Death is cast as a “shadow” and the sun as a “brooding” presence “veiling

its face” (508). The funerary song in the ears of the mourners is likewise depicted as a “shadow” that stands out in bold relief next to the “pale faced” hurrying men and women who fail to turn in sympathy toward the black mourners but instead judge them in a “glance” and pronounce them “Niggers!” Finally, in his depiction of Burghardt’s departing soul Du Bois writes that it leaves “darkness in its train” (508) as well as the ominous Veil itself.

Du Bois’s preoccupation with the visible coding of his son’s body and with the play of darkness and light across it can be linked to the treatment of racial optics in the best known passage in *Souls*, that in which Du Bois declares that the “true self-consciousness” that he seeks to find and instill in others is that which belongs to the man who “simply wishes it to be possible ... [to] be both a Negro and an American” (364). In formulating the struggle for self-consciousness as the inter-articulation of racial and national belonging, Du Bois mobilizes the Veil, a highly visual figure, to explain the twinned forces that inspire that particular feeling of “twoness,” of possessing a body that holds “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (364-5) in a form of tension manifest as “double consciousness.” Double consciousness, the “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” (365) is structured at least in part by racial optics—by a presumption that blackness is opaque to the white gaze. In turn, double consciousness relies on a series of visual concept metaphors and refers to a number of scopic states simultaneously: the power of white racism to render blacks invisible and thus subordinate; the experience that results from such invisibility, that of being perceived as American and yet not quite

American; the recourse of racism to the hypervisibility of “one drop of black blood” (the inverse of a racism of invisibility); the internal conflict attendant on living in a white nation while perceiving oneself as black; and the visually overdetermined metaphor of the Veil. Consciousness is perhaps more accurately double-edged than double: while those who look at the world through the Veil gain a painfully clear view of the array of mechanisms separating whites from blacks, the Veil renders blacks subordinate to the white world and gaze.

In foregrounding the use of visual concept metaphors and color-coded figurations in Du Bois’s work, I do not mean to argue that he wished to reduce blackness to a set of visual signifiers, nor to imply that in meditating on the raced body, on physiological degrees of blackness and whiteness, that he embraced an essentialist conception of race.⁴⁾ Rather, I press for a reading of Du Bois’s central philosophical formulations—the Veil and double consciousness—as those in which consciousness and vision are, as in most Enlightenment projects inextricable. It is only then that it becomes possible to understand that Du Bois inhabits the dominant discourse on race and the notions of racial visibility that are part and parcel of it, because he regarded this as a strategic necessity in a context in which racism so transparently grounded itself in such thinking. In short, Du Bois’s engagement with the optics of race reveals his awareness of racial (in)visibility as one of the primary regimes of power through which racism institutes itself. His reflections on his son’s golden hair and

4) Here I challenge Anthony Appiah’s famous claim that Du Bois remained wed to a nineteenth-century scientific conception of race throughout his life and work. In so doing I join a number of other critics of Appiah’s reasoning (Outlaw 1996; Gooding-Williams 1996; Wald 1995).

blue tinted eyes constitute an acknowledgment of the historical and political necessity of working through the effects of the dominant scopic economy of race—the “the quasi-hallucinatory” visibility of race that has been used to cement relationships between racial and national belonging in a nation space that Du Bois famously describes as divided by “the color line.”

Insofar as Du Bois’s engagement with the optics of race exists in a strategically deconstructive relationship to the dependence of racism on the putative visibility of race, it also bears such a relationship to the nationalist discourse that joins race and reproduction. As Du Bois well understood, black fathers could not bequeath citizenship to their sons in a nation to which they themselves belonged ambiguously. And thus when Du Bois imagines that his son’s body can escape the cut of the Veil it is by way of an genealogical counter narrative in which he is dissociated from the paternal line (note that Burghardt does not have the eyes and features of his father or his father’s father) and affiliated instead with his mother. At the same time that he refuses paternal filiation, Du Bois casts the maternal-child bond as decisively anti-essentializing—*not* grounded in biology—but instead integrated into an alternative calculus of connection, one in which spiritual merging plays a far greater role than descent.

Like her child, Burghardt’s mother is presented as racially indeterminate. And while it may be argued that readers assume that Nina Gomer Du Bois is black and self-identified as such, the textual mother in Du Bois’s eulogy is never named, described physically, or discursively racialized. Instead, she is characterized as an empty vessel, a protean being of mythological proportions who is so emotionally bound up with Burghardt that Du Bois depicts him as torn from

“underneath her heart” (506), rather than from her womb. The mother’s connection to the child is so primary that Du Bois’s paternal ties can be expressed only as maternally mediated. Unable to love the “tiny formless thing ... all head and voice,” Du Bois insists that his relationship to his baby is secured through “love for its mother” (506). This romanticized and at once non-biological link between mother and child is further solidified when the connection between them is rendered not in terms of blood or flesh but of language. As Du Bois points out, adopting a nineteenth-century discourse of sentimentality to his own ends, mother and child communicate through a private, “soft and unknown tongue and in it [hold] communion” (507).

Although Du Bois insists throughout that his son is born within the Veil, he also reiterates that even as the Veil shadowed him it remained incapable of “darken[ing] half his sun” (509). Because his son lacks racial self-consciousness, Du Bois describes him as living in a better world in which “souls walk alone, uncolored and unclothed” (509). In this sense Burghardt is suspended above the color line, a precarious position that is associated with his youthful ignorance, with his multiply signifying body, with this body’s ability to escape the cut of the Veil, the cutting gaze of white America, and perhaps most importantly with this babe’s racially unmarked mother. Just as Du Bois will not “Africanize America ... [or] bleach his black Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism” (215), he will not bind Burghardt to his mother using the ideological constructs of racial nationalism: to do so would be to capitulate to the (il)logic of national reproduction—as much a losing proposition for a black father, as for a child born to a black woman. Instead, an ambiguous maternal body will hold this child close, all the while allowing this incalculable body to remain in

suspension above the color line, contesting its logic.

When critics recognize the political and rhetorical significance of “Of the Passing of the First-Born” they interpret the chapter allegorically (McKay 1990; Gilroy 1993; Wald 1995). The reading offered here follows this trend but attends also to the reproductive politics neglected by others. By developing a portrait of his child’s tiny changing form, Du Bois constructs mother and child together as a symbolic repository for the relationship between race and nation (the central theme of *Souls*), and simultaneously indicates the contours of a genealogical counter narration. In contrast to the dominant ideology of national belonging, in which the reproduction of race is coupled with an account of the maternal body as a resource for instantiating the memory of the nation as racist (and thus of a particular form of sexualized racism as the history of nationalism), “Of the Passing of the First-Born” allegorizes the problems with the ideology of national reproduction, refusing to construct the maternal body as the source of racial identity. As the last words of the chapter indicate, so long as national belonging and blackness remain irreconcilable in the United States, there will be no justice for America’s black sons. Together with the other “tawny” children who comprise the newly unified nation, Du Bois’s child will reside “above the Veil,” balancing on the tight rope of the color line that suspends it.

Keeping this in mind, Du Bois’s title, “Of the Passing of the First-Born,” begins to resonate multiply. Du Bois’s first son passes away, potentially passes in and out of the white world, and passes in the biblical sense of being passed over. He is not sacrificed to the Veil, but is among the chosen, his death, as Priscilla Wald argues, “a ... survival, [or an] almost active (although ... unwitting) protest” (284).

But perhaps even more importantly, the act of “passing” invoked in the title refers to Du Bois himself. For it is Du Bois who “passes” in the sense that he declines to ground either his own paternity or his portrait of black maternity in the nationalist logic of racialized reproduction. In creating an alternative representation of mother and son, he refuses to cast the black mother as the source of racial identity in a context in which racialized maternity has been used to exclude blacks from the nation. In refusing to situate his son in the world according to the geography of American racism—a map that charts the terrain of visible blackness—Du Bois deconstructs the nationalist logic that views reproduction as a racializing force determining who belongs and simultaneously denying belonging to those who are both Negro and American.

In the “After-Thought” to *Souls*, Du Bois prays that his book will not fall “stillborn into the world” (547), thus indicating that “Of the Passing of the First-Born” is not one allegory among others but an allegory of thwarted reproductive potential that is central to the book overall. “In the Dawn of Freedom,” the essay in which Du Bois locates white masters and slave women as the progenitors of the nation, he reflects on the failures of the Freedmen’s Bureau, stating that “the passing of a great human institution before its work is done, like the untimely passing of a single soul ... leaves a legacy of striving for other men” (390). In echoing nearly verbatim his sentiments about his son’s death in recounting his feelings about the plight of black freepersons, Du Bois reveals his child’s story as again coincident with that of the miscegenated nation. In failing to nurture the children of black mothers, Du Bois warns, America renders its future precarious. For in a context in which the pervasive form of historical memory

disavows the history of miscegenation in the United States—in a context in which it is impossible to acknowledge black mothers as “co-worker[s] in the kingdom of culture”(365)—the bold vision elaborated in *Souls* risks demise.

The concept of “the kingdom of culture,” a primary figuration of the miscegenated nation in *Souls*, has a special place in the book’s final chapter, “the Sorrow Songs,” which argues that black national roots can be discerned in black music:

By fateful chance the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised ... but not withstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people. (536-7)

As readers have repeatedly observed, the United States, like its music, is African American, and yet it is this fact, like the more starkly political one, that awaits full acknowledgment.⁵⁾ What is not often mentioned about Du Bois’s argument about the black foundations of the nation, however, is that the sorrow songs are not only a raced, but a gendered cultural expression. These songs, “the siftings of centuries,” are those of his grandfather’s grandmother, who was “seized by an evil Dutch trader two centuries ago” (538). These are songs that black mothers have passed down to their “children and they to their children’s children”—to generations upon generations who may not know any better than their parents the meaning of the songs’

5) There are old and new versions of this interpretation of Du Bois’s writings on the sorrow songs (Locke 1925; Carroll 1997; Sundquist 1993; Zamir 1991).

words, but “know ... well the meaning of [the] ... music” (539). In coupling stanzas from the sorrow songs with bars of music from other lands, Du Bois universalizes the songs’ message. Voices can be heard singing the sorrow songs throughout Europe and Africa, for the universal message of the songs, “sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins” (544), is comprehensible no matter the language in which they are sung. These songs have been *reproduced* by black mothers not as a biological destiny, but as a cultural inheritance of universal significance.⁶⁾

Racial Globality

Although Du Bois clearly hoped when writing *Souls* that acknowledgment of black America might be foreseeable in the near future, over a quarter of a century later his optimism was significantly dampened. Three decades of lynching, Jim Crow, and other forms of state-sanctioned racial violence had taken their toll. Rather than battle exclusively for national recognition of black men and women, by the 1920s Du Bois began turning to the larger world: toward Marxism and toward an understanding of the interconnection between struggles for racial justice fought in the United States and those fought against imperialism and colonialism elsewhere. In his 1920 anthology, *Darkwater*, this geographical reorientation is already evident.

6) Du Bois writes again of his great great grandmother and of the sorrow songs in *Dusk of Dawn*. Here she is given a name: “Jacob Burghardt [Du Bois’s great great grandfather] ... married a wife named Violet who was apparently newly arrived from Africa and brought with her an African song which became traditional in the family” (635).

Whiteness, Du Bois argues, fundamentally signifies class as much as race; and, thus, in discussing whiteness as a world economic power Du Bois develops a critique of colonialism as a form of international capital expansion linked directly to racial oppression in the United States. Like European imperial powers, America produces itself as a white nation, and thus Du Bois asks of *Darkwater's* readers, "Are we not coming more and more, day by day, to making the statement 'I am white' the one fundamental tenet of our morality?" Are not Americans "shoulder to shoulder" with Europeans in their quest for the accumulation of wealth through imperial escapades and racialized exploitation? (34 and 51).

In a 1925 essay instructively entitled "The Negro Mind Reaches Out" Du Bois elaborates these ideas further through a careful process of self-citation and revision of his opening gambit in *Souls*. "Once upon a time," he writes,

in my younger years and in the dawn of this century I wrote: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." It was a pert and singing phrase which I then liked and which since I have often rehearsed to my soul and asked:—how far is this prophecy or speculation? To-day in the last years of the century's first quarter ... fruit of bitter rivalries of economic imperialism ... deeply entwined at bottom with the problems of the color line ... [Such that] world dissension and catastrophe still lurk in the unsolved problems of race relations. (385)

Whereas in *Souls* the problem of the color line is treated principally as national, in 1925 "the problem of the twentieth century" overtly refers to Portuguese involvement in Sao Thom, British Nigeria, insurgent Morocco, Liberia, the Belgium Congo, the French West

Indies, Sierra Leone, and a score of other sites of imperial domination and anti-colonial struggle that Du Bois discusses at length. These locations are linked by a shared experience of exploitation, by the unity that might emerge from common analysis of “international finance” and “imperialistic world industry” (Du Bois 1925:406)—that is, by a powerful if partially inchoate global consciousness that “the Color Problem and the Labor Problem” are to “a great extent two sides of the same human tangle” (Du Bois 1925:407-8).

Building on this work, *Dark Princess* conjoins critique of a nation that had frustrated Du Bois’s quest for justice with exploration of the potential of black anti-imperial internationalism.⁷⁾ The novel, which Du Bois called his “favorite book,” resolutely gazes outward toward emerging struggles for decolonization, while simultaneously working to legitimate inclusion of African Americans in such world historical events.⁸⁾ As if continuing the unfinished argument of *Souls* by picking up on the internationalist potential of the sorrow songs, in the opening chapter of *Dark Princess*, Du Bois’s protagonist, the self identified “American Negroe,” Matthew Towns, makes the global move by singing “Go Down Moses” to an audience referred to as the “Council of the Darker Peoples of the World.” Matthew is prompted to share the “great song of emancipation” by desire for recognition by this group as a man whose cultural contribution rivals that of members of other great civilization and whose consciousness of exploitation and dream of liberation are consonant with those possessed by the world’s

7) Although there are now two scholarly editions of the novel, it has only just begun to receive critical attention (Rampersad 1996; Posnock 1998; Gilroy 1988; Tate 1998)

8) Du Bois makes this claim in *Dusk of Dawn* (752).

other oppressed peoples. If, in writing *Souls*, Du Bois could not make America see black people as “co-workers in the kingdom of culture,” if he could not by force of argument, succeed in convincing America that it could not be “America without her Negro people” (Du Bois 1986[1903]:545), then the fictional Matthew will show the world that African Americans have a place on the larger global stage.

Du Bois’s internationalist fiction is thus not distinct from his earlier, seemingly more political project, one superseding the other, but intertwined with it, echoing Du Bois’s earlier concerns even as it responds to the limitations of their previous articulation.⁹⁾ As in *Souls*, the political argument in *Dark Princess* finds expression through a series of reproductive metaphors, figurations, and themes. In sharp contrast to Du Bois’s previous use of the figure of black mother to contest the racist logic of nationalism, in *Dark Princess* he reappropriates her in order to elaborate a utopian dream of solidarity among the darker peoples of the world. As if rebounding from the earlier grief stricken representation of mother and child, a new vision of a “black All-Mother” is proffered to new effect.

As the novel’s subtitle signals, it is generically “A Romance”—a story about the love of Matthew for Kautilya, the Maharanee of Bwodpur, the princess of the title. Their relationship is detailed in the book’s four parts, which also record Matthew’s political awakening:

9) This connection is also evident insofar as *Dark Princess* fulfills Du Bois’s call for propagandistic literature as elaborated in “The Criteria for Negro Art,” a treatise on engaged artistic production delivered in 1926 at the NAACP conference in Chicago. “All art is propaganda and ever must be” Du Bois wrote, “I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing had been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda.”

his struggle to develop an internationalist consciousness that is part and parcel of his love for the princess and her movement to end imperialism and white global domination. In part one, Matthew leaves the United States for Germany after being discharged from medical school. He first meets the princess in Berlin when rescuing her from the advances of a white American. After he tells her his life story, he is invited into the inner circle of “the Council of the Darker Peoples of the World” which has begun plotting an anti-imperialist realignment of global power. Though the other members of this group are uncertain about whether African Americans should be included among them, the princess has participated during a recent trip to Moscow in debate over the “the Negro Question” and has become convinced of the need to include African Americans in the internationalist enterprise. Against the protests of her comrades, the princess charges Matthew to research and report on the activities of Manuel Perigua (a Caribbean nationalist reminiscent of Marcus Garvey), the leader of an organization committed to the overthrow of white supremacy through terrorism.

On his return home, Matthew finds that his life is filled with new forms of racial brutality and violence. In part two, he meets Perigua by whom he is baffled, not sure whether he is a misguided visionary or a true prophet. In order to meet Perigua’s alleged supporters and to support himself, Matthew becomes a railway porter. On his investigative journey he quickly discerns that Perigua’s organization is largely a sham. Though disheartened, he retains his sense of purpose until his fellow porter, Jimmy, is lynched aboard a train transporting Ku Klux Klan members to a huge international conference. Overwhelmed by bitterness, Matthew joins Perigua in a suicide mission to dynamite bridge over which the next “Klan Special” will be passing.

At the last minute, when he discovers the princess on board the train slated for destruction, he aborts the mission, realizing that his love for her and his commitment her cause persist. When he refuses to turn Perigua over to the law, he is sentenced to ten years in prison.

In part three, Matthew begins a new life as a cog in the corrupt political machine that is making a bid for control over black Chicago. This section of the novel, an exposé of the corruption of organized politics and the manipulation of black constituencies by power hungry hucksters, also depicts the political alternatives to the princess's cause. Though Matthew momentarily loses himself in the narrow world of corruption, he eventually reawakens to the distinction between justice and injustice, honesty and graft. When the princess reenters his life, having gone off to learn the dignity of toil (as a maid, waitress, tobacco worker), Matthew is jolted back into consciousness and love all at once.

In part four, the romance is consummated and the princess and Matthew each achieve enlightenment—spiritually, romantically, and politically. When the princess finally calls upon Matthew to rejoin “the Council of the Darker Peoples of the World,” whose planning for global transformation has entered its final stages, she also summons him to join her in constituting a new family at the center of which resides a golden child—Matthew's and Kautilya's son—a baby cast as the messiah of a new world in which Pan-Asia and Pan-Africa are united in common cause against white world domination.

Both the events that catalyze the drama of this novel and those that resolve it are preoccupied with reproduction. Matthew is dismissed from medical school not because he can not make the grade, but rather because he has been prohibited from completion of his training in

obstetrics, a course that would place him, a black man, in contact with the reproductive bodies of white women. As the dean of the medical school puts it, “What did you expect? Juniors must have obstetrical work. Do you think white women patients are going to have a Nigger doctor delivering their babies?” (Du Bois 1995[1928]:4). As in the discourse of “race suicide” the white maternal bodies that regenerate the nation are rescued from contaminating black hands, and Matthew’s “exile” in “his own native land”(7) is explicitly marked as an exclusion from the reproductive order of things. When Matthew arrives in Berlin, the rage in his heart is channeled into a precise action that avenges the specific wrong done him. His exclusion from medical training fuels his outrage that a white man would sexually defile a woman of color, the princess, who is sitting at a far table in the Viktoria Caf. As Matthew first envisions her, she is cast as a burst of color, “a glow of golden brown ... darker than sunlight and gold ... a living, glowing crimson” who suddenly brightens “the absence or negation of color” in which he exists in Europe (8).

The scene that ensues is overdetermined and highly charged. Matthew’s honorable intentions toward white women as a would-be doctor contrast sharply with the sexually threatening white American’s. In this brief episode it is the white man rather than the fantasmatic “black rapist” who emerges as the true threat to racial harmony. Though the scene is set in Berlin, its male actors operate within a specifically North American racial and sexual economy. The white American points to the princess and claims he knows what “Niggers” want, while Matthew defends her honor with a conviction of which only he understands the deeper meaning: “All that cold rage which still lay like lead beneath his heart began again to glow and burn” (9).

Though grateful, the princess is nonplused. Although “she [is] ‘colored’ ... [she is] not at all colored in [Matthew’s] intimate sense” (14), and thus she interprets the incident differently, through a global lens rather than a specifically North American one. As she tells Matthew as they later talk over coffee, “It had never happened before that a stranger of my own color should offer me protection in Europe. I had a curious sense of some great inner meaning to your act—some *world movement*” (17 my italics).

As the narrative unfolds, the princess’s understanding of the alliance of “Negro America” and India, and more broadly Pan-Africa and Pan-Asia is literally born(e) out in the *inter-national* and *inter-racial* reproductive union that serves as the narrative’s symbolic and rhetorical culmination. Before turning to the child who may aptly be identified as Du Bois’s second son, however, I turn to the text’s archetypal maternal body, a dark and silent background figure who provides the novel with a maternalist logic that renders the narrative’s reproductive telos possible.¹⁰ This maternal figure’s first incarnation is as Matthew’s ex-slave mother who lives alone in rural Virginia in a cabin in the woods. She is repeatedly etched in the reader’s mind with simple descriptives: “big,” “straight,” “tall,” “immense,” “white haired,” and “darkly brown” and is often encountered “singing something low and strong” (130), the sorrow songs passed down from African ancestors that Du Bois writes about in *Souls*, and claims to

10) The hyper reproductivity of black maternity is foiled by the barrenness of the light-skinned Sara Andres, the woman to whom Matthew is married during his sojourn in Chicago, and the one whom he leaves for the princess. Elsewhere I explore the highly charged and disturbing repercussions of this figuration of the cold, calculating, and sterile mulatto (Weinbaum, forthcoming).

have first heard from the descendants of his great grandmother Violet, who had “crooned a heathen melody to the child between her knees” (538).

Although Matthew’s interactions with his mother are scant, she comes into focus through the bond that she and the princess forms with her during Matthew’s imprisonment. On the occasion of Kautilya’s and Matthew’s reunion, she extols his mother to him: “Oh Matthew, you have a wonderful mother. Have you seen her hands? Have you seen the gnarled and knotted glory of her hands? ... Your mother is Kali, the Black One; wife of Siva, Mother of the World!” (220). Describing her encounter as “what I shall always know to have been the greatest thing in my life,” Kautilya continues,

I saw that old mother of yours standing in the blue shadows of twilight with flowers, cotton, and corn about her, I knew I was looking upon one of the ancient prophets of India and that she was to lead me out of the depths in which I found myself and up to the atonement for which I yearned. ... So I started with her upon that path ... we talked it all out together. We prayed to God, hers and mine, and out of her ancient lore she did the sacrifice of flame and blood which was the ceremony of my own great fathers and which came down to her from Shango of Western Africa. (221)

Matthew’s mother represents many things to Kautilya. She is symbol of the dignity of the manual labor that Kautilya herself will soon know; she is a Hindu goddess of life, Kali, who is specifically racialized as black; she is a symbol of the fertility of the earth; and she is an “ancient prophet” whom Kautilya views as a direct descendent of Gotama, the Buddha of the world, an incarnation of “his perfect and ineffable self” who is meant to lead her to atonement.¹¹⁾

Significantly this pantheistic and at times unapologetically orientalist portrait of the black mother as the life-giving goddess of the entire world originates in Du Bois's early nonfiction. In "On the Damnation of Woman" (1920), which first appeared in *Darkwater*, Du Bois rescues black women from historical occlusion, from scorn and racist stereotype, by celebrating them as descendants of those other "daughters of sorrow" among whom he includes "the primal black All-Mother of men" and "black Neith, the primal mother of all," through to the "dusky Cleopatras, dark Candaces, and darker and fiercer Zinghas" (Du Bois 1969[1920]:96-7). According to Du Bois, the land of "the mother is and was Africa" and the black mother is herself akin to "Isis ... still titular goddess ... of the dark continent" (97). Taking a detour through the writings of famous authors who have recognized "the mother-idea" as itself black, Du Bois concludes that although it is commonly believed that slavery destroyed black maternity, "the half-million women of Negro descent who lived at the beginning of the nineteenth-century [have] become mothers of two and one-fourth million daughters at the time of the Civil War and five million granddaughters in 1910" (99).

Black maternity is simultaneously American, global, and ancient. And while Du Bois's "black All-Mother" image may indeed have lent itself to black matriarchy myths and to glossing over the complexity of black women's lives, this figuration plays a crucial role in freeing

11) Rampersad argues that Du Bois's knowledge of India was built upon a long orientalist tradition within American thought including Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, and T.S. Eliot. He also suggests that the portrait of Matthew's mother may have been informed by Radhakrishnan's, *The Hindu View of Life* (1927), a popular racist tract in which Kali is cast as non-Aryan (Rampersad 1996:163-4).

black people the world over from the logic of the color line. For if Du Bois refused to racialize the mother of his son in “Of the Passing of the First-Born” in order to fend off the racist logic of national reproduction, in *Dark Princess* he produces “the black All-Mother” as the source of racial globality—a form of international kinship that encompasses all the darker peoples of the world and constitutes a refutation of the U.S. nationalist maternalism that is at base racist.

In continuing her dialogue with Matthew, Kautilya transposes the black mother figure yet again. When Matthew asks her to tell him about India, she casts India as a mother source metonymically connected to Matthew’s mother:

India! India! Out of black India the world is born. Into the black womb of India the world shall creep to die. All that the world has done, India did, and that more marvelously, more magnificently. The loftiest mountains, the mightiest of rivers, the widest of plains, the broadest of oceans—these are India. (227)

This passage is part of an ongoing argument in Du Bois’s work that contests Europe and specifically Greece as the origin of civilization. In this instance India clearly has as much to offer as the origin of world culture. When on completion of her monologue the princess turns to Matthew and asks whether he understands her, however, it becomes evident that there is more at stake than a reworking of civilization’s origin story, which after all would be nothing more than a form of legitimation by reversal. Matthew’s deceptively simple reply encapsulates the affective logic of racial globality. “No I can not understand,” he says to Kautilya, “but *I feel your meaning*” (227 emphasis added). In refusing a strict analogy between India and

America, Pan-Africa and Pan-Asia, Du Bois refuses to homogenize members of the darker world; rather, through Matthew, he proffers a shared “structure of feeling” (to borrow a formulation from Raymond Williams), a form of racial consciousness that connects all the world’s darker peoples into a single world shaping force. In so doing Du Bois renovates the language of sentimentality yet again, grounding his alternative vision of international black collectivity in feeling rather than reason. “Black America” and “Black India” have much in common in terms of the feelings of their “black” populations he argues, and thus although they are not the same, the story that can be told through the mother line makes revolutionary kinship possible. Where Richard Wright cast the Negro as America’s metaphor, Du Bois cast the black mother as the world’s metaphor.¹²⁾

If the members of “the Council of the Darker Peoples of the World” are initially reluctant to grant full membership to African Americans, the trajectory of the novel is toward their enlightenment, toward a shift in their political analysis made possible by embrace of a more nuanced understanding of black labor and its connection to white world domination. While in the beginning of the novel the council members – Japanese, Indian, Chinese, Egyptian, and Arab elites – believe that a color line divides the world but that there is a necessary “color line within a color line” (22) dividing the worthy from the rabble, by the end of the book this internal divide dissolves. The council realizes that it matters not whether the masses “be bound by oppression or by color,” but only that all the oppressed belong among their ranks. In

12) Here I modify Rampersad’s suggestion that Wright regarded the black woman as the world’s metaphor.

adopting a more robust form of Marxism the Council approaches Stuart Hall's formulation, that race is the modality in which class is lived (Hall 1996). As Matthew and the princess concur: "the mission of the darker peoples ... of black, brown, and yellow is to raise out of their pain, slavery, and humiliation, a beacon to guide manhood to health and happiness and life and away from the morass of hate, poverty, crime and sickness, monopoly, and the mass-murder called war" (257).

Although the novel's pervasive elitism precludes the possibility that the masses should ever emerge as significant historical actors within its pages, Du Bois grounds the princess's political philosophy and emergent Marxist proclivities in his own historical reality and political concerns. In particular, Kautilya figure his engagement with the debates animating the Communist Party throughout the decade. She, like Du Bois, is fascinated by debates over "the Negro Question," which began in the early twenties when Lenin introduced it at the Second Congress of the Communist International in his famous "Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Question." In this document Lenin advanced the idea that African Americans constitute an oppressed nation, whose struggle for freedom should be supported and recognized as linked to other struggles against imperialist and capitalist oppression. Significantly, the final formulation of the "Theses" that was adopted by the Comintern was linked from the outset with debates about the dawn of communism in India and especially with the writings of the Bengali intellectual and activist M.N. Roy, founder of the Indian Communist Party. Roy's contribution to Lenin's "Theses" came in the form of comments and critiques, and eventually an alternative draft created in response to a preliminary version of the

document that Lenin had pre-circulated among congress delegates. The central additions that Roy offered, and which were officially adopted by the party, drew distinctions among different kinds of bourgeois-democratic liberation movements and their respective revolutionary potentials. Roy was concerned that in many contexts “reformist” nationalist movements prevailed, and urged the Comintern to eschew such movements and their leaders lest they desert to the imperialist camp. In contrast to his condemnation of such dangerous bourgeois tendencies, Roy advocated undivided support of the real revolutionary masses, those nationalists who were stridently anti-colonialist (Roy 1987, 1988; Haithcox 1971).¹³⁾ The difficulty with Roy’s proposals, as Du Bois seemed to comprehend in creating his portrait of princess and her council, was how to distinguish among nationalist movements—how to divine the difference between revolution from above from revolution from below.

In 1921, after the Second Congress met, Lenin wrote to the Communist Party, USA expressing surprise that their reports to Moscow did not discuss party work among black Americans, and appealing to them to reconsider their strategy and recognize blacks as a crucial element in Communist activity. After all, he argued, “American Negroes [sic.]” occupy the most oppressed sector of American society. Although Lenin had his detractors, particularly John Reed (the outspoken leader of the Communist Labor Party), by the Fourth Congress in 1922, a more realistic basis for discussion of the connection between the national question and the Negro question was

13) According to Harry Haywood debates among Party members about how to assess Marcus Garvey’s nationalism were directly related to Roy’s concerns (Haywood 1978:110-12, 127-28).

finally established.¹⁴⁾ At this congress, the first to be attended by “American Negroes”—Jamaican-born writer Claude McKay, and the official black communist delegate, Otto E. Huiswood—the first formal declaration of Comintern policy toward American blacks was put forth. As the Comintern announced in the pages of the *Worker*, it was now ready to recognize the right of “Negro American’s” to national self-determination, for the “history of the Negro in America fits him for an important role in the liberation of the entire African race.” Indeed, “the international struggle of the Negro race is a struggle against Capitalism and Imperialism” and thus the “necessity of supporting every form of [the] Negro Movement which tends to undermine Capitalism and Imperialism and to impede its further penetration” (Reprinted in Foner and Allen 1987:28-30).

The reverberation between the Comintern’s discourse and that which Du Bois chooses to develop his novel is remarkable. When comparing the language of the Comintern’s declaration with Kautilya’s the echoes of the former are audible:

The world Negro Movement must be organized: in America, as the center of Negro culture and the crystallization of Negro protest; in Africa, the reservoir of human labor for the further development of Capitalism; in Central America ... where American Imperialism dominates; in Puerto Rico, Haiti, Santo Domingo [sic.] and other islands washed by the waters of the Caribbean, where the brutal treatment of our Black fellow-men by the American occupation has aroused the protests of the conscious Negro ... in South Africa and the Congo ... in East Africa ... in all of these centers the Negro

14) Reed’s objection to Lenin was twofold; he argued that Garvism had failed because blacks actually wanted to be part of America; and he insisted that separate black movements were divisive to working class solidarity (Reprinted in Foner and Allen 1987:5-8).

movement must be organized. (Reprinted in Foner and Allen 1987:29-31)

Here the Comintern recognizes the relationship between “the Negro Question” and “Colonial Question,” and conceptualizes the work of organizing among black Americans as part of a worldwide struggle against colonialism and imperialism—a struggle to be led by the Communist Party International.

These debates appear again in Kautilya’s discussion of the “black belt,” a formulation she repeatedly deploys to rescript black America as a “nation within a nation” (the formulation announced at the Sixth Party Congress in 1928, the year *Dark Princess* was published), as a black nation that is part of a “black belt” that girds the world. As she observes to Matthew, rural blacks constitute a significant sector of the darker world. From Virginia, where she is living with Matthew’s mother, gestating her child and at the same time planning world revolution, she writes:

This world [the black world of Virginia] is really much nearer to our world [the black world of the council] than I had thought. This brook dances on to a river fifty miles away ... And the river winds in stately curve down to Jamestown of the slaves ... Think Matthew, take your geography and trace it: from Hampton Roads to Guiana is a world of colored folk, and a world, men tell me, physically beautiful beyond conception; socially enslaved, industrially ruined, spiritually dead; but ready for the breath of Life and Resurrection. South is Latin America, East is Africa, and east of east lies my own Asia. Oh Matthew, think this thing through. Your Mother prophesies. We sense a new age. (278)

When Matthew responds to Kautilya’s letter, asserting a more exceptionalist position, Kautilya stridently contests his U.S. centrism.

Asia and Africa are the center of the world, she corrects; and yet, because “America is power,” it must be factored into her new geography. Recognizing rural Virginia as a part of a world-swaddling swatch of color and consciousness, Kautilya proceeds to articulate her position more deftly still:

Here in Virginia you are at the edge of a black world. The black belt of the Congo, the Nile, and the Ganges reaches by way of Guiana, Haiti, and Jamaica, like a red arrow up into the heart of white America. Thus I see a mighty synthesis: You can work in Africa and Asia right here in America if you work in the Black Belt ... now I see through the cloud. You may stand here, Matthew—here halfway between Maine and Florida, between the Atlantic and the Pacific, with Europe in your face and China at your back; with industry in your right hand and commerce in your left and the Farm beneath your steady feet; and yet be in the Land of the Blacks. (286)

According to Kautilya, black America, the nation within a nation, merges with all the oppressed nations that together comprise the “the Land of the Blacks.”

Not surprisingly this powerful vision comes to Kautilya while she is pregnant. As the black belt wraps itself around the world, the black world develops in Kautilya’s womb. In Du Bois’s representation of this epic reproductive process, moreover, the three movements—Kautilya’s transformation into a mother, the birth of her and Matthew’s child, and the dawning of her political consciousness of racial globality—are inextricable. Just as Matthew’s mother is the “Darker World” and, through a process of metonymic substitution, India itself, through her own reproductive journey, Kautilya is likewise transformed from an Indian princess into a “black All-Mother” whose womb is the repository for a form of black internationalism encompassing people of

color the world over.

In the last few pages of the novel, the birth of Kautilya's baby and of a black world order converge fully. Where the politics of national reproduction would expel the racially mixed baby from the nation as in *Souls*, in *Dark Princess* this child inherits the world. The coupling of this fictional birth with that of Du Bois's son, and thus of this second son with Burghardt, is pronounced in the language that is used to describe these children. When Matthew is beckoned to Kautilya's side for what he does not realize until the last moment is his own wedding and the crowning of his son as Maharajah of Bwodpur, Du Bois depicts mother and child in terms that resonate with the sentimental language he previously used in *Souls* but transform it yet again:

She was dressed in Eastern style, royal in coloring, with no concession to Europe. As he neared, he sensed the flash of great jewels nestling on her neck and arms; a king's ransom lay between the naked beauty of her breasts; blood rubies weighed down her ears, and about the slim brown gold of her waist ran a girdle such as emperors fight for. Slowly all the wealth of silk, gold, and jewels revealed itself as he came near and hesitated for words; then suddenly he sensed a little bundle on her outstretched arms. He dragged his startled eyes down from her face and saw a child—a naked baby that lay upon her hands like a palpitating bubble of gold ... (307)

As in "Of the Passing of the First Born," where Du Bois writes of Burghardt as "golden," he likewise describes the babe in Kautilya's arms as a "bubble of gold." And yet the two depictions are distinguished by the affect of the revelation of the child's body and the figuration of the mother. Whereas in his elegiac chapter Du Bois experiences conflict on first viewing his son and baldly declines to

racialize his child's mother, he renders the princess's body with an array of racializing details that bind her to her baby. This "princess of the wide, wide world" (307) can give her son to the brown world and it to him, even though for the black mother in the United States such a proposition is unrealizable. In contrast to Du Bois's son, who is "torn from beneath the heart" of his mother, an act that signals an intimate bond and simultaneously an intimate violence, the golden child born to Matthew and Kautilya is described as "leap[ing] [from] beneath [the] heart" of his mother, an act that signals joy and possibility. Whereas Burghardt is consumed—literally killed—by the racism of white America when separated from the protective maternal body, in *Dark Princes* the "golden child" thrives in the warm embrace of those who surround him.

No sooner are Kautilya and Matthew pronounced man and wife than a mysterious pageant emerges from the gloom of the Virginia woods, and the coronation of their babe begins. In this ritual, Matthew's mother hands the child over to the Brahmin leader of ceremonies. Symbolically, he is the gift of black America to black India. In completion of the ceremony, Kautilya, joined by the celebrants and the "silver applause of trumpets," declares:

Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva! Lords of Sky and Light and Love! Receive from me, daughter of my fathers back to the hundredth name, his Majesty, Madhu Chandragupta Singh ... Maharajah of Bwodpur ... Protector of Ganga the Holy! Incarnate Son of the Buddha! Grand Mughal of Utter India! Messenger and Messiah to all the Darker Worlds. (311)

It is of course difficult not to balk as Du Bois glosses over historic Brahmin caste prejudice against blacks and persists to the last in

exhibiting little, if any, interest in criticizing the elitism of his imagery. Within the Utopian dream of his novel it is imperative that Kautilya's golden progeny inherit the world because he can be linked to his mother through the racialization of her body. Although in his romance Du Bois clearly has taken a step forward by expanding the scope of his political enterprise into the global theatre, the reappropriation of the narrative of racial maternity that he found to inhere in the United States also represents a step back.

Du Bois's romance of black world revolution rescripts racial nationalism as racial globality; and yet, it is a highly problematic vision, for in *Dark Princess* Du Bois secures his internationalist vision by relinquishing the critique of racial nationalism he had developed in *Souls*. With its hallucination of Brahmin royalty, royal blood, and its vision of the golden child as the incarnation of a new inter-racial alliance, *Dark Princess* reinscribes the orientalism we might expect it challenge, while simultaneously making what may be called a "racial origin mistake," an essentializing argument about genealogy that is on a structural level a mere revamping of that made by advocates of racial nationalism in the U.S. context—that is, by those who view whiteness as a requirement for United States citizenship and national belonging. In the end, even though *Dark Princess* succeeds in severing maternity from the logic of racial nationalism, it simultaneously reinserts the black mother into the logic of internationalism, making reproduction the motor of black belonging in the world. The upshot is that Du Bois's novel emerges as racially globalist in the way in which it mobilizes racial reproductivity to ground inter-colonial alliance.

Perhaps the sentimentalism of *Dark Princess* is a careful generic choice made by Du Bois in order to squeeze out of, and ultimately

evade, the tough scrutiny he would have subjected this text to had it been expressed in another idiom. Regardless of Du Bois's intent, the novel lacks critical perspective on its own strategy of narrative resolution. This said, Du Bois did not conclude his mediation on the relationship of race to reproduction with *Dark Princess*; rather, his romance constitutes one moment among many that must be regarded as part of a lifelong project that is consistently engaged in the process of working through this conceptual pairing.¹⁵⁾ This article has elaborated two instances of such attempts at working through, and hopefully points the way toward a new approach to Du Bois's thinking on "the race concept." For until the central political arguments of these often read texts and others that are lesser known are recognized as articulated through reproductive concept metaphors, we will have failed to read Du Bois's work closely enough.

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15) Du Bois probably narrated his life more frequently than any other twentieth-century intellectual. He wrote four autobiographical works—*Souls*, *Darkwater*, *Dusk of Dawn: The Autobiography of Race Concept*, and *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing my Life from the Last decade of Its First Century*—each discusses Du Bois's pedigree and descent and thus takes up reproductive and genealogical themes. All four may be analyzed in terms of the arguments advanced above.

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Abstract

In United States black mothers have consistently been treated as national outsiders, as women whose children, although ostensibly entitled to full citizenship, are in practice rarely provided with equal protection within the nation's borders or under its laws. From the time he began writing in the aftermath of the failures of national Reconstruction, the African American public intellectual and political activist W. E. B. Du Bois realized that a truly effective anti-racist politics would also have to contend with the particular ways in which U.S. racism targeted black mothers. In short, he understood that an effective anti-racism would necessarily have to be a form of anti-sexism. This article

examines the myriad ways in which Du Bois attempted to reconstruct the relationship between race and reproduction in the interest of producing anti-racist, anti-nationalist, as well as internationalist thinking. In so doing it treats the various representations of black maternity and child birth that Du Bois created, and elaborates on the rhetorical and political function of these representations in combating the racialization of national belonging on the one hand, and in articulating universal black citizenship, or what this article theorizes as *racial globality* on the other.

The article begins by considering Du Bois's attempts to transcend ideas about the racialized reproductive body as a source of national belonging within the United States, particularly his efforts to contest the idea of the reconstructing nation as a white nation reproduced exclusively by white women. Through analysis of Du Bois's depiction of the birth and death of his son in his monumental work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) it demonstrates his reluctance to build an anti-racist politics founded on the idea that belonging within the nation is something that can be bestowed by one's mother. The article proceeds by turning to Du Bois less well-known romantic novel, *Dark Princess* (1928) in which, by contrast, he depicts the birth of a "golden child" who belongs not only within the United States, but within the world. This child, the son of an African American man and an Indian Princess, is cast as a messenger and messiah of a utopian alliance between pan-Asia and pan-Africa. In exploring the relationship between these two reproductive portraits, the article moves from a discussion of Du Bois's critique of the ideological construction of the U.S. as a white nation reproduced by white progenitors, to an examination the literary figuration of a black mother out of whose womb a black diasporic anti-imperialist alliance springs. In contrast to previous scholarship, which has tended to focus on the critique of U.S. racial nationalism that Du Bois expressed in his early work, or on the internationalism that he later embraced, this article pays close attention to how Du Bois's anti-nationalist and internationalist politics are together subtended by subtle, but constitutive, sexual politics.