

Dialectics of the Veil

Howard Winant

INTRODUCTION

W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "the veil," first fully articulated in The Souls of Black Folk (1903), contains the most nuanced and powerful theory of race and racism ever developed. Du Bois understands the veil dialectically. This philosophical term "dialectic" refers to a relationship that simultaneously embodies both antagonism and interdependence, that develops over historical time, and that links the small-scale and large-scale (or "micro" and "macro") dimensions of social life. The concept represented by Du Bois as the veil, in other words, operates both at the level of the personal or intrapsychic and at the institutional or structural level of social interaction. It evolves over historical time. And it expresses both the conflict, exclusion, and alienation inherent in the dynamics of race and racism, and the interdependence, knowledge of "the other," and thwarted desires that characterize these phenomena.

Souls, of course, is about race and racism in the United States. Although elsewhere in Du Bois's lifework the concept of the veil is applied more broadly, he first theorized it -- drawing on a wide range of philosophical sources of both European and African-American provenance -- in order to interpret and transform the black-white racial dynamic that had been historically and socially dominant in the US since the onset of African slavery.

The most famous point Du Bois makes in presenting his concept of the veil is his idea of "double consciousness" or racial dualism. He argues that "double consciousness" both afflicts and transfigures the black soul: dividing its experience and self-awareness, "introjecting" racism into the racially oppressed self,¹ and also affording that self some means of defense against racial oppression. Here at the individual and experiential level we already have a fully-fledged dialectic. Yet Du Bois is at pains to show how the veil's operation at this "micro-social" level is but an instance, albeit a vital one, of a far broader

and deeper phenomenon. The veil not only divides the individual self; it also fissures the community, nation, and society as a whole (and ultimately, world society in its entirety). The veil's antagonisms, however, are also thoroughgoing interrelationships, such that it not only splits self and world along the "color-line," but simultaneously founds the self and produces the social world.

I first read The Souls of Black Folk in the mid-1960s. I was a teenage anti-racist activist then, and I was particularly struck by the concept: it seemed a symbol for the irrationality of racism. For quite a few years after that, I thought of the veil only as an obstacle to racial justice and equality. It all seemed so simple: any barrier dividing human beings along racial grounds, I thought in my movement zeal, needed to be removed. I wanted the veil to be immediately lifted, so that we could "just be" with one another: equal, free at last, undifferentiated by race.

Today -- many years later -- I see Du Bois's concept of the veil somewhat differently. I still understand the veil as a metaphor for the racial barrier of the "color-line," Du Bois's "problem of the twentieth century." Du Bois surely meant it that way, but that wasn't all he meant. He did not only seek to lift the veil, the act I naively thought would achieve the straightforward restoration of the common humanity that had been so cruelly and illogically deformed by racism. He was also searching for a means to transform the veil, a way to preserve the differences it demarcated but not the status distinctions it reified.

For Du Bois the veil is a complex metaphor for the dynamics of race. It represents both barrier and connection between white and black. Imagine it as a filmy fabric, a soft and semi-transparent border-marker, that both keeps the races apart and mediates between them. On the one hand Du Bois harbored the faith -- especially in his younger days -- that once the country, once white America in particular, came to understand more fully the injustice of racism, it would move to overcome it, perhaps invoking its Lincolnian "better angels." In some time to come, then, when whites would at last evince a willingness fully to share American life and society with blacks, when whites' and blacks' acceptance of each other (and even love for each other, absurd as that might initially sound), could finally be acknowledged and made manifest, then the veil would no longer be needed, or wanted, or accepted.

Du Bois was certainly a committed anti-racist, but as his lifework and political trajectory advanced he came to doubt that the US could ever achieve true racial equality, that it could ever abolish the "color line," that it could ever lift the veil.

If this had been the ideal of his early days, by his middle career he was struggling with the racial transformations that accompanied World War I: the contradictions of Wilsonian doctrine, the disappointments of Versailles, the horrors of the "red summer" of 1919, and the racial meaning of the Russian revolution. From the 1930s on he embraced a more radical perspective, one that drew strongly upon Marxism and on a militant and anti-colonialist nationalism. So by the appearance of Dusk of Dawn (1940) the veil had acquired a great deal more solidity. Du Bois depicts it there not as a thin film but as a thick glass barrier. It is still transparent, but it is also impenetrable. It cuts off all sound and communication. It renders black experience unintelligible -- but also cruelly amusing -- to whites who bother to look through it. And for blacks looking out at their tormentors from within the glass cage, there can be little more than rage and despair.

During the last years of his life, when the postwar civil rights movement had already burst upon the scene, and when (during the Cold War) he had been meretriciously attacked and abused, Du Bois expressed deep skepticism about the possibility of a reform-oriented, integrationist racial politics. Increasingly he argued that the veil not only confined and excluded black people, but that it also protected them from at least some forms of white violence and domination.

Is racism indeed so fundamental to US culture and social structure, so deeply interwoven into white character structure, that it occludes all trans-racial empathy? Does it pose such a systematic barrier not only to black progress and mobility but also to black self-awareness? Du Bois wrestled with these issues throughout his life. But no matter how disillusioned he became, he never succumbed to unremitting gloom and despair. Just as he retained his dual commitment to black peoplehood and American equality, just as he upheld his dual commitment to black peoplehood and socialism, he always recognized the ambiguities and contradictions, the political flexibility of the veil. He was ever its dialectician.

At the end of his life he saw that the veil was being transformed again. His last years were the Cold War years, the time of the downfall of the old imperialisms and the onset of the civil rights era. In the 1950s and early 1960s (Du Bois died in 1963 at the age of 95) he was still saying that the veil could not be lifted: this would only serve to expose black folk to the full force of racial subjugation, which by the mid-20th century would not have meant renewed slavery, but might have portended something almost worse, if that is possible: the "bleaching" of the black soul, the compulsory abandonment of blackness and black identity (Du Bois 1973 [1960]).

So what is the veil then? Is it a barrier or a defense, a curse or a blessing? Is it a flimsy and rent fabric, or a rigid, imprisoning cage? Is it a mark we wear or a role we play? Is it the demands we make for our freedom or the restriction of our freedom brought about by the racial policy of the state? Is it a cleavage within our racialized society, or indeed a schism inside every racialized self? It is, I want to argue here, all of these, and more.

THE VEIL AS RACIAL DIALECTIC

The philosophical term dialectic refers to a logical method, a style of reasoning, that proceeds through the posing and resolution of contradictions. Although dialectical thinking has its origins in Greek philosophy, its deepest modern association is with the enlightenment-based philosophies of Hegel and Marx, who applied it to social theory and the philosophy of history. For them, all social relationships simultaneously contained both antagonistic and interdependent elements; they developed over historical time through the framing and resolution of contradiction; and they inexorably linked the experiential and the structural dimensions of social existence (Marcuse 1963 [1954]).

Du Bois's concept of the veil was certainly rooted in the Hegelian tradition. The whole framework of double consciousness draws upon this legacy: it describes a subjectivity both sundered and fused, an identity divided by forces originating both within and outside the self. The concept of the veil also recognizes the black soul's striving for wholeness, for synthesis and integration: after all, its "dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." Besides this, Du Bois drew upon the various currents of German nationalist thought -- themselves Hegelian -- to which he had been exposed during his studies in that country. The concept also contained images of racial collectivity, destiny, and mission that he had absorbed at Fisk: the abolitionist legacy, Ethiopianism, racial uplift, the legacy of the Jubilee singers, the influences of Crummell and Blyden. Du Bois also infused his theory of the veil with the developing pragmatist philosophy of James and Pierce that he had absorbed at Harvard. This was a body of thought that had great affinities with dialectical reasoning.² Finally, there were his historical studies, which bore fruit in his dissertation on the suppression of the African slave trade (Du Bois 1896) Here was the early macro-history of the veil, which lay in the world-historic conflict between the Atlantic slave system and nascent capitalism's developing interest in "free" (that is rented, not owned) labor. The ongoing historical dialectic of the veil plays a central role in Souls -- notably in the chapter "Of the

Dawn of Freedom" and the treatment of Booker T. Washington -- and then reaches its climax in Du Bois's masterpiece Black Reconstruction (1935).

Because race and racism are more-or-less omnipresent in US society, the veil -- which is their metaphor -- does not need documentation. What I aim to do here is to demonstrate the flexibility of the veil and its quintessentially political character. In a general way I adopt an "overdetermination" approach to the problem of the dialectic of the veil. In other words, I argue that the concept of the veil is effective in analyzing the depth and breadth of race and racism because it so seamlessly links the numerous sites where they are present in US society (and ultimately on a global scale, though that is not my main subject here). Certainly the veil divides the human psyche and figures the human body; yet it also fissures soul and nation, collectivity, polity, history, and culture. Since every US institution as well as every identity is partitioned by race and racism, fractured by the veil, and since at the same time the entire society owes its existence to the workings of race and racism³ -- to the presence of the veil -- the concept necessarily takes on an accretive quality. The veil signifies a profound social structure that has been built up for centuries, accumulating among the infinite contradictions of race and racism as they have shaped our identities and social organization.

This great weight of accrued indignity and injustice, privilege and exclusion, at times seems to pinion the social system under an immovable burden, to constitute a deadening inertia made of a racial injustice that seemingly can never be budged. Yet the veil is always unstable and contradictory: the weight of racial oppression is bound up with the implacable will to resist. Thus at key moments, more rare perhaps but still crucially important, the sheer weight of the veil -- qua social structure -- becomes insupportable. The built-up rage and inequity, the irrationality and inutility, and the explosive force of dreams denied, have sometimes been mobilized politically in ways which can only be termed quasi-revolutionary. When racially-based challenges have occurred at this level they have brought about "breaks" in the system: if not revolutions, at least serious social transformations. Such ruptural moments are rare and necessarily conjunctural: they arise in connection when large-scale social crises occur, crises which both enable such seismic political ruptures and are themselves produced by them. Hence "breaks" or ruptures in the veil may be said to be overdetermined.⁴ In US racial history we may discern two such "breaks," two moments when the fabric of the veil was torn, if not dissolved: during and after the Civil War, and during and after WWII.

Such shifts are primarily political events, phenomena of crisis. They occur when the instability of the old racial system becomes too great and opposition acquires too much disruptive power to be successfully ignored or repressed. When the dialectic of the veil means in practical terms that the white supremacist system depends too comprehensively and openly on the racially oppressed -- as occurred during the Civil War and during the post-WWII period -- then the logic of racial rule, the very fabric of the veil, threatens to burst apart.⁵ Du Bois's lifelong emphasis on the primacy of racial politics -- visible most clearly in his controversies with Washington and with Garvey, both of whom refused engagement with the US political system -- can best be understood in terms of this larger or macro-social understanding of the veil.

At such ruptural moments both identity and social structure undergo profound alteration. Racial identity is fundamental in the US; when slavery was abolished (if not entirely superseded) after the Civil War, when a century later the system of official segregation was outlawed (if not entirely transformed), these developments profoundly altered US racial identities and social practices. At the same time, obviously enough, such racial "breaks" deeply transformed the larger social structure. They overturned established patterns of economic, political, and cultural life. They fostered widespread conflict and new modes of social organization and collective action (from the reaction of the Klan to the rise of new forms of black nationalism). And they engendered new efforts to explain and theorize the meaning of race. Du Bois's own development, and indeed his theory of the veil, were themselves products of his particular national and historical location; this fact is repeatedly recognized in Souls. Indeed the book's entire structure is predicated upon the interaction between the transformative experience undergone by all of Afro-America in the post-Civil War period on the one hand, and the author's own developing awareness of race, his burgeoning encounter with the "peculiar sensation" of "double consciousness" on the other (Gilroy 1993).

Thus we can understand the veil as operating simultaneously at the "micro-" level of identity, experience, the divisions and struggles within the racialized self; and at the "macro-" level of the social whole, the collectivity, the state, history, the nation. It furnishes a conceptual tool, an "anatomy" of racial formation, whose significance derives precisely from the various levels (or the various "instances," to speak structuralese for a moment) at which it shapes society. Such is the dialectic of the veil.

THE 20TH-CENTURY HISTORY OF THE VEIL

The past century was the one whose "problem," Du Bois famously predicted, was to be "the color-line." And it was. But now that century is over; its "problem" is certainly not.

During the first half of the 20th century, from the moment when Souls appeared until the onset of WWII, the taken-for-granted rule of the system of white supremacy remained in place. That is to say, although faced with increasing opposition and perhaps unravelling incrementally, the fabric of the veil was not ruptured. Numerous conflicts and tensions accumulated as black people left the South by the millions and established greater influence in the North and Midwest. Black migration, entrance into the industrial labor force, participation in the Great War, and above all political mobilization along varied lines -- reformist, nationalist/pan-Africanist, socialist/communist -- all called the dynamics of race and racism into question.

The veil was being tugged and stretched from what Du Bois called "within" -- from its black side. But it was also being reinforced from "without" -- from the white side. The "Atlanta compromise" of Booker T. Washington had not pacified racial conflict very much, and had ameliorated racial oppression not at all; Washington's death in 1915 left a vacuum in the zone of racial collaboration. Returning soldiers were lynched and black communities assaulted after WWI ended, and the red scares of the 1920s were black scares too. The Ku Klux Klan attained a formidable public presence in the 1920s, operating not only in the South but also in the midwestern heartland. In the 1930s the Democratic "solid South" adhered to the New Deal coalition, demanding (and receiving) in return the loyalty of Roosevelt: there was to be no federal sanction on lynching, no serious inclusion of black workers in the labor reforms of the 1930s, no intrusion on the Dixiecrats' disenfranchisement of blacks, indeed no challenge to their exercise of a racial dictatorship in the American South, which was effectively an American internal colony. That the Democratic Party could remain so monolithically racist at the same time that black voters (those who were permitted to vote) were deserting the party of Lincoln in droves (see Weiss 1983) testifies both to the resilience of the veil, and to its impending political crisis. Yes, there were small reforms, and there was Mrs. Roosevelt, the President's ambassador across the color-line, but her role was largely confined to the propitiatory and symbolic.

Only with the coming of World War II was national attention turned again to the black hand side: indeed the hands of black workers were needed; black soldiers and sailors were required again, as they had been during WWI. Once again blacks responded to the call, but this time they made more serious demands: for desegregation of war industries, and for integration of the armed

forces. Roosevelt defused A. Philip Randolph's threatened march on Washington in 1941 by acceding to the former demand (although wartime labor practices were only partially reformed). But military desegregation was delayed until 1947. The war years were riddled with racial conflict -- sometimes armed confrontations and "riots" -- on military bases and even on the battlefield (Kryder 2000; Peery 1995).

Still, for obvious reasons the black movement grew and deepened during the War, sparking the "break" that occurred in racial politics in the postwar decades. Racial reform followed hard upon the War's end: not only did military desegregation take place, but epic battles were fought for control of the trade unions and the Democratic Party in the 1940s. Anti-communism was the main tune being played, but very often the shrill notes of McCarthyism were grounded in a firm base (or "bass"?) of racism (Lichtenstein 1989).

The "break" represented by the rise of the civil rights movement -- usually dated from the Brown decision of 1954 and the Montgomery events of 1955 -- was really but a continuous building-up of the contradictions of the veil, an overdetermined outgrowth of the consequences of the War, combined with numerous other racial pressures: the long-simmering struggles of earlier decades, the greatly transformed world situation in which the US was now the hegemonic power (Dudziak 2000), and above all the massive mobilization of black people on a scale not seen since the Civil War or perhaps the Garvey movement's heyday.

As a result of this conjuncture of pressures the veil was dramatically rewoven: the most loathsome forms of racial dictatorship were ameliorated as state racial policy abandoned its explicit support for Jim Crow. As noted, a shift in racial identity also occurred, generating greater pride among blacks and other racially-defined minority groups in the US, and also initiating a mild version of racial "double consciousness" among whites and "other others"; let us call it a "paler" version. This shift in racial politics took shape at both the "micro-" and "macro-" social levels, prompted both by movement pressure and by various global influences. As a result of the enactment of civil rights reforms, political exclusion was replaced by a limited form of political participation. Blacks were finally enfranchised -- though not without problems -- a full century after the passage of the 14th Amendment.⁶ Although they made some gains, they also suffered enormous disappointments.

During the second half of the 20th century, and in most respects down to now (2003), racial politics and race consciousness have been transformed again. The veil is being rewoven again.

The achievement of reforms in US racial policy was a real victory. It was a limited one, however: only "moderate" black currents were deemed fit for representation in the American political mainstream; significant racial repression was maintained; and radical alternatives were isolated, discredited, and assaulted. Perhaps most damaging to the cause of freedom and racial justice, the egalitarian demands of the movement were incorporated in suitably neutered form into mainstream racial discourse and policy. Thus did the rhetoric of "colorblindness" and "reverse racism" frame some familiar tropes in post-civil rights era America.

Today racially-conscious political opposition, and indeed anti-racist movements in general, have been divided by the very successes of the reforms they sought, even though those successes were never more than partial and incomplete. The movement is no longer what it was in the 1960s or 1970s. It has been a victim of its own victories; it has been incorporated. The racial state has proved relatively effective at reinterpreting (or "rearticulating") movement demands in conservative and individualist, though ostensibly egalitarian, terms. Because it has "learned a new racial language," so to speak, the state has actually been able to fortify the racially oppressive policy of "lockdown America" in the criminal (so-called) justice system, and to maintain the "savage inequalities" of the public education system, all the while claiming that it is now "beyond race." Again the veil has shifted: to promote black (or brown, or red, or yellow) race-"consciousness" today is to invite criticism from whites -- and from those few nonwhites who have adopted the "colorblind" stance -- that one is a "reverse racist." Radicals and nationalists are told to "get over it." Those who sneer at anti-racism evince little concern for redlining and racial steering in the housing market, employment discrimination, persistent and comprehensive school segregation, or ongoing violence and racial profiling by the police, the border patrol, the courts, the electoral system, and the media.

Indeed the same people who today avow colorblindness find themselves experiencing a new version of "double consciousness": the white kind. "I don't see color," many of my white students tell me. "You can be black, white, green or purple. I treat everyone as an individual." Yet they also stick closely to their own segregated neighborhoods, listen to their own rock stations, and count on the benevolence of the police.⁷ Of course, the veil is not only about separation; it is also about "crossing over." Many of these same (male) students wear their pants in the baggy "sag" fashion of the black B-boys who set popular styles in this country. White working-class girls show up in class with cornrows or dress in "ghetto fabulous" fashion. "Wiggers" abound: the desire for "otherness," so central to the veil, lives on among whites. They know

they are supposed to reject racism, and indeed they consider themselves non-racist. But they also need racism: it protects their jobs, their property, their neighborhood schools, their "standard of living." Their psychic demand for "security" is still served by it; their feelings of vulnerability are still figured racially. Their racial privileges -- and the contradictions inherent within them -- are the lineaments of their social identities.⁸

THE FUTURE OF THE VEIL

What patterns of development can we expect to see in US race and racism in the 21st century? What principal contradictions will inform and transform the dialectic of the veil in the years ahead? Of course both prediction and prescription are off-limits to us. But I still wish to consider these questions, perhaps rushing in where angels fear to tread.

Three general patterns, I think, will be woven into the fabric of the veil in the years ahead. These are the continuing depth and comprehensiveness of racial identity; the tenacity of racism as a system of social injustice and unfreedom; and the precarious state of racial democracy.

Racial identity remains. It is continually being both undermined and reproduced at both the experiential and institutional levels of social life. The meaning of race is permanently in question, as is the content of any racialized group identity: consider not only whiteness and blackness in this context, but also Asian-ness, consciencia de la raza, Indianness, the revived credibility of orientalism and the resurgent Islamophobia of the present, just to pick the major contemporary examples.

The boundaries of the race-concept are also problematic: to what extent is race somaticized, phenotypic, corporeal (to use but some of the familiar terms that link racial identity to the body), and to what extent is race performative, socialized, cultural?⁹ This last question problematizes the border between the racial, which is supposedly inherent, ineluctable, intrinsic; and the ethnonational, which can be learned (or unlearned).

These are extremely large issues which cannot be adequately managed in the space of a brief essay.¹⁰ The boundary between the two categories of race and ethnicity is always contested. Race and ethnicity are social constructs, not objective phenomena. In practice racial and ethnonational ways of seeing the social world often compete for explanatory and mobilizational purchase. That is to say, they signify distinct but overlapping discourses, similar but far from congruent identities and practices.

Cultural differences matter; but at the same time any "ethnic" group can be racialized. Some examples: the Nazis effectively racialized the German Jews, although they could often not tell by mere visual cues who was Jewish; the British racialized the Irish, and the Bosnian Serbs racialized the Bosnian Muslims, although there were no categorical phenotypical differences between either pair. The Rwanda and Burundi Hutus and Tutsis racialized each other. In all these cases (and many others we could name) there had been substantial interbreeding, group mixing via migration and colonial rule, and significant if intermittent periods when racial distinctions were notably effaced.¹¹

Why does racial identity remain significant in the face of its contemporary dismissal as a relic of a benighted past, an "illusion" which we must now "get beyond"? We return to the dialectic of the veil to answer this question. For all its fungibility and flexibility, race continues to code the social locations and identities of individuals and groups in terms of what Weber called status. It continues to offer an immediately available classificatory framework that is useful in establishing what Blumer (1958) labelled "group position" in respect to a great variety of issues: resource distribution, group demographic differences and territoriality, political power, cultural practices, etc. Most significant in perpetuating racial distinctions, though, is the dualism that Du Bois suggested traversed and informed these differences. Dualism remains the essential meaning of the veil, the heart of its dialectic: racial identity establishes not only the norms of oppression and subordination, but also those of self-assurance and autogestion or self-determination. The latter concept, whether understood in the familiar collective and nationalist sense ("imagined communities," etc.) or in terms of the "centering" of the self, is as much a component of racialization as group-based domination. Where there is domination there is resistance; this is another fundamental dimension of the dialectics of the veil.

Thus racial identity is not merely an instrument of rule; it is also an arena and medium of social practice. It is an aspect of individual and collective selfhood. Racial identity, in other words, does all sorts of practical "work": it shapes privileged status for some and undermines the social standing of others. It appeals to varied political constituencies, inclusive and exclusive. It codes everyday life in an infinite number of ways. How foolish, then, to claim that race is merely an archaism, a concept left over from an unenlightened past!¹² The idea of getting "beyond race" is as utopian -- and ultimately as undesirable -- as other homogenizing utopian objectives: a classless society, a world government, the abolition of gender distinctions, etc.

Yet the permanence of race, the continuity of the veil, does not preclude movement toward greater justice and freedom. Other group distinctions, once seen as similarly intractable -- such as religious difference -- have been transmuted into far less invidious forms. Obviously I wouldn't want to overstate that, for religious intolerance and oppression still abound. But I think the point is clear: pluralism matters; substantive (not merely formal) equality matters; freedom matters; democracy remains precarious.

Racism remains. Racism continues to operate as a system of social injustice and unfreedom, even in an era -- after the post-WWII "break" -- when anti-racism has achieved some degree of official consensus as a universal norm. In this historical situation, when white supremacy has been delegitimized so extensively, what accounts for the continuity of racism?

The work of Joe R. Feagin is indispensable in answering this question in the US context. Feagin and his co-author Hernán Vera argue that most racist practices are relatively invisible. Whites in particular find it easy not to think about race, not to consider themselves prejudiced towards racially-defined minorities, not to recognize the ways in which they

...have created a set of 'sincere fictions' -- personal mythologies that reproduce societal mythologies at the individual level. Whites generally use these fictions to define themselves as 'not racist,' as 'good people,' even as they think and act in antiblack ways.... The sincere fictions embedded in white personalities and white society are about both the black other *and* the white self (Feagin and Vera 1995, 14; emphasis original).

In other words racism inheres in us as individuals not as some outworn relic, but because it performs valuable psychological work. This analysis of "sincere fictions" is deeply linked to Du Bois's account of white racial identity as producing a "psychological wage" -- that is, a privileged social location -- relative to blacks' social positioning in the US. Some important consequences of this model are that because racism is a social structure in which all Americans are imbedded -- Feagin calls this "slavery refusing to die" (Feagin 2000) -- the fact that it is recognized or even criticized does not serve to dispel it. This is a peculiar situation for anti-racists, even anti-racist activists: we occupy and indeed have been socialized into the very terrain we are trying to transform. Here again we see the dialectic of the veil in operation.¹³

So racism remains because it has played a central role in creating American society (and the modern world) over the last half-millennium or so, and because it continues unjustly to allocate the values that Americans (and

the world's peoples in general) produce. Racism remains, in short, because it still "pays off" in substantial ways, even under the putatively anti-racist consensus of the 21st century. So the veil has proved itself capable of adapting very well to anti-racist reforms. This is true both at the micro-social level of the self, the individual who must interpret and "theorize" her own experience, and at the macro-social and level of our economic, political, and cultural institutions, where resources are distributed and our "collective representations" (a Durkheimian phrase) are produced, challenged, and changed.

PRECARIOUS DEMOCRACY

Du Bois's intellectual and practical accomplishments continue to inspire. One hundred years after the appearance of The Souls of Black Folk, his analysis of race and racism, explored through the concept of the veil, retains its explanatory power. Why is this so? Because the idea of the veil helps explain the vast importance of racial identity, racial oppression and resistance, and racialized social structures in the creation and organization of the modern world. As a theoretical framework that addresses and links the "micro-" and "macro-" social meaning of race; that illuminates the continuity and transformation of racial conflict from the historic past to the unresolved racial present; and that illustrates the connections between the racial contradictions within the human soul and those of national (and global) society, the concept of the veil transcends all other attempts to thematize and analyze racial dynamics. I have argued here that this sort of conceptual range and depth is best understood by grasping the dialectical reasoning that informs and molds the concept of the veil.

The meaning of race has evolved tremendously over the 100 years since Souls. Especially over the past decades, understandings of race and racism, and social structures and practices crucial to the contours of the veil, have changed dramatically. Yet in racial terms democracy remains precarious. Race-conscious democracy has never been realized. The dialectical synthesis of Duboisian racial dualism has yet to be achieved. Neither in the US nor at a transnational level is it at all possible to synthesize recognition of racial difference with full-scale equality, social justice, and freedom for all.

To be sure, there has been real racial reform. But ironically this has imposed huge new dilemmas on those who strive for racial justice, both through political work and through cultural/intellectual work. Much of the current confusion, anxiety, and debate about the continuity and extent of racism, as

well as about various issues of racial politics (affirmative action, debt peonage, immigration, welfare, etc.) can be explained in terms of this unprecedented situation. The dialectics of the veil still operate.

In this confused and tormented atmosphere, in which race and racism are simultaneously acknowledged and denied, the figure of the veil can prove useful once more. The deep dialectic of race and racism must be affirmed against those who consider these themes anachronistic or wish to "get over" them. The belief is commonplace, the idea is everywhere, from right to left, from integrationism to nationalism, etc., that race is declining in significance, that it is an outmoded analytical concept, and that it plays no important part in the organization of the "new world order." This position must be challenged in different ways: by disputing it through historical analysis; by contrasting its variations among nations as they have emerged in recent years; and by exploring the interplay between global racial dynamics and national racial formations. But most centrally, the idea that we are somehow "beyond race" must be challenged in terms of theoretical and political analysis. Vital as it was to overcome the old systems of racial oppression, it is just as important to understand today that new anti-racist battle-lines have appeared. The concept of the veil, the dialectics of the veil, still provide our most effective tool in the struggle to achieve racial justice and democracy.

NOTES

1. This Freudian term is of course used anachronistically here, since Freud's work on "defense mechanisms" such as introjection was done after Souls appeared. Yet the substance of the concept is certainly visible in Du Bois's account of "double consciousness." Du Bois later lamented that he had not become acquainted with Freud's work sooner in his intellectual development. The Fanonian framework is also prefigured, of course, in the "double consciousness" idea.
2. The later pragmatist social psychology of George Herbert Mead, with its anatomizing of consciousness as simultaneously subjective and objective, constructed through the interaction of the "I" and the "me," can also be linked to the Hegelian dialectic.
3. The logic of this position may at first unsettle US readers, who have been trained to see their country as "the land of the free and the home of the brave" since before they could question such rhetoric. I explore the claim of racism's centrality to the construction of the US -- and indeed of the modern world --

more fully in The World Is a Ghetto (Winant 2001). That racial slavery (as well as racially-organized conquest of native peoples) were fundamental to the founding of the "modern world-system," the rise of Europe, and the organization of capitalism on a global scale, are but some of the key elements of this analysis. Race and racism also shaped global experiences of political democracy, empire and national sovereignty, and cultural/individual identity in crucial ways. This argument is itself Duboisian, and also owes a good deal to the work of C.L.R. James.

4. This account follows Althusser's (1969) analysis of revolution in the essay "Contradiction and Overdetermination."

5. Du Bois's account of the Civil War and Reconstruction (1977 [1935]) emphasized (among many other important points) such matters as the precarious dependence of the rebellious South upon enslaved labor and the opportunities this presented for a "general strike" of black slaves. Politically the book stressed the incompleteness of the American revolution and the vulnerability of democracy in a situation shaped by enslavement and disenfranchisement of millions solely on the grounds of race.

I have argued that the post-WWII racial "break" arose from rather similar factors: the legacy of an anti-fascist war whose enemy bore some uncomfortable resemblances to the system of rule in the South (and to some extent nationally); the onset of the Cold War whose central arena of conflict was the vast and racially "other" colonial terrain; the dependence of the world's North on southern immigrant labor, etc.

6. July 25, 1868.

7. For a more expansive treatment of racial dualism among whites other (non-black) "others," see Winant 1997.

8. in a haze these days

i pull up to the stoplight

i can feel that something's not right

i can feel that someone's blasting me

with hate and bass

sending dirty vibes my way

cause my great great great great grandad

made someone's great great great great granddaddy slaves

it wasn't my idea

it wasn't my idea

it never was my idea

i just drove to the store

for some preparation h

ya'll don't know what it's like
being male, middle class and white
it gets me real pissed off and it makes me wanna say
fuck

--Ben Folds, "Rockin' the Suburbs," Sony Music, 2001

9. Perhaps I should offer my own definition of the concept, as well as of the notion of racism, rather belatedly in this article, I suppose. I draw these from my own earlier work:

Race:

Race can be defined as a concept which signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies.

Although the concept of race appeals to biologically-based human characteristics (so called "phenotypes"), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. There is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of "race," and the sociohistorical categories employed to differentiate among these groups reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be imprecise if not completely arbitrary.

Racism:

Racism can be defined as inhering in one or more of the following: (1) signifying practice that essentializes or naturalizes human identities based on racial categories or concepts; (2) social action that produces unjust allocation of socially valued resources, based on such significations; (3) social structure that reproduces such allocations.

10. But see my other work in which they are more seriously encountered: Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 2001.

11. A more comprehensive treatment of these issues - one more in line with Du Bois's lifework -- would emphasize the global dimensions of the veil far more than has been possible here. Such matters as North-South conflict, global debt peonage and "sustainable development," environmental crisis and unequal distribution of natural as well as economic resources, HIV and other global health crises, and the injustices of the worldwide division of labor, should all be considered as racial issues. They are all intelligible in terms of the veil. See Winant 2001.

12. Elsewhere I have argued these points at far greater length (Winant 2001). The claim here is that although race is a modern invention -- appearing on the world-historical stage only with the rise of Europe, the conquest of the Americas, the African slave trade, etc. -- over subsequent centuries the concept has acquired such range and depth that it is now a permanent (although of course changeable) component of human and societal organization and consciousness.

13. A further consequence of this analysis extends the understanding of racism beyond whites -- the dominant racially-defined group -- to all Americans. Duboisian double consciousness, as I have already noted, identified something like "internalized racism" (or introjected racism) within the black self, and in the years since Souls appeared a large literature has developed on this. But we can see today there is no reason to limit this dialectic to white or black racism, whether directed inward or outward. All Americans are socialized into the same racist system; all are subject to one variety or another of racial dualism. To recognize that racism is introjected by blacks is to recognize that black people can be racist, not only toward themselves but toward others; the same holds true of other racially-defined minorities. This does not diminish, however, the veracity of the basic insight that racism in the US is a system of white privilege. See Winant 1997.