

The People, Rhetoric, and Affect: On the Political Force of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*

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*In recent decades, the concept of “the people” has received sustained theoretical attention. Unfortunately, political theorists have said very little about its explicit or implicit use in thinking about the expansion of the American polity along racial lines. The purpose of this article in taking up this issue is twofold: first, to provide a substantive account of the meaning of “the people”—what I call its descriptive and aspirational dimensions—and second, to use that description as a framework for understanding the rhetorical character of W.E.B. Du Bois’s classic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, and its relationship to what one might call the cognitive–affective dimension of judgment. In doing so, I argue that as a work of political theory, *Souls* draws a connection between rhetoric, on the one hand, and emotional states such as sympathy and shame, on the other, to enlarge America’s political and ethical imagination regarding the status of African-Americans.*

*O, Let America be America again—The land that
never has been yet—And yet must be.*

—Langston Hughes

In recent decades, the concept of “the people” has received sustained theoretical attention (e.g., Allen 2004; Canovan 2005; Frank 2010; Morgan 1988; Morone [1990] 1998; Näsström 2007; Smith 2003; Wolin 1981; Yack 1996). At issue is the proper understanding of the category, who it comprises, how it expands, and its boundaries in the context of globalization. Unfortunately, political theorists have said very little about its explicit or implicit use in thinking about the expansion of the American polity along racial and gender lines (exceptions here include Frank 2010, chap. 7; Morone [1990] 1998, chap. 6). How, for instance, were women and African-Americans able to invoke the language of the people even as they were consistently identified as standing outside the boundaries of the political and affective concerns of the nation?

I do not seek to settle this question here, although I shall come back to it at the end. The more immediate purpose of this article is twofold: first, to provide a substantive account of the meaning of the term—what

I call its *descriptive* and *aspirational* dimensions—and second, to use that description as the framework for understanding the rhetorical character of W.E.B. Du Bois’s classic work *The Souls of Black Folk* ([1903] 1986b), and its relationship to the cognitive–affective dimension of judgment, which has received recent attention in moral and political philosophy (e.g., Allen 2004; Garsten 2006; Hall 2005; Kingston and Ferry 2008; Krause 2008; Nussbaum 2001; Solomon 2001; 2003). On one hand, the people symbolize those individuals with rights and privileges of citizenship as enshrined in a constitutional structure. On the other hand, however, the idea of the people creates a space for refounding the polity along more inclusive lines, destabilizing the idea of homogeneity as a prerequisite for democratic stability (cf. Allen 2004; Canovan 2005; Frank 2010; Morone [1990] 1998; Yack 1996). Placed against this backdrop, Du Bois’s approach illustrates the kind of normative work the category of the people makes possible in democracy. And the gap between the descriptive and aspirational dimensions of the people prompts me to attend more carefully to the various mechanisms employed to bridge the divide.

The attempt to move from description to aspiration highlights the space of contestation that the politically dispossessed occupy. In this context, reformers have articulated transcendent ethical visions of what kind of community America ought to be and the virtues needed to realize and sustain that way of life. This dual aspect of the people, I suggest, encouraged Du Bois in his effort to stimulate and direct America’s political and ethical imagination. The distinction between the two dimensions of the people allowed Du Bois to appeal to the polity amid exclusion—to call his fellows, in Hughes’s language from the epigraph, to “the land that never has been yet”—even as the certainty of success was denied to him.

To make good on this argument, the article unfolds in three parts. In the first section, I lay out the two dimensions of the people and the *normative* presupposition it implies. I focus on the transformative possibility the idea of the people makes possible in a democratic society. And I maintain, in agreement with recent scholarship (Canovan 2005; Frank 2010; Yack

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1996), that there exists an internal dynamic at the core of the idea of the people that undermines determinant descriptions of who constitute the civic “we” of political life. The meaning of democracy’s legitimacy—a meaning Du Bois relies on by virtue of his appeal—resides in its “constitutive futurity, in [the people] remaining forever a people that is not . . . yet,” thus opening up a space of contestation for reimagining the boundaries of political society (Frank 2010, 182). Understanding this forces me to move beyond current scholarship to elucidate mechanisms through which Du Bois articulates these reimaginings to induce in his audience a desire to make those dreams a reality.

In the second and third sections I explore these mechanisms through a reading of *Souls*. I argue that as a work of political theory, *Souls* draws a connection between rhetoric (i.e., a mode of speaking and writing that seeks to persuade one’s audience), on the one hand, and emotional states such as sympathy and shame, on the other, to close the gap between the descriptive people and its aspirational counterpart. By emphasizing rhetoric, I mean that *Souls* attempts to craft a common horizon for author and reader from which shared emotional judgments regarding racial inequality might be reached. For Du Bois, this common horizon is not merely the result of a fortuitous union, but emanates from a shared political identity that can, in turn, be used to guide the responses of the community and its inhabitants as to the justice or injustice of the judgments they make and the actions they take.

The theme of rhetoric, its political character, and its relationship to emotional states has received scant attention in the literature on *Souls*. To be sure, I agree with, and in some instances reiterate, the importance Arnold Rampersad (1976, chap. 2) attaches to Du Bois’s training in rhetoric, especially while a student in residence at Harvard University between 1888 and 1892.¹ Nonetheless, my argument goes beyond his insights by stressing the politically transformative possibilities Du Bois accords rhetoric in influencing the character of white Americans. The theme of rhetoric has also gone unnoticed by those otherwise interested in the political vision of the text (e.g., Balfour 2011; Gooding-Williams 2009; Marable 1986; Posnock 1996; Reed 1997; Wolfenstein 2007; Zamir 1995).

My aim is to correct this picture, and in doing so to elucidate how Du Bois enacts the relationship between rhetoric and emotional states, *revealing the democratic character of his approach*. On my view, the art of rhetoric and the political aspiration of the text are constitutively tied together as part of a single desire to enrich the judgment of the reader regarding the plight of African-Americans. To come to appreciate this, I follow Du Bois back from his 1926 essay “Criteria of Negro Art” to his 1903 work *Souls*, where I find the key to understanding the rhetorical character of the latter: “all art is propaganda and ever must be” ([1926] 1996d, 1000). Propaganda here refers to a mode of

persuading the community that neither panders nor manipulates, but enlists the reflective agency of the reader. This understanding of propaganda formalizes Du Bois’s earlier training in rhetoric.

More significantly, Du Bois’s enlistment of his audiences’ judgment seeks to forge a partnership of discovery and transformation that honors their equal capacity for self and collective transformation, leaving his audience in a position of self-possession that is the hallmark of both reflective agency and democratic engagement. Persuasion that aspires to reach into the character of the self depends on one’s interlocutor finally saying, “I am persuaded.” Those who are concerned with Du Bois’s political philosophy and who emphasize the elitist dimension of his thinking (e.g., Gooding-Williams 2009, chap. 1; Reed 1997, chap. 5) miss altogether the democratic quality of rhetoric this article emphasizes. Without diminishing the vexing issue of a vanguard politics in Du Bois’s work, attending to rhetoric shows that he nonetheless believes that the rhetorician who claims to speak on behalf of the people in a democratic society must always stand before them for critical appraisal. A democratic rhetoric always attempts to combine two different, but compatible modes of politics in a way that is obscured by overstating the elite vision of leadership in Du Bois’s philosophy—namely, a form of politics engaged in showing the way (e.g., the rhetorical posture of speaking to), and a form of politics nonetheless dependent on those to whom one speaks for assessing, revising, and approving the way forward. Rhetoric thus embodies the inescapable features of democratic life—of ruling and being ruled. Although this essay is largely concerned with Du Bois, in the conclusion I maintain that the analysis offered here gives a perspective from which to answer the much larger question with which I began.

One final note should be made before I turn to the argument. For reasons of both scope and economy, I do not pursue as independent claims Du Bois’s rhetorical engagement with his African-American audience or the corresponding emotion(s) that he seeks to elicit in them, and I will only reference his engagement with his African-American audience to the extent that it maps onto the preceding arguments, especially where it reveals Du Bois’s complex understanding of *peoplehood* and the democratic character of persuasion. This should not lead the reader to believe that *Souls* is written primarily for a white audience—it is not. After all, Du Bois does argue in *Souls* for a vision of racial respect tethered to equality among the races. He therefore parts ways from that variant of black nationalism that demonized white Americans (cf. Moses 1978, chaps. 1 and 2; Walker [1829] 2000). But precisely for this reason, Du Bois’s rhetorical engagement with his white audience, attempting to elicit sympathy and shame in the hope of expanding the boundaries of the American polity, is all the more interesting. He never retreats from engaging his white readers in an effort to move them to a position of moral rectitude, even in the still dangerous period for African-Americans of the early twentieth century. This is because his rhetorical stance emerges from a belief that democracy’s logic of

¹ To my knowledge, Rampersad’s text is the only one that explicitly takes up the importance of rhetoric to Du Bois.

legitimacy is fundamentally tied to a vision of contestation over who constitute the people.

DESCRIPTION AND ASPIRATION: ON THE POLITICAL FORCE OF THE PEOPLE

Since its modern incarnation in the eighteenth century, the idea of the people has worked to dissolve the line of demarcation between rulers and ruled that previously defined monarchical and aristocratic regimes. For if rulers and ruled shared a political identity—that is, were members of one and the same citizenry, equal before the law—the power held by the former was merely fiduciary in quality and so meant the latter were never alienated once and for all from the source of political authority. The idea of the people served as the solution to the problem that modern representative government posed to the status of the minority, who might otherwise be at the mercy of a tyrannical majority. The people, understood as the ultimate source for conferring legitimacy, rendered the positions of power holders changeable. But the changeable character of power holders rested on a deeper descriptive designation—it referred to those with the rights and privileges of citizenship, enshrined in a constitutional structure and often on visible display during electoral cycles.

The idea of the people was also an aspirational category that formed the morally appealing core of democracy and extended beyond electoral politics. This idea called to mind an “imagined community” (Anderson [1983] 2006) or “dream country” (Rorty 1998) to which political reformers appealed, and in which they redescribed the boundaries of the polity. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially, women and African-Americans exploited this category. Both groups articulated their grievances to the public in the form of public addresses, treatises, and literary texts in spite of having no legal standing whatsoever (cf. Bennett 2005, chap. 1; Lee 2005, 1–14; Smith 1999, pts. II–III). The divergence between the people as they *were* and as reformers longed for them *to be* created a space for potentially mending fractures at the core of the polity, a space in which the political and ethical standing of the excluded might subsequently be affirmed.

But the term “the people” contains an important ambiguity, obscured in part by the definite article, that requires elucidation to make the full force of its aspirational dimension understood. The aspirational view of the people is often (although not exclusively) used to destabilize reified conceptions of those who constitute the politically active “we” of democracy, and this marks its emancipatory potential. Its meaning derives less from the lower classes of the polity that would be associated with the plebian class of Rome, and rather stems from (also owing to Rome) a view of the people or *populus* as signifying “the polity as a whole” (Canovan 2005, 12; cf. Lintott 1992, 42–43; Yack 2001, 521–22). This view opened an important distinction (even if linguistically hidden) between the ruling people at any given time and the constituent sovereign people, who

could never fully be absorbed into the ruling body. Hence James Wilson, an important eighteenth-century American spokesperson for this view, explained that the people embody “a power paramount to every constitution, inalienable in its nature, and *indefinite in its extent*” (Wilson [1787] 1911, 142, emphasis added; cf. Frank 2010, 12). The people as constituent sovereign may well seem mysterious, but it is this view that has played an “indispensable role in liberal democratic politics” (Yack 2001, 522; cf. Frank 2010, chap. 1; Morone [1990] 1998, 55), fueling populist movements in the name of oppressed colonists who would become Americans and, more importantly for our purposes, women and African-Americans. It created space for both contesting and redescribing the ruling or descriptive people anew. And these redescriptions derived content from the aspirations of those excluded. Yet even this derivation could never exhaust aspirations that had yet to be articulated.

The account of the aspirational view of the people sets it apart from narrow conceptualizations of the unitary polis—conceptualizations that were often at work in the American context (Horsman 1981, 15–22; Smith 1997, 72–77). One need only think, to take one example, of Thomas Jefferson’s emphasis on the Anglo-Saxon heritage of the American polity ([1774] 2006a, 3–17), his emphasis on the “one people” in the Declaration ([1776] 2006b, 23), and his robust defense of confining women to the domain of domestic affairs (1787] 2006c, 159–60), all of which he believed were essential for political stability. For Jefferson, the similitude of race and culture and the restriction of women to the private sphere sustained the integrity of the polity. Even as Jefferson articulated a robust argument against blind deference to constitutional form and located the legitimacy of democracy in the contestatory present and open future (much in keeping with the aspirational view), this conceptual outlook was endangered by an emphasis on homogeneity and patriarchy shared by him and those who historically followed in his place.²

Bernard Yack, Margaret Canovan, and Jason Frank are thus correct to discern in what I am calling the

² Such arguments do not all explicitly advance the ideological position of homogeneity, even as these claims rely on the position of the Founders. Other arguments, as in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) or *United States v. Verdugo-Urquidez* (1990), focus on the language of “the people” as referenced in the Constitution to limit the boundaries of inclusion. In both cases, the issue turns on whether those of African ancestry (e.g., *Dred Scott*) or a citizen of Mexico (e.g., *Verdugo-Urquidez*) fall into the category of “the people” per the Constitution. Chief Justice Taney in the earlier case and Chief Justice Rehnquist in the later overlap in their belief that “the people” refer to a limited class of persons as understood by the Founders. For Chief Justice Taney, the “question before us is, whether the class of persons described in the plea in abatement compose a portion of this people, and are constituent members of this sovereignty? We think they are not” (*Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U. S. 404 [1857]). For Chief Justice Rehnquist, “the people” as understood by the Framers does not refer to all members who live in the United States, but rather to a “class of persons who are part of a national community or who have otherwise developed sufficient connection with this country to be considered part of that community” (*United States v. Verdugo-Urquidez*, 494 U.S. 265 [1990]). For defenses of patriarchy that draw on the Founders see Kann (1999, chap. 7).

aspirational view of the people a break with a unitary understanding of political life. And thinkers such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Du Bois, and Martin Luther King Jr., among others, sought in various ways to hold onto the incipient cosmopolitanism of Jefferson and Wilson, even as they simultaneously challenged the limited vision of Jefferson's particular aspiration. Hence Du Bois's classic description in *Souls* of "double-consciousness" or the fractured identity of black Americans as a result of racial exclusion. As he writes in response, "the American Negro . . . wishes neither of the older selves to be lost" in merging American and African identities. "He would not," Du Bois continues, "Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply *wishes* to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American" ([1903a] 1986, 365, emphasis added).

I need to parse the passage with great care. To be sure, it should give one pause, for the language of "Negro soul" and "Negro blood" seems to partake of nineteenth-century racialism, which posits the existence of heritable traits that allow groups of persons to be divided up into races (cf. Appiah 1992, chap. 2). In passages such as this, Du Bois sees races as symbolizing distinct *peoples*, each having "a message" to contribute to human civilization. But it is important to observe that Du Bois's racial expressivism (that is, the idea that there is a collective spirit inherent to races) is always tethered to a vision of equality among the races.³ In fact, and in contrast to nineteenth-century racialism, which was often tied to moral, cultural, and political hierarchy, Du Bois followed Herder's view that each race contains truths of life, and that no one race is superior to another (Zamir 1995, 105–7, 173–77). As he said several years earlier in his essay "The Conservation of the Races," each race "in its own way" creates "for civilization its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help to guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life for which we all long" ([1897] 1986, 819). Notice, then, that Du Bois's understanding of being "an American" is understood independent of a "white" racial identity. Hence the language of "wish" in the same sentence evokes the aspirational category, and gives it content in the form of a hybridized American polity.⁴

But Du Bois's political outlook is informed by his democratic commitments. The content he gives the aspirational category is itself subject to contestation, and

³ For a more extended argument on the ways in which certain variants of black nationalism entailed equality among the races see Valls (2010, 472–76).

⁴ As he notes in "The Conservation of the Races," if there are "substantial" disagreements of laws and religion between races, there will be "friction between different groups of people" ([1897] 1986, 821). However, he notes that barring such substantial disagreements, "there is no reason why, in the same country and on the same street, two or three great national ideals might not thrive and develop, that men of different races might not strive together for their race ideals as well, perhaps even better, than in isolation" (821–22, emphasis added).

never refers to one determinate way of proceeding. The point is important because it bears directly on the democratic quality of persuasion I address in the next section. Here, however, one might worry that reifying the content of the aspirational view ultimately runs afoul of the role of contestation otherwise central to it. One might also think with Reed (1997, chap. 5) and Gooding-Williams (2009, chap. 1) that Du Bois conceives of democratic politics as what the vanguard does, rather than as what citizens do collectively. One might conclude that Du Bois, as a member of the black intellectual and political vanguard, has a determinate understanding of black and American collective life that obstructs broad-based criticism.

This argument is overdrawn; it misses altogether that for Du Bois equality among the races does not lose sight of equality among persons, if democracy is to remain legitimate. In fact this belief fuels his claim in Chapter III of *Souls*, where he discusses the role and legitimacy of leadership in the context of democracy, and the closely allied text of 1920, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. In the first of these works Du Bois argues that

hushing of the criticism of honest opponents [over the future of blacks in America] is a dangerous thing. . . . Honest and earnest criticism from those whose interests are most nearly touched,—criticism of writers by readers, of government by those governed, of leaders by those led,—*this is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of modern society.* ([1903] 1986b, 395, emphasis added)

For Du Bois contestation is at the core of democracy. And because Du Bois does not distinguish between interests of elites and interests of the masses, he must be understood to mean earnest criticism from all those whose interests are affected, whether elites or not. As he says in *Darkwater*, "Inevitably the choice of rulers must fall on electors" ([1920] 1999, 83). This is because equality among persons, for Du Bois, entails that they do not blindly defer to the judgment of their fellows, but subject (and are entitled to subject) those judgments to critical appraisal. The reason for this is simple: "In the last analysis only the sufferer knows his sufferings" (83).

So even as Du Bois subscribes to a cultural message internal to the collective spirit of *a people*, he does not allow this belief to overdetermine political arguments regarding the content of racial expressivism or how it ought to square with a hybridized view of the American polity. This point stands alongside the fact that Du Bois deliberately contributes his own judgments on the matter of racial inequality, racial uplift, and the future of America for assessment by his black and white audience. The practice of submitting his own judgment for reflective assessment by his audience, as I will suggest in the next section, embodies the democratic quality of persuasion, and affirms the role of contestation central to the aspirational view of the people.

I shall have an occasion to come back to the democratic quality of rhetoric, but for the moment all of this indicates that the presupposition of the people entails

a particular view of democratic legitimacy, and as a result, the possibility of transforming the polity. Here one might think of Stanton's plea before the New York State Legislature in the 1850s to recognize and honor the equal standing of women ([1854] 2007a, 155–79; cf. [1860] 2007b, 170–79; [1878] 2007c, 219–34). One might consider, for instance, King's classic 1963, "I Have a Dream" speech, whose central metaphor calls America to a vision of itself not yet actualized ([1963] 1986, 217–22). Most pertinently, one might recall Du Bois's idea of the descriptive people as a way to alert them to their excluded part: "Actively *we* have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of the nation,—we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless *people* to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse" ([1903] 1986b, 545, emphasis added). The formulation is striking because it stages a contrast between the black "we," and the ruling "people" from which the "we" is excluded. In effect, Du Bois not only linguistically marks the point of exclusion (based, as it was, on white supremacy) but also projects a vision of the nation (now hybridized) that might be born anew—a nation that does not despise, in his language, "Justice, Mercy, and Truth."

How do we make sense of the orientation on display by these thinkers? What must be understood here is that Stanton, Du Bois, and King are connected by their shared belief that democracy's logic of legitimacy dissolves the connection between political power on one hand, and the particular people who claim exclusive possession of that power on the other. Because the people can never be represented at any given time in their totality via the binding acts of the polity, legitimacy rests on a critical reflexivity—what makes dreaming (in King's case) or wishing (in Du Bois's) possible. This is a presupposition of their engagement. In Canovan's words, the gap between description and aspiration "left room for appeals to the people against the people's government," and this appeal process necessarily extended beyond voting itself (Canovan 2005, 29). The appeal process, as Frank writes, reveals a "people that are productively never at one with themselves," much in keeping with Du Bois's thinking (Frank 2010, 8, cf. 18, 210). Pleading with members of the American polity and eliciting their judgment implies at least one firm belief among those with and without political and ethical standing—namely, who the people are at one time need not exhaust who they may yet become. Their actions (as when Stanton stood before a legislative body in which she had no political standing or when Du Bois spoke in the name of an American people not yet realized) suggest that the political force of the people follows from the iterative process of contestation it creates, but can never finally settle. In keeping with his view of the central role of contestation and criticism in *Souls*, Du Bois explains in 1920 that the "foundation of the argument for democracy" is that "the argument must be continually *restated* and emphasized" ([1920] 1999, 82, emphasis added; cf. Bromell 2011, 150). The power of the people as a political category thus derived from

a persistent indeterminacy that allowed for an ongoing restatement, resulting in contestation over who is a member of the polity.

The space of contestation brings into view an important fact about the politically dispossessed, and signals the importance of Du Bois's view of democratic development. First, the need to occupy this space points to the asymmetries in power—that is, the legal deficiencies of a society that claims to be well ordered. And this is, in the first instance, primarily about one's *political standing* as a rights-bearing member of the polity. Second, and crucially, these deficiencies cannot exclusively refer to a system of abstract rights that attach to persons by virtue of their political standing, because the problem runs deeper. The deficiencies point to the larger societal framework of valuation in which persons are located. "He simply wishes," writes Du Bois, "to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" ([1903] 1986b, 365). This, in the second instance, is about the *ethical life* of the community to which one belongs and is not reducible to the rights that citizens possess. Indeed, the passage quoted is located in the first chapter of *Souls*, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," where Du Bois ([1903] 1986b) signals by virtue of the title his concern with the interior life of African-Americans and how it is adversely affected by those who look on them "in amused contempt and pity" (364). I refer to the political-ethical character of this space to make the basic point about *Souls*: Du Bois attempts to address and to make the reader sensitive to the experiential quality of exclusion in its multiple dimensions—from African-Americans' interactions with public agents and agencies to their mundane and private transactions with their fellows, and finally, to their self-understanding.⁵ Du Bois's democratic vision aspires to effect a transformation at the deepest levels of the self, so that democracy becomes, in John Dewey's ([1939] 1985, 370) language, "a way of life."

An important feature of the descriptive and aspirational dimensions of the people should be considered, because it points to the transformative bent of *Souls*. This relates to how Du Bois's transcendent ethical vision is to be understood. Does the content of the ethical vision, in Jürgen Habermas's (2001) language, refer to an "untapped normative substance of the system of rights laid down in the original document of the constitution?" (774). Or does it entail a deeper transformation, whose aim is to reshape the normative character of the polity itself?

Habermas's (2001) language emerges in the context of addressing the paradox of founding at the heart of

⁵ Note the multiple levels on which Du Bois articulates what is required for African-Americans to enjoy equality: "The training of schools we need to-day more than ever,—the training of deft hands, quick eyes and ears, and above all the broader, deeper, higher culture of gifted minds and pure hearts. The power of the ballot we need in sheer self-defense,—else what shall save us from a second slavery? Freedom, too, the long-sought, we still seek,—the freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire" ([1903] 1986b, 370).

democratic theory, the belief that a constitutional assembly, for instance, “cannot itself vouch for the legitimacy of the rules according to which it was constituted” (774). I am less interested in the paradox itself and more concerned with the solution Habermas offers and what this proposal means for understanding Du Bois. It is worth citing Habermas (2001) at length, to put on full display the philosophical slippage at the core of his thinking:

I prefer not to meet this objection [that is, the paradox of founding] by recourse to the transparent objectivity of ultimate moral insights that are supposed to bring the regress to a halt. Rather than appeal to moral realism . . . I propose that we understand the regress itself as the understandable expression of the future-oriented character, or openness, of the democratic constitution. . . . All the later generations have the task of actualizing the still-untapped normative substance of the system of rights laid down in the original document of the constitution. . . . To be sure, this fallible continuation of the founding event can break out of the circle of a polity’s groundless discursive self-constitution only if this process . . . can be understood in the long run as a self-correcting learning process. (774)

Observe that Habermas opens the passage by rejecting moral realism, but then concludes by interpreting the transcendent ethical vision of later generations as actualizing a latent, but untapped normative substance. On his view, reformers merely bring what is there, at a primitive level, to fruition. As such, the learning process to which Habermas refers denotes the acquisition of commitments that are implicit, but the learning process does not shape or give life to the ethical vision. This most certainly sounds like the position of a moral realist. Any doubts regarding my reading can be allayed by attending to the line of consistency that Habermas (2001) draws through history, uniting both constitutional founders and political reformers: “All participants must be able to recognize the project as *the same* throughout history and to judge it from *the same perspective*” (775; emphasis added).

But this does not seem right. Notice that this account muddles the descriptive and aspirational dimensions of the people, and, in Du Bois’s case, Habermas’s account is unable to confront the ethical disparity at the core of the American polity. What, for instance, would it mean for Du Bois to “start with the same standards as the founders” or to judge the American project from “the same perspective”? After all, it was precisely the normative basis of social life that Du Bois hoped to redescribe. The aim was to make the polity more inclusive both with respect to the juridical standing of African-Americans, and with respect to their social but nonpolitical position in the eyes of their white counterparts. Here I recall the aim of the first chapter of *Souls*, where democracy is viewed not as a system of cooperation among rights holders, but as a way of life in which those rights are sustained and ennobled. As a result, one cannot draw a line of historical consistency that ties the descriptive and aspirational views of the people together without denying that the political-ethical world Du Bois envisioned was radically different from the

one on offer by the Founders.⁶ This difference makes it clear that the battle was about the meaning of who constituted the “we” of the nation.

It seems more accurate to say that Du Bois begins with a normative horizon (i.e., the aspirational view of the people) that is developmentally open to expanding the cognitive-affective capacities human beings possess. In fact, these capacities—including the capacities for sympathy and shame—and their cultivation are precisely what Du Bois believes is fundamental in the fight against political and ethical inequities in the United States. This is why Du Bois openly describes *Souls* as a work concerned with democratic development. And this raises the all-important issue of how to effectively bridge the divide between the people as fact and the people as ideal as it relates to racial politics. Du Bois deliberately reflects on and uses the art of persuasion to address this issue. To this theme, and the details of *Souls*, I must now turn.

BETWEEN DESCRIPTION AND ASPIRATION: THE TURN TO RHETORIC

Published in 1903, *The Souls of Black Folk* is a collection of 14 essays, some of which are based on pieces previously published. Despite the distinct methodological approaches informing the essays, which give the book an uneven character of never wholly being philosophy, history, sociology or literature, Du Bois ([1904] 1996) is clear that there is “a unity to the book, not simply the general unity of the larger topic, but a unity of purpose in the distinctively subjective note that runs in each essay” (34). The unity consists in a critical and courageous effort to dramatize the problem of racial inequality, the institutional and psychological motivations for sustaining the second-class status of African-Americans, and its impact on those who live behind

⁶ In his “Popular Sovereignty as Procedure” of 1988, an essay that also appeared in the Appendix to his 1996 translated book *Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Habermas appears to be sensitive to this criticism ([1988] 1996, 463–91). There he writes of the French and American revolutions, “The revolutionary consciousness was expressed in the conviction that a new beginning could be made. This reflected a change in historical consciousness. Drawn together into a single process, world history became the abstract system of reference for a future-oriented action *considered capable of uncoupling the present from the past*. In the background lay the experience of a break with tradition: The threshold to dealing reflexively with cultural transmissions and social institutions was crossed” (467, emphasis added). He continues in his explanation of the normative thrust of the revolution: “The revolutionary project overshoots the revolution itself: It eludes the revolution’s own concepts. . . . It is only as a historical project that constitutional democracy points beyond its legal character to a normative meaning—a force at once explosive and formative” (471). But if there is a break with the past such that its concepts do not overdetermine the present, it is not clear to me what Habermas means to say in the 2001 essay. He cannot retreat to the procedural status of rights that inform that account, because it is precisely this description that is the problem. He must, instead, appeal to an account of the people that is itself discontinuous with the past, and never fully exhausted by the present in which contestation emerges. For it is here that we find the connection between the political and ethical standing of persons. Either he has changed his mind or his language betrays him. The first is a mistaken move, for reasons that I have already discussed, and the second is terribly unfortunate.

the veil, including Du Bois himself. As David Levering Lewis convincingly shows, the book was received with an intensity to match the passion with which Du Bois composed his text:

The Souls of Black Folk went into its third printing in June of its first year. By October 1903, [A. C.] McClurg [and Company] was selling about two hundred copies weekly of a second edition. . . . Five years after publication, 9,595 books had been sold. For a controversial work about African-Americans by an African-American, such sales were exceptional, and, by any measure, the book enjoyed an impressive run. (Lewis 1993, 226)

If the idea of “the people” so central to democratic life opens up space for evocative appeals for reimagining and reconstituting the polity, then *Souls* gives that reconstitution direction. In short, it answers the following question: How do you move the people so that they will embrace an expanded view of themselves? In reading *Souls* as a response to this question, I argue for seeing the text as working in the domain of rhetoric. In working in this domain, *Souls* honors the judgment of the reader, leaving his or her reflective agency intact.

The turn to rhetoric has received renewed attention by political theorists concerned to explore the subtleties of deliberation. As Garsten (2006, 9) notes, “When speakers or writers try to persuade us of something, they are confronting us with a particular situation in speech. . . . [T]hey are . . . drawing upon and reorganizing our existing patterns of thought and emotion—they are appealing to our capacity for judgment.” This formulation might easily be read as describing Du Bois’s orientation as well, encouraging his readers from the outset of *Souls* to study his words with him so that they may arrive at shared judgments regarding the plight of African-Americans. Attesting to the role of rhetoric in *Souls*, Rampersad (1976, 36) explains, “For the first fifty years and more of his life [Du Bois] showed the mark of classical principles of rhetoric. . . . *The Souls of Black Folk* is overwhelming evidence” of this fact.

This should not be surprising, given Du Bois’s training as a graduate student at Harvard University under the instruction of English professor Barrett Wendell (Du Bois [1940] 1986e, 581–82; cf. Rampersad 1976, 35–38).⁷ The central text for the course Du Bois took with Wendell was *The Principles of Rhetoric and Their Application* (1878), written by Adams Sherman Hill, the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard (1876–1904). Writing wholly in the Aristotelian and Ciceronian school of thinking, Hill (1878) states the purpose of rhetoric from the outset of his work: Rhetoric “uses knowledge, not as knowledge, but as power” (iii; cf. chap. V). One of the important aims rhetoric serves, in good classical fashion, is political and ethical development (Aristotle 2007, 1.2; Cicero 2001, 2.35; cf. Allen 2004, chap. 10; Garsten 2006, chaps. 4, 5). This point was not lost on Du Bois.

⁷ For an outline of some of Du Bois’s course work see ([1887] 1985, 5–6).

But if Rampersad notes Du Bois’s training, he seems unconcerned with rhetoric as power, as containing the possibility for political and ethical transformation, and with the particular formalized expression of it in *Souls*. Unfortunately, this goes unanalyzed by those interested in the political character of the work, all of whom miss the opportunity to discern an egalitarian strain in the book’s structure and mode of presentation. Yet the power of *Souls* is bound up with its aspiration to persuade through an appeal to affirmative and negative emotional states, namely, sympathy and shame. Indeed, it is precisely Du Bois’s quest to evoke in the reader sympathy for the suffering of black folks and shame in being complicit in their suffering that is the key to involving the judgments of his white counterparts. Sympathy and shame potentially enrich the perceptual capacity of Americans, helping them see, feel, and respond to the world and their place therein in the appropriate way. *Souls* depends on the ability of readers to use their independent judgment, and to this extent it respects their equal capacity for critical appraisal.

I begin by defending the rhetorical character of *Souls* through Du Bois’s 1926 claim that all “art is propaganda, and ever must be”—that is, Du Bois’s rearticulated pronouncement of Hill’s earlier description of rhetoric. As Du Bois ([1940] 1986e) explains in *Dusk of Dawn*, reflecting on the period in which *Souls* was composed, “My attention from the first was focused on democracy and *democratic development* and upon the problem of the admission of my people into the freedom of democracy” (574, emphasis added). I will address in the next section the emotional states the rhetoric of the text works to activate.

In “Criteria of Negro Art,” an essay ostensibly directed to embolden black artists against the humiliating and exclusionary standards imposed on them by white America, Du Bois ([1926] 1986d) defends his use and understanding of art as propaganda: “I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy” (1000). In isolation the first of these sentences might well strike the reader as odd, especially for those who see in propaganda the opportunity to manipulate and deceive the public. And yet the passage is prefaced by Du Bois’s explicit explanation that artists are conveyers of moral and political truth, in possession of tools for bringing truth into view for their fellows:

First of all, he has used the truth—not for the sake of truth . . . but . . . as the one great vehicle of universal understanding. Again artists have used goodness—goodness in all its aspects of justice, honor, and right—not for sake of an ethical sanction but as the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest. (1000)

When Du Bois weds truth and goodness to the work of the artist and art to propaganda, he means for the reader to understand art as a vehicle for expanding the horizons of the recipient. The recipient is brought to a wider view of the world and his or her place in

it than is currently on offer. This is why Du Bois encourages black artists to resist the need to satisfy their white audiences' desire for "literary and pictorial racial prejudgment[s] which deliberately distorts truth and justice, as far as colored races are concerned" (1001).

This description of art as a vehicle for persuasion is motivated by the wider context in which artists are located. But Du Bois is not simply providing direction to would-be artists; rather, he means to signal something about his own method as a writer. Importantly, Du Bois treats art as a much wider category to include his written engagements with the public, and not simply those expressed by his works of fiction. As such, he draws *Souls* into the orbit of propaganda. This move is consistent with Hill's (1878, iii) description of rhetoric as "the art to the principles of which, consciously or unconsciously, a good writer or speaker must conform." *Souls* is thus the product of an artist of letters and as such exemplifies the aims stipulated decades later in "Criteria."

As an artist of letters—that is, a rhetorician—Du Bois employs propaganda in an effort to provide access for African-Americans to "love and enjoy," and this consciously informs his work. Or to put it differently, *Souls* is an attempt to persuade his white counterparts to embrace an alternative view of America. In his view, the aim is to articulate a vision not simply of what the "world could be if it were really a beautiful world," but of a world to be enjoyed by "all of America" (Du Bois [1926] 1986d, 994). For this reason, William Ferris (1913) writes of *Souls*, "Du Bois is a literary artist who can clothe his thought in such forms of poetic beauty that we are captivated by the opulent splendor and richness of his diction, *while our souls are being stirred by his burning eloquence*" (18, emphasis added). One should read the use of "souls" in this passage by Ferris as referring to the moral and emotional nature of human beings that Du Bois is seeking to transform, which is consistent with the rhetorical tradition. Hence *Souls* pleads with a "headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse" ([1903] 1986b, 545). Du Bois thus attends to the "souls" of black folk—both the work they may yet contribute and the deprivation they experience—in order to reveal and redirect the "souls" of white folk.

But the artist "becomes the apostle of truth and right not by choice but by inner and outer compulsion" (Du Bois [1926] 1986d, 1000). By inner compulsion Du Bois seems to have in mind a desire to proffer grander visions of life—that is, to give content to the image of what the people may yet become. And the artist is also moved by outer compulsion because those visions of life stand in tension with and seek to address the world currently on display. Inner and outer compulsion are thus in a dynamic and creative relationship that brings into view the experiential quality of black life that is in need of a response. And Du Bois uses such experiences as a way to guide the moral and emotional nature of his fellows.

In fact, the aim of rhetoric is to take the reader to the experiential source from which appropriate emotions and judgments spring. The dynamic relationship

between inner and outer compulsion that Du Bois describes in "Criteria" exemplifies and enacts Hill's claim: "We are made to feel by being taken to the sources of feeling" (1878, 239). This approach fuels the "storied" or "narrativized" structure of *Souls*, the way many of its chapters turn on the detailed depictions of dreams unrealized (chaps. II, IV, XII, and XIII), communities destroyed (chaps. IV and IX), and lives lost (chaps. XI and XIII). "Let me on the coming pages," Du Bois says at the conclusion of chapter one of *Souls*, "tell again in many ways, with loving emphasis and deeper detail, that men may listen to the striving in the souls of black folk" ([1903] 1986b, 371). To listen, for Du Bois, means that the audience will actively seek to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate what is being heard. The aim is to elicit an emotional response in the reader that might generate a reasoned desire to alleviate the condition of African-Americans and to expand the political-ethical imagination of the broader citizenry. For Du Bois, then, it is the repulsive conditions African-Americans endure under the weight of Jim Crow that serve as the backdrop for his reflections—a motivating force that infuses and transfigures his efforts to move his readers to a position of moral rectitude. This much he suggests in "Criteria": "I am one who tells the truth and exposes evil and seeks with Beauty and for Beauty to set the world right" ([1926] 1986d, 995). Of course Du Bois is sensitive to a view of the artist whose vision of beauty stands above and is unconditioned by the truth of public atrocities. But Du Bois is committed to the proposition that "here and now and in the world in which I work they [beauty and the truth of life] are for me unseparated and inseparable" ([1926] 1986d, 995).

In describing art as propaganda, Du Bois is not merely politicizing aesthetics, but more importantly aestheticizing politics. As to the first, he clearly sees a transformative role for art, broadly understood. He opens "Criteria" by saying "the thing [i.e., art] that we are talking about tonight is part of the great fight we are carrying on." And he delivered this statement, like the wider essay, at the Chicago conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Du Bois most certainly sees himself as engaging in this fight. Although it may seem odd that Du Bois emphasizes art rather than political action properly speaking, this understates the fact that he sees art as a form of political action that must stand alongside traditional modes of protest in a world of asymmetrical power relations. Recounting his transition from relying exclusively on scientific rationality in addressing racial inequality, Du Bois explains, "The black world must fight for freedom. It must fight with the weapons of Truth, with the sword of the intrepid, uncompromising Spirit, with organization in *boycott, propaganda and mob frenzy*" ([1940] 1986e, 557, emphasis added).

In attributing the aestheticization of politics to Du Bois one should observe that he sees this as a method not only for African-Americans to expand their self-description and the judgment of their white counterparts, but also as a vehicle for building themselves "up into that wide judgment" that is the key to freedom ([1926] 1986d, 1001). For the role of the black artist

generally, and the black rhetorician in letters particularly, is not simply to ask the question “what is a Negro anyhow?” but to provide a more capacious answer (1001). This is what Du Bois refers to as African-Americans compelling “recognition” (1002).

Notice that these two claims—politicizing aesthetics and aestheticizing politics—serve as bookends for the essay. The first keeps in view the problem of racial injustice that orients Du Bois as a literary artist, whereas the second indicates that the content of his rhetoric must aim at expanding his white counterparts’ capacity for judgment. Building blacks up into that judgment requires, as Du Bois attempted decades earlier in *Souls*, a dramatization of their struggles—a jarring presentation of those who live behind the veil, to generate sympathy for their plight and shame in those who were complicit in and unresponsive to their struggles.

Recall Du Bois’s explicit call to widen the judgment of the audience in “Criteria,” and my earlier gloss on his use of the word “listen” in the conclusion of the first chapter of *Souls*. The first of these helps in understanding what he intends by the second. He does not intend readers to alienate their judgment to his authority—that is, to be dominated; rather, he asks readers to put the capacity for judgment to work, including its ability to be expanded. Rhetoricians seek to stir the souls of those whom they engage so that they may arrive (and see themselves as participating in that arrival) at a truth hitherto unavailable. Properly conceived, Du Bois allows readers to retain their reflective agency and contribute to the participatory and binding quality essential to democratic life.

It is not completely clear, one might think, how the rhetoric of *Souls* can hope to generate the kind of deep transformation Du Bois imagines that affirms rather than stifles reflective agency. Or to put it in the form of a question: What does it mean for Du Bois’s audience to see themselves as participating in the arrival of a truth hitherto unavailable? After all, Hill describes rhetoric as a kind of power, and Du Bois describes it as propaganda. All of this seems to point to manipulation; and certainly that does not involve affirming the reflective agency of the recipient, and it most certainly does not support a democratic reading of Du Bois’s use of rhetoric. Why not, one might ask, interpret propaganda more straightforwardly and subsequently read *Souls* as a book simply engaged in manipulation, even if for good ends? And if *Souls* is read as simply engaged in manipulation, even if for good ends, why not simply attribute to Du Bois a view of politics as what some—namely, elite actors—do, rather than what we all do in concert?

The issue can be addressed by comparing persuasion and manipulation. When we manipulate someone we typically move him or her to a belief or action that is inconsistent with the reason for which he or she hold that belief or engage in that action. As a result, there is a disconnect between the belief and the reason for holding that belief, leading to the conclusion that the belief in question, properly speaking, is not the person’s own. To manipulate a person in this respect is to dominate him or her clandestinely—to substitute

the manipulator’s judgment and will for the person’s own and elicit his or her cooperation in securing the manipulator’s advantage. Manipulation thus violates what one might call an *identifiability condition*: Persons who are manipulated cannot recognize themselves in the belief they have now come to hold. And it is this violation that undermines one’s reflective agency.

But there is another view of rhetoric that does not necessarily fall prey to this conflation, which Aristotle defends in his book, *On Rhetoric*, and which was reiterated in Hill’s *Principles of Rhetoric*. The Aristotelian view of rhetoric has recently been reclaimed by Garsten and Danielle Allen for thinking about contemporary reflections on deliberative democracy (Allen 2004, chap. 10; Garsten 2006, chap. 4). Properly understood, rhetoric reflects the cooperative aspirations of democratic life, rather than the more tyrannical imposition of the rhetorician’s views. This is because the rhetorician hopes that the audience—those to whom he or she writes and speaks—will assent to the particular views in question as being their own, so that they comport their political and ethical lives in light of those views. Du Bois is no different. I follow Garsten, then, on this distinction between rhetoric as manipulation and rhetoric as persuasion largely (a) because I believe it is a division to which Du Bois was attentive, given his education and what he lays out in “Criteria,” and (b) because it helps to better understand how *Souls* can aspire to contribute to the political and ethical development of America. The latter, as he argues in “Criteria,” relates to cultivating the “wide judgment” he defines as the aim of the black rhetorician.

In contrast to manipulation, when one persuades someone to hold this or that belief or engage in this or that action, there is a sense of ownership on the part of the one on the receiving end of persuasion. This is why Du Bois deliberately uses “listen” to describe how the audience should orient themselves to his words. Having listened and read carefully, the person is able to say at the end, “I’m persuaded.” This matters profoundly if what one intends is for the person or community to be able to affirm, *on their own*, the new belief they hold. This is what one might refer to as the content of the wider judgment. As Hill explains of the role of persuasion, “Persuasion may go on long after the feelings have been reached; for it is necessary, not only that the feelings should take the right direction, but that they should take it with a will” (1878, 240). On this point Du Bois agrees. For although he rightly emphasizes the coercive force of the law in protecting African-Americans, he also argues that the law alone does not entail the kind of deep transformation at the level of character necessary for achieving racial equality.⁸ As he says elsewhere, the cure to racial injustice, if one were ever to be found, is not possible by “simply telling

⁸ In *Souls*, Du Bois attaches weight to both the law (see, for instance, his criticism of Booker T. Washington in chap. III, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others”) and a deeper exchange and engagement among whites and blacks for improving the standing of each in the eyes of the other (see, for example, chap. IX, “Of the Sons of Master and Man,” where he emphasizes the importance of genuine social contact).

people the truth”; rather it comes about by “inducing them to act on the truth” (cited in Lewis 1993, 226). To induce them to act on the truth is simply to have it reflectively emanate from their will.

As such, the statement “I’m persuaded” references the process of internal transformation by the auditor that aligns his or her belief with the rhetorician. This alignment indicates the active involvement of the auditor, and affirms a view of the persuader (in this case Du Bois) as a partner in bringing about the internal transformation. This is the point made in the preceding section, that Du Bois submits his views regarding both black life and the aspirational content of the people to the consideration of his readers. In contrast to Robert Stepto’s claim that the “rhetorical posture” of *Souls* expresses a “strategy for greater authorial control,” it does the opposite (Stepto [1979] 1991, 53; cf. Wolfenstein 2007, chap. 1). This much Du Bois affirms in his own assessment of *Souls* in 1904, explicitly invoking the judgment of the reader, which must stand alongside his own:

In thus giving up the usual impersonal and judicial attitude of the traditional author I have lost in authority but gained in vividness. The reader will, I am sure, feel in reading my words peculiar warrant for *setting his judgment against mine*, but at the same time some revelation of how the world looks to me cannot easily escape him. ([1904] 1996, 305, emphasis added)

The diminution of his authorial voice makes sense in the context of inviting his readers to be coparticipants in arriving at shared judgments regarding the plight of African-Americans. The statement “I’m persuaded” thus expresses something that individuals who are persuaded have reflectively done for themselves, which connects the belief they now hold with reasons for holding that belief. Hence Du Bois says in the first sentence of the “The Forethought,” gesturing to his lack of control over his readers’ judgment, “Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience *may* show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century” (359, emphasis added). As Aristotle explains of the rhetorician’s lack of control, it is the one on the receiving end of persuasion who “determines the objective of the speech” (2007, 3.1). Listeners are, in essence, responding to a situation in light of reasons to which they take *themselves* to be committed, even as the rhetorician helps them to see those reasons.

This brings into sharper relief the claim that understanding *Souls* through a rhetorical framework tilts its vision of leadership in a decidedly democratic direction, even among his African-American audience. There is symmetry here, then, between the importance of contestation over the meaning and content of the people, and the idea that Du Bois submits *Souls* to the judgment of his white as well as black audience. The point is noteworthy because it bears on the bona fides of Du Bois’s rhetorical stance as one that affirms the reflective agency of the reader. Throughout the work, Du Bois is terribly concerned to affirm the dig-

nity of African-Americans, even amid the horror of life. Here one might think of the story of Alexander Crummell, the fictional story of John Jones, and Du Bois’s understanding of the Sorrow Songs. Despite the impact of white supremacy, the first two of these chapters call attention to the excellence of singular individuals, who should serve as examples for African-Americans, whereas the last explicates the spiritual excellence of African-Americans in their collective capacity as members of the polity. These chapters can be read as attempting to counteract the negative influence of measuring oneself by a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.

But how should this point be interpreted in the context of the rhetorical framework thus far emphasized? How should Du Bois’s presentation of these chapters be read? The answer requires seeing that just as he invites the judgment of his white readers to be coparticipants in the arrival of a truth hitherto unavailable, he does the same for those who live behind the veil. In contrast to assessments that argue that Du Bois fundamentally affirms a vanguard vision of leadership that undermines the cooperative nature of democratic politics among all classes of persons (e.g., Reed 1997, chap. 5; cf. Gooding-Williams 2009, chap. 1), *Souls* struggles to render compatible two accounts of politics central to American political thought more broadly. This is already present in the reconciliation Du Bois forges between speaking of races descriptively as “peoples” and nonetheless offering (for consideration) a hybridized vision of an American identity. To be sure, as Reed and Gooding-Williams have suggested, *Souls* advances a vision of politics that focuses on ruling in the form of *giving direction*, but this stands alongside a vision of politics that affirms the capacity of citizens to reflect, amend, or reject the directions presented to them. Even in cases where Du Bois commends particular examples (e.g., Crummell and Jones), he does not undercut the role of evaluation. As Balfour notes, “Without offering general rules for political emulation, exemplarity engages the reader, eliciting judgment” (2011, 73). Hence the line cited earlier from Chapter III, where he emphasizes the importance of criticism of those who claim to speak on behalf of the people by “those whose interest are most nearly touched.” As with his engagement with his white audience, *Souls* is the textual embodiment of Du Bois standing before the judgment of the African-American community at the turn of the twentieth century, who will decide if he is worthy of serving as a leader. The idea of “standing before the judgment” of his audience follows from Du Bois’s rhetorical framework. And anyone who claims to speak on behalf of a democratic people must stand before their judgment.⁹

⁹ The reader should note that Du Bois struggles to render these two visions of politics compatible. He is not always successful, as his essay, “The Talented Tenth,” reveals ([1903] 1986c, 842–61). At the same time, we must grapple with the more egalitarian strain in *Souls* and its continuity with his 1920 essay, “Of the Ruling Men,” in *Darkwater*. In the 1920 work he makes clear, much in keeping with *Souls*, that regardless of the beliefs of leaders, “only the man

Now, we will have missed the point of involving the judgment of the reader, if we did not attend to the relational and binding character of what Du Bois is attempting. Recall that Du Bois says to his audience, study my words “with me.” Arriving early on, in “The Forethought” of *Souls*, this is an invitation that frames the book as a whole. But an invitation to what? At one level it is an invitation to assess. At another level, what he has in mind is that speaker and listener, author and reader may arrive at *shared* judgments regarding the subject matter and the claim it makes on them. In suggesting that they (speaker and listener) will arrive at shared judgments regarding the plight of blacks and the deficiencies of the polity, he also suggests that they will have tied themselves together in a community based on shared emotional dispositions regarding the subject matter.¹⁰ This shared horizon is made possible by the space of contestation the idea of the people makes possible, even as that space becomes the locus for persuading white Americans to embrace an expanded view of themselves and the political community. The relational and binding quality that *Souls* seeks to forge follows from making the reader a coparticipant in the arrival of a truth hitherto unavailable. Herein lies the force of Du Bois’s claim that *Souls* is a text concerned with democratic development. For this community based on shared emotional dispositions embodies conceptions of what one’s community is about and how one is related to those who are being dishonored. For Du Bois, crafting a political–ethical vision of the community gives direction to sympathy, but it also sets a standard meant to induce in the reader a sense of shame for having failed to honor it in practice.¹¹

CULTIVATING SYMPATHY AND ELICITING SHAME: ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE POSSIBILITY OF SOULS

Thus far I have argued that the idea of the people central to democracy creates space for evocative appeals—

himself, however humble, knows his own condition” ([1920] 1999, 83).

¹⁰ To reference a “community based on shared emotional dispositions” in no way implies that Du Bois means to refer to noncognitive states. Involving the judgment of the reader in an effort to arrive at an accurate picture of the plight of African-Americans, as Du Bois does, means that the emotional states that follow have an irreducible cognitive component. That is, they are in themselves judgments of value regarding the social world and the persons that inhabit it. In Robert Solomon’s words, “Emotion is not merely a feeling, as, say, pain is a feeling. It is also an outlook, an attitude, a reaching out to the world. . . . Thus, the conceptual geography of emotion suggests that the realm of emotion is neither the mind nor the world but both together: the world as experienced” (Solomon 2003, 195, 198; cf. Nussbaum 2001, chap. 1).

¹¹ In advancing this claim about sympathy and shame, I part ways from Virgil Aldrich (1939, 57–77) and Anthony O’Hear (1976, 73–86) and the emphasis they place on the nonsocial character of such emotions as these, especially shame. Precisely because sympathy and shame emerge from *shared standards*, we need not worry, as they do, that these emotional states result wholly because of what others think about us, rather than being the result of our reflective stance toward the persons for which we should feel sympathy or actions about which we should feel ashamed.

that is, makes room for moving the people so that they will embrace an expanded view of themselves. I have argued that Du Bois, as he calls for in “Criteria” and enacts in *Souls*, was engaged in just this project through his use of rhetoric, with its aim of involving the judgment of the reader. Enlisting the judgment of readers thus honors their reflective capacity and exemplifies the democratic character of this approach. *Souls* illustrates the normative work that goes on in the space between the descriptive and aspirational views of the people. In this section, I argue that the objects of Du Bois’s rhetoric—the keys, for him, to widening the judgment of the white reader—are the emotional states of sympathy and shame.

Why should one believe that the rhetoric of *Souls* aims to cultivate sympathy? The simple answer is that Du Bois often argues for the importance of sympathy throughout *Souls* for improving race relations. In chapter VI, “Of the Training of Black Men,” he writes: “It was not money these seething millions want, but love and sympathy, the pulse of hearts beating with red blood” ([1903] 1986b, 432). In yet another chapter, “Of Alexander Crummell,” Du Bois remarks,

He did his work,—he did it nobly and well; and yet I sorrow that here he worked alone, with so little human sympathy. His name today, in this broad land, means little, and comes to fifty million ears laden with no incense of memory or emulation. And herein lies the tragedy of the age: Not that men are poor,—all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked,—who is good? Not that men are ignorant,—what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men. (520)

Whenever Du Bois employs the language of sympathy, it conveys a sentiment that brings the life of another into view. So little human sympathy, referenced in line one of the passage, is dialectically tied to knowing so little of men. For Du Bois, then, sympathy means that one understands a person from his or her point of view (knowledge of the person) in a way that generates concern. As I read Du Bois, sympathy is meant to both *register* and *consider* the details of situations, so that one can respond appropriately to the condition of persons. But because sympathy involves understanding from the position of those with whom one sympathizes, the capacity for sympathy is constitutively connected to the ability to *re-present*—that is, imagine—in one’s mind what may potentially be neither directly seen nor felt, but is essential to enlarging one’s perspectives for decision-making.

The example of Crummell is telling in this regard. It is worth recounting some of the details of Crummell’s life to contextualize the point Du Bois makes. After the destruction, in 1835, of the Noyes Academy interracial college that Crummell attended, he enrolled and graduated from the Oneida Institute in Whitesboro, New York. As Du Bois writes of the destruction of the Academy, “But the godly farmers hitched ninety yoke of oxen to the abolition schoolhouse and dragged it into the middle of the swamp” (513–14). At the Oneida Institute, Crummell came to realize his calling, one that involved the spiritual uplift of African-Americans:

A vision of life came to the growing boy,—mystic, wonderful. He raised his head, stretched himself, breathed deep of the fresh new air. . . . He heard the hateful clank of their chains, he felt them cringe and grovel, and there rose within him a protest and a prophecy. And he girded himself to walk down the world.

A voice and vision called him to be a priest,—a seer to lead the uncalled out of the house of bondage. [H]e stretched forth his hands eagerly, and then, even as he stretched them, suddenly there swept across the vision the temptation of Despair. (514)

The temptation of despair pertains to the refusal of the General Theological Seminary to admit Crummell because of his race.

Du Bois uses Crummell's life and unrealized calling as a synecdoche for African-American experience. "So he grew," Du Bois explains, "and brought within his wide influence all that was best of those who walk within the Veil" (519). Crummell exemplifies what Du Bois states earlier in Chapter I: "Throughout history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness" (365).¹² Crummell serves as a proxy for what goes unappreciated and unnoticed about blacks in America—their striving for success, the work of their lives, the character they model, and their frustrated attempt at self-realization.

In narrating Crummell's life and using him as a proxy, Du Bois intends to undermine the dividing force of the veil so that the reader can come to appreciate and to sympathize with those who live behind it (cf. Gooding-Williams 2009, 98–111). The veil not only divides the political–ethical status of blacks and whites—the "world within and without the Veil" (Du Bois [1903] 1986b, 359)—but also signals an emotional geography following from this division (which leads to so little human sympathy). Notice that the veil represents (among other things) the division between the "outer" or experiential condition of blacks in America, and the "inner" disposition that experience should properly influence among white Americans. Notice further that this division between "outer" and "inner" is precisely what, from the perspective of "Criteria," Du Bois believes the rhetorician must overcome in an effort to expand the judgment of the reader.

Overcoming the divide between "outer" and "inner" relates directly to Du Bois's ironic use of sympathy between master and house-slave, which he takes up in Chapter IX. Now it is important to observe that this analysis comes in the sociological portion of the book—Chapters VII–X—where he remarks, "We seldom study the condition of the Negro to-day honestly and carefully" (457). The ironic use of sympathy shows what happens when the divide is not appropriately bridged. As Du Bois explains,

This is a vast change from the situation in the past, when, through the close contact of master and house-servant in the patriarchal big house, one found the best of both races in close contact and sympathy, while at the same time the squalor and dull round of toil among the field-hands was removed from the sight and hearing of the family. One can easily see how a person who saw slavery thus from his father's parlors, and sees freedom on the streets of a great city, fails to grasp or comprehend the whole of the new picture. (477)

In this context, Du Bois emphasizes a form of sympathy born of contact, but its meaning is distorted because the truth of black life is "removed from the sight and hearing of the family." Removing the problems from sight and hearing signals the superficiality of contact. He commends proximity, but it needs to be genuine. He thus juxtaposes close contact as determined by the norms of the "big house," and the close contact that puts in view the daily "squalor" and "toil" of black life as imposed by the norms of the veil. The former gives to white Americans a distorted view of what freedom means and leaves blacks in a position where they suffer as a result.

In focusing on the details of Crummell's life and the character it represents, Du Bois means to counteract this distortion and its effects. Crummell's life allows him to stage the experiential separation between whites and blacks (revealing the substantive difference between freedom and unfreedom), even as he alerts the reader to a deeper connection between the races. It is no wonder that the chapter on Crummell comes several chapters after Du Bois takes up the distorted view of sympathy. The division between the races becomes palpable as Du Bois recounts the tragic details of Crummell's life that result from his second-class status. It is this condition that is in need of a response and accentuates the absence of freedom. But the motivating force for addressing this situation, Du Bois believes, comes about because of a fundamental human quest for self-realization that unites blacks and whites. It is this shared quest that is obscured by the veil and that he aims to uncover. Indeed, Du Bois says as much in the first line that opens the chapter: "This is the history of a *human heart*,—the tale of a *black boy* who many long years ago began to struggle with life that he might know the world and know himself" (512, emphasis added). In describing the chapter as a history of "a human heart," Du Bois humanizes the subject of the narrative. He is building blacks up into that wide judgment, so that the white reader may be "touched" (514). And the result of being "touched" is that the reader will come to hear and see appropriately—that is, understand—the nature of Crummell's plight and those like him.

Following Du Bois on this journey reconceptualizes freedom for the reader. The meaning of freedom no longer consists in using the norms of the "big house," for that merely obscures the horrors of black life and leads to a disingenuous sense of close contact. Rather, freedom consists in removing the obstacles to self-realization. Freedom is now conceptually tied to making Crummell's goals and the goals of

¹² Du Bois's constant reference to "black men" and to male leadership reveals his patriarchalism—a patriarchalism all the more problematic in the context of arguing against political–ethical inequality (see Carby 1998; cf. Balfour 2011, chap. 5).

those like him genuine possibilities in the American world, while simultaneously helping his white audience “grasp or comprehend the whole of the new picture” this freedom entails. Only by making the goals of African-Americans genuine possibilities and helping white Americans seize the transformed picture of the political and ethical life these possibilities require does America become both “great” and “new.”

The success of Du Bois’s narrative depends not on impartial judgment, but rather on the partiality of the reader. When he seeks to persuade his readers he meets them where they stand; he addresses their existing bundles of commitments, values, and norms with the hope of expanding their horizons. As he explains in chapter IX, “Such an essentially honest-hearted and generous people cannot cite the caste-leveling precepts of Christianity, or believe in equality of opportunity for all men, without coming to feel more and more with each generation that the present drawing of the color-line is a flat contradiction to their beliefs” (490). But care is needed in reading this line. After all, Du Bois is clear that *Souls* is about democratic development. In other words, he is well aware that the content of those beliefs as currently structured does not, in fact, have African-Americans in view as proper subjects of their application. (Recall that it was “godly” farmers that pulled Crummell’s schoolhouse into the swamp.) This is precisely why the perceptual shift, the reconceptualization of freedom just noted, is necessary. Thus, when Du Bois appeals to conventional wisdom (e.g., the precepts of Christianity or equality of opportunity), he does so in an effort to extend its content and move readers to a position that they might not have otherwise adopted. It is this new, expanded view that Du Bois subsequently uses to defend the proposition of contradiction or inconsistency. So in saying that Du Bois seeks to get his readers to see and feel that the suffering of African-Americans is out of step with what America claims to be, one must remember that the content of this description of America is not yet a reality, but a vision toward which Du Bois is trying to move the nation.

In showing the inconsistency between the expanded principles—principles of equality or freedom as self-realization that now includes African-Americans—and the failure to apply them equally to black Americans, Du Bois seeks to generate in the reader a sense of shame for having contributed to their suffering.¹³ If sympathy looks outward to others, shame looks inward to the self that has either contributed to suffering or played witness to that suffering. As Bernard Williams rightly notes, “Shame looks to what I am” (1994, 93;

cf. Morrison 1996; Tarnopolsky 2010). Shame entails falling below a standard that I otherwise embrace, but this falling below can only come into view because of the negative feelings that follow and which sympathy puts on display.

Although Du Bois does not use the language of shame, properly speaking, there is little doubt this is what he intends. As he says in the “The Afterthought” of *Souls*, “Let the ears of a guilty people tingle with truth” ([1903] 1986b, 547). There are two terms here—“guilty” and “truth”—that require elucidation. What is Du Bois after in this sentence? To be guilty, as Du Bois employs it, is to be justly chargeable with harming another (in this instance African-Americans). One might think, however, that there is imprecision in this sentence, especially given that Du Bois hopes that *Souls* will touch or move the reader. The imprecision emerges because one can readily think of cases in which people are found guilty of an offense for which they do not take responsibility. But the fact that Du Bois wants the guilt to resonate with the offenders (to tingle their ears) means that he takes himself to be laying out their failure to live up to a standard with which they identify.¹⁴

The sympathetic identification with African-Americans that contributes to an expansion of the political-ethical horizon potentially opens the reader to feel shame appropriately. That sympathy and shame are functioning together is important, especially given that Williams (1994) and most recently Christina Tarnopolsky (2010) typically analyze shame in isolation from other emotions. The problem in doing this is that it will invariably be the case that the reaction to shame will be one of evading the situation that requires attention—one will recoil from rather than engage with shame and its source. This is precisely why the structure of *Souls* moves from attempting to cultivate sympathetic identification in several of the early chapters to eliciting shame in the reader by the end of the book. It is the work of sympathy—creating a shared normative and affective horizon—that increases the chances that a sense of shame will emerge. (Of course, there are no guarantees). In doing so, Du Bois intends for his readers to feel diminished by the end of the book—a sense that something about who they are as displayed in their treatment of blacks is wrong. The psychological and characterological effect of this is to lower “the agent’s self respect and diminish him in his own eyes” (Williams 1994, 90). This helps explain Du Bois’s reference to truth. For the truth that will tingle the ears of white Americans is a truth about normative dissonance on display in their mistreatment of African-Americans. This is the realization that shame makes possible for the

¹³ I do not mean to suggest that this description of shame exhausts how the term can be understood. I fully acknowledge that, as indicated by an anonymous reviewer, persons can feel ashamed of hypocrisy even if this produces no harm to others. But feeling ashamed of oneself in this sense will be wholly a private affair and will have no material bearing on the life chances of persons. Du Bois, as indicated here, is concerned with shame that emerges precisely because the actions one has engaged in or been a witness to impacts the life chances of persons. I should further note that although I do not preclude this other, wholly interior sense of shame, at some point consistent hypocrisy will generate a material impact.

¹⁴ It is important to note that Williams distinguishes between shame and guilt by focusing on their directionality (1994, 90–95). Shame looks inward to the self and guilt looks outward to the one that has been harmed. In Du Bois’s case, these two are collapsed. Hence guilt is not simply about the one that is harmed, but in properly identifying with one’s guilt, white Americans see themselves as having fallen below a standard to which they take themselves to be committed and for which they should be ashamed. For Du Bois, then, it is not enough simply to find white Americans guilty; they must also find themselves guilty if the feeling of shame is to emerge.

reader. Du Bois's aim here is not, properly speaking, for readers to feel bad because they have been shamed, but to feel bad because they have failed to realize the good.

Failing to realize the good crystallizes an important undercurrent to Du Bois's evocations of sympathy and shame. First, sympathizing with the plight of African-Americans in their frustrated attempts to achieve self-realization (a) reveals to the persuaded reader something that they find central to the flourishing of life and (b) awakens in them a sense of disappointment over the failure of the polity and all who belong to it (including themselves) for not providing the space in which that flourishing can be actualized. Second, precisely because the reader sees self-realization as central to the flourishing of life, but nonetheless frustrated in African-Americans because of racism, the reader is forced to ask and confront the following questions: Who am I? What kind of community do I belong to that obstructs the living of life? These are the questions that must be generated within and by citizens if they are going to be genuinely answered. But they are questions that allow readers to probe the justice and injustice of their community.

As these questions suggest, if shame diminishes the standing of persons in their own eyes, it is equally meant to generate a new way of living by alerting the reader to the demands of a just regime. Shame honors the judgment of the reader by encouraging a self-critical stance toward one's treatment of African-Americans that reflexively reveals the moral deficit within oneself and one's political community, which should in turn generate outrage regarding racial injustice. As Williams explains, "shame may be expressed in attempts to reconstruct or improve oneself" (1994, 90). Shame thus provides an opportunity for self-development because it entails a view of one's political-ethical identity (now transformed) in relation to which political transformation is made possible and rendered intelligible. This is precisely why the hope of *Souls* is that it will not fall "still-born into the world-wilderness," but will produce a new mode of political and ethical life in America ([1903] 1986b, 547, original emphasis). This is simply to say, that in Du Bois's hands, shame emanates from a sense that who Americans are as a democratic people need not determine who they may yet become.

It should not be ignored at this final moment that if, in soliciting the emotions of sympathy and shame, Du Bois aspires to bring into view for white Americans the meaning of a just polity as it relates to the political and ethical status of blacks, he also offers caution about what the persistence of injustice may produce. In this regard, *Souls* is not consistently or primarily concerned with using the threat of violence or fear as a tool to mobilize his audience. He does not, as David Walker ([1829] 2000) so classically did, advance the threat of a race war and bloody violence to stimulate white Americans to action. Fear is not as prominent in *Souls* as sympathy and shame. But Du Bois shrewdly suggests that one cannot help but feel sympathy with African-Americans and their quest for self-realization, and, in light of that sympathy, come to believe that their

subordination will not be tolerated for long. In Chapter X, "Of the Faith of the Fathers," where he discusses the role of religion in the context of black subordination and white supremacy, he speaks of the radicalization of African-Americans: "Feeling that his rights and his dearest ideals are being trampled upon, that the public conscience is ever more deaf to his righteous appeal . . . he often becomes bitter and vindictive" ([1903] 1986b, 502). If Du Bois's white reader has come to sympathize with black Americans, the reason for this vindictiveness is all too clear. But even here, the worry that white Americans should feel is tied to African-Americans judging that the "public conscience"—the domain in which sympathy and shame work—is deaf to the "righteous" call of blacks, leaving them with no other option but violence. Du Bois invokes the danger of bitterness by African-Americans as a way to foreground the political and ethical importance of sympathetic identification and therefore the necessity of active transformation. Or to put it differently, readers have reason to be afraid if decisive action is not taken to assist African-Americans in the resolution of America's most vexing problem—the problem of the color line.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the idea of the people, with its descriptive and aspirational dimensions, creates a space in which the rhetoric of *Souls* and its explicit appeal to sympathy and shame operate. Rhetoric and its affective targets are used by Du Bois to potentially move his white audience to embrace a view that, if realized, would redefine the contours of democratic citizenship and the political-ethical standing of blacks therein. As the word *potentially* suggests, Du Bois was well aware of the uncertainty that haunted his appeals. Significantly, then, *Souls* seeks not only to fashion a vision of what the people may yet become, but also necessarily reflects the uncertainty that is bound up with democratic development. And the rhetorical invitation to the judgment of readers, over whom one can never exercise complete control, reflects this uncertainty. This is the normative work that the idea of the people makes possible and the danger it courts.

And yet, *Souls* may well be an exemplar of the practices that African-Americans and women historically employed in their quest to redefine the contours of the political community. How might *Souls* serve as a guide to understanding a much larger tradition of American rhetoric? Might Du Bois's mode of engagement serve as a tentative answer to the question with which I began this essay: *How were women and African-Americans able to invoke the language of the people even as they were consistently identified as standing outside the boundaries of the political and affective concerns of the nation?*

I pointed earlier to Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Martin Luther King Jr. as examples of individuals who also sought to transform the American polity. Standing historically on either side of Du Bois, they mark a much

wider tradition of engagement. For these thinkers, too, this gap between description and aspiration opens a space to refashion a vision of the democratic self. Consistent with Du Bois's approach, what emerges in their writings and speeches is the role and status of rhetoric as a form of political education, the transcendent vision inherent in rhetorical appeals, and the central place of the sentiments in awakening the citizenry to the demands of the moral life. Taken together, these aspects of rhetoric both clarify the challenges of democratic life and illuminate a philosophical outlook common to Stanton, Du Bois, and King.

Stanton and King are analogously related to Du Bois because they also found in rhetoric and the sentiments a vehicle for engaging their fellows. Indeed, this is the form in which they partly waged the battle for America's soul. Speaking before the New York State legislature in 1860, Stanton graphically recounts the horror women experienced at the hands of their male counterparts without any opportunity for redress. "Call that sacred," she exclaims, "where innocent children, trembling with fear, fly to the . . . dark places of the house, to hide themselves from the wrath of drunken, brutal fathers, but, forgetting their past sufferings, rush out again at their mother's frantic screams, "Help, oh help?" ([1860] 2007b, 182). Stanton's graphic portrayal focuses on stimulating sympathy in her male audience, and thus pursues the same rhetorical approach I observed in Du Bois. "What father," she asks, "could rest at his home by night, knowing that his lovely daughter was at the mercy of a strong man drunk with wine and passion, and that, do what he might, he was backed up by law and public sentiment?" (183).

But if sympathy is central to Stanton's appeal, King is no less keen on having his audience feel that they have fallen below standards with which they otherwise identify. In his classic "I Have a Dream" speech King argues that "when the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" ([1963] 1986, 217). King's rhetoric is similar to what I observed in *Souls*; like Du Bois, King attempts to call into existence the thing he assumes—that the Founders, did, in fact, see blacks as equal. But the appeal to the Founders is a mainstay of American rhetoric, even among the marginalized, and is not meant to express a belief in a preexistent consensus. King attempts to work within familiar symbols, if only to expand their conceptual content. He creates a foundation within the sacred text of America upon which he locates black equality and then moves to critically engage the nation for failing to honor this in practice—a failure, he hopes, that all will look on in disappointment, and above all else, shame.

These thinkers are similar because they share experiences of domination in a society that claimed to be well-ordered, experiences that prompt them to defend a constellation of ideas that rely on rhetoric and

the sentiments in moving the people to embrace an expanded view of themselves. Significantly, however, what fuels their political orientation is a view of democracy that severs the connection between the people and those who might claim exclusive possession of power in the people's name. This is the beauty of democracy, which ennobles human existence through the iterative process of contestation it makes possible, even as it suggests a darker undercurrent in the recognition that the outcome of contestation can never be known in advance. That lack of knowledge—that existential uncertainty—makes democratic action a leap of faith. And in acknowledging the danger of political engagement, these political actors nonetheless defend a species of perfectionism: They constantly push and prod the nation, by virtue of the projections of life they offer, to reimagine itself. Perhaps, then, to engage *Souls* is not merely to discover the approach of one thinker on behalf of a marginalized group, but to discover a powerful example of a larger tradition of thinking that gives life to the democratic world we continually aspire to realize.

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