

## The Cultural Theory of Race: Yet Another Look at Du Bois's "The Conservation of Races"\*

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I argue that, despite all the attention philosophers have given W. E. B. Du Bois's essay "The Conservation of Races," they have missed some of his distinctions between ways of thinking about what race is. Recognizing this leads us to note an ambiguity in the claim that race is a social construction: the ambiguity between a focus on politics or culture. I claim that, although there are problems with Du Bois's cultural account of race, it contains valuable insights about the nature of racism and helps us to confront the question of whether there can and ought to be race after racism.

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It is amazing how much influence W. E. B. Du Bois's 1897 essay, "The Conservation of Races," has exerted over the development of philosophy of race as a distinct field within contemporary anglophone philosophy. Especially in the wake of Kwame Anthony Appiah's controversial engagement with it in 1985, the essay has served as an almost constant reference point and site of contestation in philosophical debates about

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the nature, reality, and significance of race.<sup>1</sup> It is reasonable, at this point, to wonder whether there is anything interesting left to be said. As it turns out, I plan to argue that, despite all these years of often very sophisticated engagement, philosophers of race have not yet managed to fully appreciate and elucidate all that is going on in “Conservation” and to recognize its full import for the formation and evaluation of positions in the field today. My claim will be that, while it is clear enough to most that Du Bois distinguishes in the essay between different ways of thinking about what race might be, there has not been sufficient clarity about how many options he considers and about the differences and relations between these options.

This interpretive point is significant not simply because it is good to get an important text right, but also because doing so in this case will help us to recognize and address a noteworthy ambiguity in the philosophical claim that race is a social construction—namely, the ambiguity between a focus on politics and a focus on culture. Against the political focus that is dominant in contemporary social constructionist thought, Du Bois demands that we pay greater attention to race’s cultural dimension. I will argue that, despite weaknesses that make it hard to completely accept the cultural account of race in “Conservation,” this remains an important and fruitful demand. As a practical point of immediate significance, attention to the cultural dimension of race illuminates the double-sided nature of racism and what is involved in fighting it. On a more speculative note, rereading “Conservation” in the manner I advise is useful for confronting the way that a focus on politics or on culture necessarily shapes our thinking about whether race would still exist in a world without racism. Could it? And if it could, then should it? As my sympathies lie with the position that race can survive racism’s death and that

1. See esp. Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 21–37 (esp. 23–30); Lucius Outlaw, “Against the Grain of Modernity: The Politics of Difference and the Conservation of ‘Race,’” *Man and World* 25 (1992): 443–68 (esp. 460–66); Tommy L. Lott, “Du Bois on the Invention of Race,” *Philosophical Forum* 24 (1992–93): 166–87; Robert Gooding-Williams, “Outlaw, Appiah, and Du Bois’s ‘The Conservation of Races,’” in *W.E.B. Du Bois on Race and Culture: Philosophy, Politics, and Poetics*, ed. Bernard W. Bell, Emily R. Grosholz, and James B. Stewart (New York: Routledge, 1996), 39–56; Bernard R. Boxill, “Du Bois on Cultural Pluralism,” in Bell, Grosholz, and Stewart, *W.E.B. Du Bois on Race and Culture*, 57–85 (esp. 57–65); Paul C. Taylor, “Appiah’s Uncompleted Argument: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Reality of Race,” *Social Theory and Practice* 26 (2000): 103–28; Tommie Shelby, “Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression?” *Ethics* 112 (2002): 231–66 (esp. 234–36); Ronald R. Sundstrom, “Douglass and Du Bois’s *Der Schwarze Volksgeist*,” in *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 32–52 (esp. 36–47); Anna Stubblefield, *Ethics along the Color Line* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), chap. 2 (esp. 81–85); Joshua Glasgow, “The End of Historical Constructivism: Circularity, Redundancy, Indeterminacy,” *Monist* 93 (2010): 321–35.

this would be a good thing, I will end by offering some reasons for taking such a position as well as preliminary responses to some of the objections it may provoke.

### I. "CONSERVATION" AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF RACE

A central reason that "Conservation" has been such a powerfully relevant resource for contemporary thinking about the nature and reality of race is the way that Du Bois raises prescient questions in the essay about the disciplinary perspective most appropriate to thinking about race. He suggests that efforts in the natural sciences to clarify the concept of race eventually reach a dead end but that by taking up a social scientific perspective—that of "the historian and the sociologist"—we are able to achieve a deeper understanding of the relevant phenomena.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary philosophy of race has developed in a disciplinary context characterized by the growing consensus that, from the perspective of biology and physical anthropology, there are no such things as races. The question that has therefore driven much work in philosophy of race is whether, in light of this consensus, we have any reason at all to go on thinking and talking of races as real. Du Bois's suggestion in "Conservation" that races exist as social and historical entities has made the essay the perfect point of reference for the contemporary debate.

Appiah's 1985 essay, "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race," is the foundational text in this debate. Appiah argues that, despite appearances to the contrary, Du Bois fails in "Conservation" to transcend the limits of nineteenth-century racial pseudo-science. He systematically analyzes Du Bois's definition of a race as "a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life."<sup>3</sup> Appiah seeks to determine what in this definition serves to individuate races, especially the "Negro," if not biological descent and physical characteristics. He concludes that, at least for the "Negro," nothing else in the definition does the work. Most notably, he argues that Du Bois's appeal to a "common history" is circular: "sharing a common group history cannot be a *criterion* for being members of the same group, for we would have to be able to identify the group in order to identify *its* history."<sup>4</sup> He therefore interprets Du Bois as chal-

2. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," in *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 40.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 32.

lenging only the inferiority associated with the “inherited racial essence” of black people, not the belief in heritable racial essences itself.<sup>5</sup> Du Bois’s failure, in Appiah’s view, is that he moved toward but did not reach the conclusion that “there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us.”<sup>6</sup>

This forceful expression of antirealism about race made Appiah the necessary target for philosophers wishing to defend realism about race, that is, the view that races are real. Among the first and most prominent of Appiah’s critics was Lucius Outlaw, who—beyond challenging Appiah’s reading of Du Bois—disagrees with the idea that an account of race cannot in any way recognize biodiversity among humans. This is not because he wants to defend the idea that our identities as members of races are completely biologically determined but, rather, because he thinks races are created through the complex interaction of biological and social factors. Outlaw takes this to be Du Bois’s position as well, and thus he rejects Appiah’s step-by-step critique of the various elements of Du Bois’s definition, arguing that Du Bois is best understood as proposing “a *cluster* concept” in which no single factor, like biological descent, is essential and thus the causal determinant of all the others.<sup>7</sup>

Despite its prominence, though, I would not say Outlaw’s critique is representative of the majority of the realist responses to Appiah, as I would say that the majority of realists believe race’s reality is purely or at least fundamentally a matter of its social construction, not the seemingly equal mix of social and biological factors described by Outlaw.<sup>8</sup> Critiques of Appiah’s reading of Du Bois from this standard social constructionist perspective generally hold that, contrary to what Appiah would have us believe, Du Bois does succeed in giving us a cogent, sociohistorical definition of race and not simply a veiled version of the traditional biological

5. *Ibid.*, 34. In the inaugural Henry Louis Gates Jr. lecture at Yale University delivered October 16, 2012, “Being Du Bois: Lessons in the Management of Identities,” Appiah explicitly retracts this interpretation. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VImYHdIjss>.

6. Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, 45.

7. Lucius Outlaw, “‘Conserve’ Races? In Defense of W.E.B. Du Bois,” in Bell, Grosholz, and Stewart, *W.E.B. Du Bois on Race and Culture*, 15–38, 25, 28.

8. The claim that race is a social construction is sometimes taken or intended to be equivalent to the claim that race is not real, that it is something “made up.” Nevertheless, the position that has become popular in philosophy and some other contexts is that race, like money and a number of other familiar things (or relationships between things), is *socially constructed and therefore real*—that is, race is real precisely because of the social practices that bring it into existence. On money as an example of social construction, see John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995). For an example of the money analogy in race theory, see Paul C. Taylor, *Race: A Philosophical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 90–92. For an argument that confusion surrounding the term “social construction” justifies dropping it altogether in discussions of race, see Lawrence Blum, “Racialized Groups: The Sociohistorical Consensus,” *Monist* 93 (2010): 298–320, 304–9.

account. We find this argument being made by, among others, Tommy Lott, Bernard Boxill, Ronald Sundstrom, and Paul Taylor. Taylor, for example, argues that the “common history” criterion need not be understood as dependent upon the prior individuation of a group to whom the history belongs if Du Bois’s claim is simply that we can recognize the existence of “parallel individual histories—that is, relevantly similar individual experiences of dealing with certain social and historical conditions.”<sup>9</sup> For Taylor, these social and historical conditions are what make us members of races.

I will conclude this summary of the contemporary debate surrounding “Conservation” by mentioning an important strand of the debate that moves away from the question of Du Bois’s success or failure in constructing a sociohistorical definition of race to the issue of his intentions. One of the points Outlaw makes in his critique of Appiah is that Du Bois should not be seen as having been interested in simply producing a taxonomy of humans for knowledge’s sake, because he was engaged in a “decidedly *political* project.”<sup>10</sup> Anna Stubblefield has amplified this point, arguing that Outlaw in fact fails to prove his case against Appiah insofar as he attempts to defend Du Bois “on Appiah’s terms,” that is, in terms of a debate about how to objectively *describe* what races are.<sup>11</sup> In her view, it is only when Outlaw leaves this terrain and points out the way Du Bois was engaged in, to use Outlaw’s terminology, “*prescribing* norms for . . . a people suffering racialized subordination” that he usefully counters Appiah’s critique and shows us the depth and relevance of Du Bois’s project.<sup>12</sup> This distinction between the content of Du Bois’s definition and his practical intention in offering it is a helpful one, and I will discuss it further soon.

## II. RACE AS POLITICAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND CULTURAL

In spite of the huge role “Conservation” has played in the development of contemporary philosophy of race, I believe the essay’s delineation and comparison of the options available to the theorist of race have been oversimplified. Appiah’s critique and the counter critiques in response to it tend to set up a dichotomy between biological and sociohistorical

9. Taylor, “Appiah’s Uncompleted Argument,” 108.

10. Outlaw, “‘Conserve’ Races?” 28.

11. Stubblefield, *Ethics along the Color Line*, 82.

12. Outlaw, “‘Conserve’ Races?” 28; emphasis mine. See also Robert Gooding-Williams’s intervention: he sides with Appiah concerning the charge of circularity but argues that Appiah fails to do justice to Du Bois’s intentions in trying to construct a sociohistorical definition of race and holds, like Stubblefield, that Outlaw “persuasively insists on the political stakes of Du Bois’s theoretical enterprise” (Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009], 37).

foundations for the reality of race, asking us to choose whether we see Du Bois as committed to one or to the other (or perhaps, in Outlaw's case, to a mix of both). I believe a more careful reading of "Conservation," however, reveals that Du Bois distinguishes between and evaluates not two but three alternative answers to the question of what race is before he asserts the supremacy of the sociohistorical—or, more precisely, the *cultural*—option.

To see this, let us consider more closely the essay's opening moves. In the first sentence of "Conservation," Du Bois announces the peculiar pertinence of theorizing about race from the African American point of view: "The American Negro has always felt an intense personal interest in discussions as to the origins and destinies of races: primarily because back of most discussions of race with which he is familiar, have lurked certain assumptions as to his natural abilities, as to his political, intellectual and moral status, which he felt were wrong."<sup>13</sup> This correlation between talk of race and the insinuation of black inferiority quite naturally inspires an antiracist reaction: "He has, consequently, been led to deprecate and minimize race distinctions, to believe intensely that out of one blood God created all nations, and to speak of human brotherhood as though it were the possibility of an already dawning tomorrow."<sup>14</sup>

Du Bois criticizes this reaction, stating that "in our calmer moments we must acknowledge that human beings are divided into races."<sup>15</sup> He points to the relationship between the black and white races in the United States as a particularly inescapable and important site of racial reality. Inviting his audience to confront this reality, he admonishes: "It is necessary in planning our movements, in guiding our future development, that at times we rise above the pressing, but smaller questions of separate schools and cars, wage-discrimination and lynch law, to survey the whole question of race in human philosophy and to lay, on a basis of broad knowledge and careful insight, those large lines of policy and higher ideals which may form our guiding lines and boundaries in the practical difficulties of everyday."<sup>16</sup>

Now, within these opening moments, Du Bois has, I believe, already introduced us to and then critically evaluated a theory of race. The view that he considers—which he ascribes, abstractly enough, to "the American Negro"—rejects, first of all, the hierarchy implicit or explicit in most mainstream nineteenth-century discourse about race. More fundamentally, this view rejects the biological assumptions of this discourse, emphasizing the "one blood" that flows through the veins of all humans over their superficial physical differences. At this point, it is tempting to as-

13. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," 38.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 39.

sume that the view Du Bois is addressing here is Appiah-style antirealism about race. This, in itself, is something that has gone strangely unnoticed in the contemporary debate about “Conservation”—one wonders why those discussing whether or not Du Bois falls back upon biology would not have more to say about the fact that Appiah’s position on race seems to be treated in the essay and furthermore presented as something like the default position among African Americans!

And yet, I think there is more to this position than a simple denial of the reality of race. Du Bois indicates, I would argue, both what this position denies about race and what it asserts. On the one hand, he claims that African Americans deny the biological distinctions, or at least the significance of the biological distinctions, that feature in mainstream thinking and talking about race. On the other hand, when signaling his intention to look at race from a perspective that is broader than usual, Du Bois suggests that when African Americans think and talk about race among themselves, they usually concentrate exclusively upon the “pressing” problems of segregated schools and trains, economic exploitation, lynching, and other such issues of subordination and brutalization under the regime of Jim Crow. It therefore seems to me that we are not dealing with a simple dismissal of race as a myth but, rather, a position that sees the falsehoods of mainstream racial discourse as ways of rationalizing and reinforcing the all-too-real materiality of institutionalized oppression. I would thus identify the first theory of race that Du Bois describes and evaluates as claiming that race is fundamentally *political*—that the substance of race, the only basis for the division of humanity into distinct races, is the power dynamic separating people into dominant and subordinate groups.

This first theoretical option has been overlooked by commentators, but I think recognizing it makes much in “Conservation” clearer. Let us proceed by examining why Du Bois disagrees with the theory’s suggestion that a political relationship is all there is to race. He is acutely aware, of course, of the problems of antiblack oppression and the false ideas used to legitimize it. Nevertheless, he thinks that seeing oppressive group relations and their discursive rationalization as exhausting the reality of race constitutes a failure to penetrate the surface of the topic, and he implores us to go beyond the “pressing, but smaller” issues of racial injustice in order to confront race in all its breadth. He therefore sees the political theory of race as picking out certain aspects of the reality of race— aspects that, it must repeatedly be emphasized, he sees as “pressing”— but he thinks the correct way to address these “practical difficulties” is to think through the larger significance of race so as to design a plan of action that rests on, as he puts it, “broad knowledge and careful insight.”<sup>17</sup>

17. It is intriguing to compare this with John Rawls’s claim concerning political philosophy that the problems of nonideal theory are “*pressing* and urgent matters” but that we

For this reason, Du Bois leads his audience away from the biblical talk of “one blood” to seriously consider the then dominant stance on what race is: the *scientific* theory, which holds that physical differences between human beings indicate their division into biologically distinct groups called races. But, Du Bois asks, which differences? He notes that scientists have paid attention to features such as “color, hair, cranial measurements and language.”<sup>18</sup> It is true that we can see great diversity among humans along these lines, but can we use these features to organize them into discrete races? Du Bois says no, as “these criteria of race are most exasperatingly intermingled” (there are, for example, darker peoples with straight hair, and other such findings that complicate our standard correlations).<sup>19</sup> In the absence of criteria that reliably distinguish a finite set of races, we are forced to doubt the scientific theory’s potential for explaining the true significance of race.

Does this mean Du Bois thinks science has nothing to say? As with the political theory, his view, as I understand it, is that the scientific theory represents part of race’s reality. “The final word of science, so far,” he writes, “is that we have at least two, perhaps three great families of human beings—the whites and Negroes, possibly the yellow race.”<sup>20</sup> Du Bois sees this judgment, which he associates with the work of T. H. Huxley and Friedrich Ratzel, as representing progress in racial science: it is, he claims, “more nearly true than the old five-race scheme of Blumenbach.”<sup>21</sup> But its truth lies in its modesty. Far from pinning down the real source of racial difference, its retreat from complexity reveals it as “an acknowledgment that, so far as physical characteristics are concerned, the differences between men do not explain all the differences of their history.”<sup>22</sup>

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are justified in beginning with ideal theory because it provides “the only basis for the systematic grasp of these more pressing problems” (John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971], 9; emphasis mine).

18. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” 39. It is not quite clear to me why Du Bois takes the study of linguistic differences to be analogous to the study of the other, more clearly physical, differences.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.* The corollary of this view is that “other races have arisen from the intermingling of these two” (*ibid.*).

21. *Ibid.* T. H. Huxley discusses races in his 1865 essay “On the Methods and Results of Ethnology,” in *Man’s Place in Nature: And Other Essays in Anthropology* (New York: D. Appleton, 1897), 209–52. For Friedrich Ratzel’s views, see his 1885–88 *Völkerkunde*, translated as *The History of Mankind*, trans. A. J. Butler (London: Macmillan, 1896), esp. pp. 5–14. For Blumenbach’s “scheme,” see Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, “On the Natural Variety of Mankind,” in *The Idea of Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 27–37.

22. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” 39–40.



Interestingly, then, Du Bois ends up claiming that properly pursuing the scientific approach to race ultimately leads one back toward the theoretical and practical implications of the political approach. He cites Darwin in this regard: “as Darwin himself said . . . great as is the physical unlikeness of the various races of men, their likenesses are greater, and upon this rests the whole scientific doctrine of human brotherhood.”<sup>23</sup> Both the political and scientific theories of race, rightly understood, encourage us to see and to seek more unity than difference among human beings. And yet, though Du Bois respects their insights, he remains convinced that both views fail to capture the totality of human reality. While physical differences may fall short of explaining “the different roles which groups of men have played in human progress,” it remains the case that “there are differences—subtle, delicate and elusive though they may be—which have silently but definitely separated men into groups. While these subtle forces have generally followed the natural cleavage of common blood, descent and physical peculiarities, they have at other times swept across and ignored these. At all times, however, they have divided human beings into races, which, while they perhaps transcend scientific definition, nevertheless, are clearly defined to the eye of the historian and sociologist.”<sup>24</sup> Du Bois, in his capacity as a historian and a sociologist, shortly thereafter introduces his *sociohistorical* theory of race, presenting the previously quoted definition of a race as “a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life.”<sup>25</sup>

Let us be specific, though, about what kind of sociohistorical view this is. The political theory of race is, in its own way, a sociohistorical account: racial difference is understood as a social phenomenon whose reality is dependent upon an ongoing history of discrimination and oppression. Du Bois’s definition of race, on the other hand, with its talk of “traditions” and “ideals of life,” evokes a different type of social and historical reality: the existence of distinct *cultures*. While the political theory of race gives us clear reason to hope for and work toward the abolition of races (and a sophisticated scientific view gives us little reason to see

23. *Ibid.*, 40. Presumably Du Bois is referring to the chapter in *The Descent of Man* entitled “On the Races of Man,” in which Darwin argues against the idea of species difference between human races. See Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 214–50.

24. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” 40.

25. With respect to his position as a historian and sociologist, note that, at the time that he wrote “Conservation,” Du Bois had already published his history of *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1896) and had begun the extensive research for his seminal text in sociology, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1899).

race as socially and historically meaningful), a theory according to which races are cultural groups suggests the possibility that races represent valuable forms of life to be celebrated rather than eradicated.

There is thus an interesting conflict here between two sociohistorical theories of race, one cultural and one political, a conflict that has, to my knowledge, been completely missed in the literature on "Conservation" thus far. Now, to be clear, I am not claiming that people have completely failed to recognize that Du Bois's preferred sociohistorical account of race is an account according to which races are cultural groups. This element of "Conservation" has been highlighted even before Appiah's 1985 essay by Boxill, whose 1977 essay "Dubois and Fanon on Culture" includes what is perhaps the first extended discussion of "Conservation" by a professional philosopher.<sup>26</sup> Boxill has repeatedly returned to "Conservation" in the decades that have followed and has pointed out each time that, as he puts it in his book *Blacks and Social Justice*, Du Bois "defined a race as a family of human beings sharing a common culture."<sup>27</sup>

While I am therefore not the first to emphasize the fact that Du Bois holds a cultural theory of race, I do not think we can fully appreciate what Du Bois does in "Conservation" without recognizing the contrast between his embrace of this cultural theory and his criticism of the political theory of race. Nowhere in the past literature have I seen this contrast pointed out.<sup>28</sup> It is especially important, in this regard, to recognize the distinction between Du Bois's intentions in elaborating a theory of race and the theory he elaborates itself. People like Outlaw and Stubblefield have rightfully drawn our attention to the prescriptive, political dimension of Du Bois's project, that is, the sense in which he sets out not merely to define race for the sake of conceptual or empirical accuracy but, rather or also, to promote a conception of race that will ground and encourage collective action among his people in the face of their oppression. What these folks have inadvertently obscured, though, is the difference be-

26. Bernard R. Boxill, "Dubois [*sic*] and Fanon on Culture," *Philosophical Forum* 9 (1977-78): 326-38.

27. Bernard R. Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, rev. ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 178.

28. Sundstrom perhaps comes close when, in his essay "Douglass and Du Bois's *Der Schwarze Volksgeist*," he treats Frederick Douglass and Du Bois as representing opposite poles in race theory and says of Douglass: "He equated the preservation of racial distinctiveness with the preservation of racial prejudice" (35). As I will emphasize later on, the equivalence of the continued existence of race with the continued existence of racism can be seen as an implication of the political theory of race and so, by treating Douglass and Du Bois as holding opposing views, Sundstrom to some extent indicates Du Bois's opposition to the political theory. Still, since he does not explicitly refer to the description and rejection by Du Bois of the claim he attributes to Douglass, neither he nor any other commentator with which I am familiar has made clear the need to disaggregate the notion of a sociohistorical theory of race into two contrasting theories, one of which Du Bois rejects and the other of which he defends.

tween the sense in which Du Bois's project as a whole is political and the political nature of the position on what race is that I claim he considers and rejects. The political theory of race defines race in such a way that "racialized subordination," to use Outlaw's term, constitutes its very existence, and Du Bois asks us to repudiate this reduction of race to politics. It is true that his project remains political, as his purpose in defining race is to enable black people to deal with the "practical difficulties" of racialized subordination from an informed standpoint. Nevertheless, the difference between this avowed political motivation, on the one hand, and the political theory of race, which he rejects, on the other hand, should not be ignored.

To see why it is problematic to ignore this difference, let us return to Taylor and his social constructionist defense of Du Bois against Appiah. Taylor seeks support for his interpretation of the "common history" criterion as referring to "parallel individual experiences" in another of Du Bois's works, *Dusk of Dawn*, written in 1940. There, in a memorable passage, Du Bois responds to an imagined interlocutor's request to explain how the black race can be differentiated from others by claiming that "the black man is a person who must ride Jim Crow in Georgia."<sup>29</sup> This treatment of being black as a matter of being told where to sit on the train is what allows Taylor to infer that "to be black on this account is to have the experience of being seen and treated in certain ways."<sup>30</sup> It is not strange that Taylor would draw on *Dusk of Dawn* in responding to Appiah, since Appiah includes a discussion of that book in his critique of Du Bois. Unfortunately for Taylor, though, Du Bois's 1940 statement on what it is to be black cannot be treated as derived from or supportive of his 1897 definition of race, as the later statement's proposed criterion of black identity quite clearly implies, in my terms, a political theory of race. It is thus out of line with Du Bois's earlier subordination of politics to culture in defining race in "Conservation."

Taylor's error here is, I believe, very instructive. Consider his own definition of races, in his 2004 book *Race: A Philosophical Introduction*, as "the probabilistically defined populations that result from the white supremacist determination to link appearance and ancestry with social location and life chances."<sup>31</sup> Reading this definition, we have no reason to wonder why Taylor would be attracted to the *Dusk of Dawn* passage, as it mirrors his own fundamentally political theory of race. In this, Taylor is much like the majority of social constructionists. For example, Charles Mills's famous model of white supremacy, the "Racial Contract," is meant to be understood as "creating not merely racial exploitation, *but race it-*

29. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 153.

30. Taylor, "Appiah's Uncompleted Argument," 109.

31. Taylor, *Race*, 86.

*self* as a group identity.”<sup>32</sup> But, while it is only natural that social constructionists today would be drawn to the political theory of race in *Dusk of Dawn*, reading this theory into “Conservation” is a mistake. Yes, “Conservation” can be seen as offering us a proto-social constructionist view, but it is a view based on a decidedly cultural rather than political explanation of what it means to say that race’s reality is social rather than biological.<sup>33</sup>

### III. PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL IN DU BOIS’S CULTURAL THEORY OF RACE

What are we to make of “Conservation” once we notice the distinction I have pointed out? Things would perhaps be easier if we were faced only with a choice between believing Appiah’s claim that Du Bois remains wedded to the biological essentialism prevalent in the past or believing Taylor’s reply portraying Du Bois as espousing the type of social constructionism most common in philosophy of race today. Instead, however, we have reason to see Du Bois as holding a position at odds with the prevalent views in both the nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries—a cultural theory that does not see the cultural characteristics of races as either their straightforward biological inheritance or as the inessential by-product of the political situation that creates races in the first place.

There is of course the exciting possibility that seeing Du Bois as a social constructionist who is nevertheless at odds with the dominant perspective in social constructionism today will shake up current debates, providing us with a compelling rival for the popular political theory of race. To explore this possibility, we need to ask how Du Bois justifies his cultural theory. As it turns out, what we find in “Conservation” is not a series of arguments for the theory but, rather, a story of the origin of races and a philosophy of history that is derived from this story. I will review these aspects of the essay, which have received too little attention in the contemporary debate, and comment on what hope they give us of seeing the cultural option as a viable position.

32. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 63.

33. For a very different criticism of Taylor’s use of *Dusk of Dawn* to defend the “common history” criterion, see Joshua Glasgow’s recent argument that Taylor’s account can be seen as avoiding the problem of circularity (and a related problem of redundancy) but only at the cost of making racial facts unsatisfyingly indeterminate: “why is *having to ride in such-and-such train cars* a race-making property, while *living during the second most recent appearance of Halley’s comet* (or *being born after the first use of money*, or any of a gazillion other properties that fail to demarcate races) is not?” (Glasgow, “The End of Historical Constructivism,” 329).

Du Bois begins his story of the origin of races in “the age of nomadic tribes.”<sup>34</sup> According to him, there existed at that time a multitude of separate groups that were, internally, closely related: “They were practically vast families, and there were as many groups as families.”<sup>35</sup> Given their nomadic dispersion and lack of exogamy, the sets of physical traits these groups passed on to successive generations came to represent a spectacular variety—“a maximum of physical differences,” as he puts it.<sup>36</sup> Importantly, though, this maximum physical diversity coexisted with minimum diversity in people’s ways of life: although these groups lived their nomadic lives separately, they lived these separate lives in very similar ways.

Things changed, however, when they began to settle and form cities. First, a gradual process of physical integration began: “purity of blood was replaced by the requirement of domicile, and . . . there was a slight and slow breaking down of physical barriers.”<sup>37</sup> There was thus a reduction in the number of distinct physical types. At the same time, however, there was an increase in “spiritual and social differences” between human groups: “This city became husbandmen; this, merchants; another, warriors; and so on. The *ideals of life* for which the different cities struggled were different.”<sup>38</sup> This process repeated itself on a larger scale during the coalescing of cities into nations. Further physical integration occurred, leading to modern levels of physical diversity: “myriads of minor differences disappeared, and the sociological and historical races of men began to approximate the present division of races as indicated by physical researches.”<sup>39</sup> As before, though, this integration was combined with intensified diversity on the nonphysical plane: “At the same time the spiritual and psychical differences of race groups which constituted the nations became deep and decisive.”<sup>40</sup>

Someone might understandably interrupt the story at this point to inquire: what relationship is posited here between “races” and “nations”? The relationship is, to be sure, a complex one. Consider Du Bois’s idiosyncratic list of the “eight distinctly differentiated races” that emerge from the historical process described above: “They are the Slavs of Eastern Europe, the Teutons of middle Europe, the English of Great Britain and America, the Romance nations of Southern and Western Europe, the Negroes of Africa and America, the Semitic people of Western Asia

34. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” 41.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, 42.

40. *Ibid.*

and Northern Africa, the Hindoos of Central Asia and the Mongolians of Eastern Asia.”<sup>41</sup> One thing we see here is that if race groups, understood culturally, constitute nations, they are also comprised of them as well. Thus “the Romance nations” are a single race, and Du Bois goes on to discuss the heterogeneity of each of the other races (for example, “the Slav includes the Czech, the Magyar, the Pole and the Russian”).<sup>42</sup> It might be useful to think of the eight major races as *supernations*: vast families made up of smaller vast families.

Returning to the story of their birth, we saw before that the advent of cities brought about specialization in new ways of life: agriculture, commerce, and war. In a similar fashion, the development of nations and supernations eventually resulted in a pattern of innovation in political, economic, scientific, and artistic realms: “The English nation stood for constitutional liberty and commercial freedom; the German nation for science and philosophy; the Romance nations stood for literature and art, and the other race groups are striving, each in its own way, to develop for civilization its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help to guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life for which we all long, that ‘one far-off Divine event.’”<sup>43</sup> This survey of modernity, with its celebration of achievement and indication of remaining potential, brings Du Bois’s historical account to a close. He goes on to argue that his own race has the power to give gifts to the world just as valuable as those given by the English, German, and Romance races, and African Americans must therefore conserve their racial identity rather than seek to be absorbed into the white American mainstream.

This is, undoubtedly, a fascinating account of how races came to be and how their development explains historical progress. Unfortunately, if what we are seeking is justification for believing the cultural theory of race, there are a number of reasons to think that it is impossible for this story to play such a role. Perhaps the most important point here is a conceptual one. Let us grant, for the moment, that there is merit to Du Bois’s description of the various changes over time in human social organization. Even if this is so, such historical accuracy does not yet compel us to admit that Du Bois’s story is a story of *races*. We might accept this as a story about cultural groups and, therefore, be comfortable with Du Bois’s talk of *nations*. For the cultural theory of race to be convincing, though, we need to be told why we should see “race” and “nation” as interchangeable terms. Intellectual historian Wilson Moses has derided

41. *Ibid.*, 40. He admits that there are, “of course, other minor race groups, [such] as the American Indians, the Esquimeaux and the South Sea Islanders” (*ibid.*, 41).

42. *Ibid.*, 41.

43. *Ibid.*, 42. The quotation (“one far-off Divine event”) comes from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “In Memoriam” (see Tennyson, *Selected Poems* [London: Penguin Books, 1991], 224).

Du Bois's list of eight races as a "thoughtless concatenation of non-comparable entities, a wrenching together of religious, racial, geographical and linguistic groups."<sup>44</sup> While this judgment may be harsh, it is nevertheless symbolic of the need for something further to be said about how to know when we are talking about races and how to know when we are confusing race with some other kind of distinction between human groups.

Putting this conceptual point aside, there is of course also the empirical worry that Du Bois's story is a fascinating tale but not a reliable historical account. Part of what makes it hard to judge the story in this regard is its lack of specificity about time and place. When and where did these things happen? Du Bois does not tell us anything concrete about geography or chronology, at least before the modern age. As a related point, it is also curious that Du Bois does not say much in the story about the effects of the environment. One suspects that environmental differences would be among the most likely causes of the initial physical diversity of nomadic tribes, and one therefore wonders why such differences would not present themselves as providing an equally or even more convincing explanation of the eventual diversification in ways of life, as compared with the transition to urban living.

In light of such problems, we might begin to move from thinking that "Conservation," properly understood, can stimulate new debate to thinking that, in spite of the fact that contemporary philosophy of race has built itself up in large part through discussions of this essay, the actual conception of race that Du Bois champions in it is badly motivated and defended and thus of interest mainly as a curiosity rather than as a live option.<sup>45</sup> This would be a reasonable judgment, I would say, if it were not for the fact that engaging with the philosophy of history Du Bois expresses by means of this story reveals a practical usefulness we miss if we

44. Wilson Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 135.

45. It might be helpful at this point to note the contrast between my account of the problems with Du Bois's cultural theory of race and Appiah's critique. Note first that Appiah sees Du Bois as ultimately offering a properly cultural account of some races but not others. He notices the association of each of the eight races Du Bois lists with a particular geographical region and suggests that the general criterion Du Bois must be using for race membership is the following: "people are members of the same race if they share features in virtue of being descended largely from people of the same region." His portrayal of Du Bois as committed to biological essentialism about race depends on his suggestion that, while in some cases the shared features do indeed seem cultural ("hence Anglo-Americans are English"), it is implausible to see the shared features as anything but physical in the case of the black race (Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 33-34). I, unlike Appiah, do not wish to rule out the plausibility of seeing the black race as culturally constituted. What Du Bois fails to provide, I have suggested, are explanations of why groups characterized by cultural connections are what we have in mind when we speak of races and how races, understood as cultural entities, first came to be.

remain caught up in the question of the story's plausibility and aptitude as a form of justification.<sup>46</sup>

Here is how Du Bois sums up the story's point: "The whole process which has brought about these race differentiations has been a growth, and the great characteristic of this growth has been the differentiation of spiritual and mental differences between great races of mankind and the integration of physical differences."<sup>47</sup> Growth here can be taken to mean both expansion in size and development from simplicity to complexity: the size of humanity's primary social unit increased (from the small tribe to the multinational race) and, at the same time, humanity developed from the simplicity of nomadic life to the complexity of modern civilization. The expansion in size, however, took place through a process of integration (cities arose from the merging of tribes, nations from the merging of cities) which brought with it a reduction in the number of physical types. What was not reduced but rather increased by this process, though, was the number of ways of life and thought.

Synthesizing all this, we find that the logic of historical development that Du Bois posits can be expressed as follows: human beings have been on a path of social unification, and this has been, simultaneously, a path of progress, but while physical homogenization has accompanied this process of social unification, the motor of progress has been humanity's growth in cultural heterogeneity. This picture of how history works contains within it, I believe, some fertile ideas that are not strictly dependent upon the persuasiveness of the story by means of which the picture is painted. What Du Bois is grappling with here is the meaning of difference and its relationship with forms of unity. He thinks it is important to recognize and accept that the world is on a path of integration, a theme that is of course extremely relevant to our current circumstances as members of an increasingly global society. What he rejects, however, is the idea that our common flourishing in a shrinking world requires that we not only unify but become uniform. He insists instead on the necessity and beneficial nature of the creative power of diversity.

While the general imperative to value diversity is already something worth considering, its application to the topic of race is what gives Du Bois's essay its distinctive, practical importance. In this essay, as elsewhere in his work, Du Bois shows a commitment to unification in the sense of the political and economic integration of African Americans into US society on terms of fairness and equality. He combines this, however, with

46. Reconstructions of a philosophy of history in "Conservation," differing in a number of ways from what follows, can also be found in Kevin Thomas Miles, "'One Far Off Divine Event': 'Race' and a Future History in Du Bois," in Bernasconi, *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy*, 19–31; and Robert Bernasconi, "'Our Duty to Conserve': W.E.B. Du Bois's Philosophy of History in Context," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108 (2009): 519–40.

47. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," 41.



an equally strong commitment to the preservation and cultivation of black cultural difference. Thus he writes: “as a race we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities for development.”<sup>48</sup> This is a sentiment he expresses just as powerfully in the famous first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, where he claims that the ultimate wish of “the American Negro” is that it would become “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.”<sup>49</sup>

The message here, one which I believe is absolutely crucial, is that *racism works and must be addressed both in terms of the way it creates difference and the way it suppresses difference*. Insofar as racist social structures create difference in the sense of refusing black people the same opportunities for power and resources that white people have, black people must fight for sameness. On the other hand, insofar as racist discourse sets up the ways and values of white people as the standard by which black people are judged to be deficient, thus denigrating black cultural traditions and creativity, black people ought to resist the pressure for sameness. What Du Bois articulates in “Conservation,” then, is a sharp critique of Eurocentrism: he claims that the liberation of black people requires that they demand equal rights and fair treatment but that they simultaneously affirm that “their destiny is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals.”<sup>50</sup>

This strong critique of Eurocentrism and bold affirmation of cultural resistance reveals, in my view, the usefulness of Du Bois’s cultural theory of race. I would furthermore argue that we can appreciate this insight even if we reject, as I think we should, Du Bois’s cultural account of the origin of race. We can and should accept, in other words, a political account of the origin of race, according to which racial divisions as we know them today are the ideological and institutional products of modern European expansion, with its expropriation of non-European lands and subjugation of non-European peoples. On this view, the origin of something called the black race is to be located in the enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans and the colonization of Africa.<sup>51</sup> But this political account of how people of various ethnicities first came to inhabit a racial identity known as “Negro,” “African,” or “black” is, I believe, compatible with the judgment that black identity subsequent to the point of origin is

48. *Ibid.*, 44.

49. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 3.

50. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” 43.

51. Another point of clarification in relation to Appiah (and also Glasgow): note that there is nothing circular or unsatisfyingly indeterminate about the sociohistorical account

an identity partly shaped by the agency, creativity, and traditional cultures of those who came to inhabit it and, as such, it has distinctive cultural meaning and value which would be sadly lost were black people to try to fit as neatly as possible into the contours of a European-derived cultural framework.<sup>52</sup> I believe that divergent but relevantly similar accounts combining a story of genesis through political positioning in relationship to Western imperialism and a story of subsequent development that includes the factor of cultural investment from within can be told for other racial identities as well.

This combination of political and cultural theories is possible, I believe, because we have good reason to think that any thoughtful version of social constructionism must recognize both political and cultural aspects of the existence and significance of race. There is no doubt that part of why race has such a major impact on our lives, especially the lives of people of color, is because, historically and in the present, it has functioned by slotting people into positions of relative privilege and disadvantage. The political theory of race captures this well. And yet, in speaking of the impact of race on our lives, we necessarily speak of the shaping of our lives by our socialization into particular ways of life where being this or that race is among the modes of identification that influence how we think and act. Race must therefore also be understood as a cultural phenomenon. What ultimately drives social constructionist views about race is the indispensable insight that, whatever we can or cannot say about human biology, race matters to us because it has come to be the case that certain features of our appearance and ancestry affect our interactions with each other as beings who live in groups—that is to say, race structures

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of race that I endorse here, because the claim is not merely that a race is a group that shares a common history but that—as Appiah perceives Du Bois to be tacitly assuming—a race is also a group linked by descent to a particular geographical region (sub-Saharan Africa, in the case of the black race). What makes the account sociohistorical rather than biological is the claim that it is only in the wake of enslavement and colonization by Europeans that the classification of these people as a group sharing physical characteristics (dark skin, curly hair, etc.) and place of origin (sub-Saharan Africa) resulted in a category of significance known as a “race.”

52. I should make it clear here that, despite my earlier criticism of Taylor, the move I am now making is quite compatible with some of what he has to say about the relationship between racial and cultural identity. When addressing the question of why it might make sense for people to accept and identify with racial designations, Taylor begins by acknowledging “cultural considerations,” noting that “certain connections exist or can be made between my ethnic and cultural background [as an African American] and the background of a black person from Kenya, Ghana, or Haiti.” He is careful to add that he is not saying “black folk everywhere share a common culture,” which might seem to signify a break with my account, but the following clarification of what he *is* saying shows that we are saying very similar things: “various African-derived cultures may similarly be oriented towards the idea of a black race, or towards the idea of being similarly situated vis-à-vis the history and practice of white supremacy” (see Taylor, *Race*, 113).

our social life. It is safe to say that there is no aspect of social life that is not in some way affected by power relations and no aspect that is not in its own way representative of the variations in beliefs, values, practices, and modes of identification by means of which different social contexts can be seen as distinct. In other words, social life is always both political and cultural and thus so is race.

That being said, what a social constructionist chooses to emphasize about race makes a difference. If power relations are what matter above all in understanding what race is and how we should react to its existence as part of our social reality, then we should all look forward to the day when race disappears once and for all. The main role of race in social life, from this perspective, is our division along lines of dominance and subordination, superiority and inferiority. It is, in short, the evil we call racism. If the political theory is right that this is what lies at the heart of race, then the ultimate defeat of racism, toward which we should all be constantly striving, necessarily means the defeat and total abolition of race itself. Something like this thought would seem to be behind the strong appeal to many of the notion of a “postracial” society.

But what if, under the influence of “Conservation,” we come to see the sense in which racial distinctions can imply cultural differences as of equal or even of more importance? This makes it possible to imagine racism going away without race going away. What the defeat of racism would bring about, from this perspective, is not the end of race but the dawn of *racial equality*. The notion of racial equality, we should note, is an oxymoron, a complete contradiction in terms, if we hold strictly to the political theory of race. From the cultural perspective, though, a situation in which racial groups persist but in a state of equality rather than socioeconomic and Eurocentric cultural hierarchy, respecting and mutually influencing each other while remaining relatively distinct, is a coherent and admirable goal.

Indeed, this is precisely the goal set for us by Outlaw, who is in many ways Du Bois’s truest heir in the contemporary debate. Whatever one thinks of the success or failure of his defense of Du Bois against Appiah, the fact that Outlaw sees the biological and social factors that he thinks combine to create races as creating “self-reproducing, relatively distinct cultural groups” clearly shows his inheritance of Du Bois’s cultural theory of race.<sup>53</sup> Outlaw speaks of races, along with ethnicities, as “communities of meaning” and states that “for many of us the continued existence of discernible racial/ethnic communities of meaning is highly desirable, *even if, in the very next instant, racism and invidious ethnocentrism in every form and manifestation were to disappear forever.*”<sup>54</sup>

53. Outlaw, “‘Conserve’ Races?” 20.

54. *Ibid.*, 34.

I concur with this statement, and I am therefore attracted to Outlaw's Du Boisian view. I am not exactly sure what to make of the scientific aspect of this view—that is, his claim that biological factors provide “not yet fully understood boundary conditions and possibilities that affect the development of the relatively distinct gene pools [of racial groups].”<sup>55</sup> He may simply be pointing out what no social constructionist can plausibly deny: namely, that people are normally born into races and thus races are groups whose members are linked partly by lines of descent.<sup>56</sup> In any case, I am most comfortable with such talk when he clarifies that “the biological features referred to when making racial distinctions are always conscripted into projects of cultural, political, and social construction.”<sup>57</sup>

The foregrounding of cultural construction is what I value here. What it means to be a black person, for many of us, including myself, can never be exhausted through reference to problems of stigmatization, discrimination, marginalization, and disadvantage, as real and as large-looming as these factors are in the racial landscape as we know it. There is also joy in blackness, a joy shaped by culturally distinctive situations, expressions, and interactions, by stylizations of the distinctive features of the black body, by forms of linguistic and extralinguistic communication, by artistic traditions, by religious and secular rituals, and by any number of other modes of cultural existence. There is also pride in the way black people have helped to shape Western culture, not merely by means of the free labor and extraction of resources that economically supported this culture but also directly through cultural contributions, most prominently in music and dance. These contributions are racial in character—that is to say, they are cultural contributions whose significance can only be fully understood when they are placed in proper context as emerging from a racialized people. It does not seem necessary, however, to assume that the oppressive nature of this process of racialization must necessarily problematize the continued existence of the culture that emerged from it. There is, in fact, reason to think that the historical memory of creating beauty in the midst of struggling to survive oppression can and should persist as a thing of value in black culture long after that oppression has truly and finally been relegated to the past. As Kathryn Gines argues: “Race is not just a negative category used for the purpose of oppression and exploitation. . . . Race has also come to represent a more positive category that encompasses a sense of membership or belonging, remembrance of struggle and overcoming, and the motivation to press forward and endeavor toward new ideals and achievements.”<sup>58</sup>

55. *Ibid.*, 20.

56. See, e.g., Taylor's claim that we can capture “the lowest common denominator for the various dialects of race-talk” by defining “race-thinking” as “a way of assigning generic meaning to human bodies and *bloodlines*” (Taylor, *Race*, 12, 15; emphasis mine).

57. Outlaw, “‘Conserve’ Races?” 21.

58. Kathryn T. Gines, “Fanon and Sartre 50 Years Later: To Retain or Reject the Concept of Race,” *Sartre Studies International* 9 (2003): 55–67, 56.

#### IV. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON REASONS FOR RESERVATION

I have argued that we should pay more attention to the way Du Bois, in “Conservation,” directs our attention to the cultural dimension of race and I have suggested that it is not unreasonable to actively desire the persistence of race as a cultural construction, even after the end of racism. I wish in this final section to briefly raise and address three concerns about my position, one of which is a textual worry concerning Du Bois and the other two of which are worries about the general plausibility of the notion of race after racism.

The textual worry concerns the surprising possibility that Du Bois might be against the vision I share with Outlaw and Gines of retaining black racial identity past the point where it is impressed upon us by a white supremacist world. Toward the end of “Conservation,” Du Bois writes of the duty African Americans have in light of the need for black people to make their contribution to civilization: “We believe it the duty of the Americans of Negro descent, as a body, to maintain their race identity *until this mission of the Negro people is accomplished, and the ideal of human brotherhood has become a practical possibility.*”<sup>59</sup> What does Du Bois mean when he suggests that this duty lasts only so long and that it apparently ends once a familial relationship (to avoid his masculinist language of “brotherhood”) among all humans becomes possible? Tommy Lott takes it to mean that, despite the fact that Du Bois talks as if the special mission of African Americans is primarily cultural in nature, he “really meant to speak of a *political* mission that culture in some way enables African Americans to carry out.”<sup>60</sup> Once this political mission—the mission of ending racism—has been carried out, the need for maintaining racial identity goes away, thus making the vision Outlaw, Gines, and I share non- or even anti-Du Boisian.

In response, I will first concede that we do have reason to think that Du Bois envisions a point in the distant future at which racial distinctions have gone out of existence. Recall that he sees humanity as having been on a path of social unification that has also been a path of physical homogenization. If this pattern continues, then at some point, presumably, the races as we know them—that is, as at least partly distinguished by physical characteristics—will be no more (and it is even unclear whether we should imagine this future world as culturally heterogeneous or whether we should imagine a homogeneity resulting from the even distribution of gifts of the races). I would argue, however, that we need not understand Du Bois as making that particular point in the quoted passage, which is a good thing given that we also obviously need not believe his prediction about the fu-

59. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” 46; emphasis mine.

60. Tommy L. Lott, *The Invention of Race: Black Culture and the Politics of Representation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 51.

ture, built as it is on his empirically questionable description of the past. The point I think we can more productively read Du Bois as making here is that as long as racism is a threat to the flourishing of black culture, there is a duty to defend it, to preserve and to cultivate it, a duty that falls upon all black people who are dedicated to resisting antiblack racism. But when racism is no longer a threat to black culture and the message of black culture has been given to the world in the same way that Du Bois claims the messages of Western European cultures have, this duty will be no more and black people who do not feel especially invested in black culture will not need to worry that they are betraying the cause of black freedom. This does not mean, however, that the black race as a cultural entity will die, any more than the fact of some Germans assimilating into other cultures would mean the death of German culture as we know it. I therefore think it is possible to maintain, as I have, that the position according to which it would be worthwhile for people to hold onto black racial identity after the end of racism is a Du Boisian position, given his cultural theory of race.

But, speaking of Germans and other Western Europeans, the first of the two general reasons for reservation concerning the idea of race after racism that I would like to address has to do with the idea of white culture. If races can be understood as cultural groups and if we are therefore justified in feeling a sense of pride in our race, is there any problem with white people feeling a sense of pride about being white? For most of us, when we encounter white people with special pride in being white and a desire for other white people and the race as a whole to protect their culture, it strikes us as a telltale sign of racism (and for good reason, as it usually is). Why is this not a sign that whiteness necessarily represents a political position in a system of oppression? Why should we not view the cultural content of whiteness as the pathological culture of privilege that must be eradicated if equality is to prevail?

One clever response to this might be to point out that Du Bois's list of eight cultural races does not, as a matter of fact, include the white race as a separate category. I will not, however, avail myself of this point. Rather, I would have us first acknowledge the reason for the asymmetry in our reactions to calls for black pride versus calls for white pride. Calls for black pride, in the world as we know it, are not simply actions but reactions: they are attempts to respond combatively to the dehumanizing power of the system of white supremacy. Calls for white pride are, at present, also reactions: they are attempts to combat the kinds of disruption to the system represented by calls for black pride. They are, in other words, morally reprehensible attempts to hold onto hierarchy in the face of struggles for change. This leads some to think that what is needed for change is the repudiation of whiteness by white people. While I understand the reasoning behind this view, I disagree that white people must run away from their whiteness and that strikes me, in fact, as a rather disingenuous approach to confronting racism. Rejecting the Eurocentric privileging of one's cultural habits and ex-

periences as a white person does not require rejecting all of those habits and experiences. It therefore seems plausible to me that, in a postracist world, there would continue to be whiteness, but a decentered whiteness that would ideally carry within it a strong collective memory of the self-critique needed to overcome its oppressive past.<sup>61</sup>

The last reason for reservation I would like to mention concerns the relationship between race and ethnicity. Now, we should either imagine that races in a future postracist world will be connected to races in our world by lines of descent, and thus most likely by distinctive appearances similar to those we possess now, or that they will not. With respect to the latter option, someone with a cultural theory of race might argue that since it is cultures that will persist, it will be possible in future for people of any ancestral heritage whatsoever to be members of any race. The problem with this view, I think, is that it seems strange to say that certain people who in our world would be called white should be called *racially* black in the future when we could simply say, as it is possible to say about many white people today, that they are white people who happen to be strongly influenced by black culture or who even participate within black culture. The fact is that talk of what one is racially, as I admitted when discussing Outlaw, really does carry with it the implication of lines of descent, even when we see social relations as the sole source of the significance of these lines of descent.<sup>62</sup>

This leads us to the position that, in a postracist world, races as cultural groups would still be connected to the races in our world by lines of descent. This would not mean, to be clear, that one would be forced to accept the culture into which one is born. It would simply mean that those within future generations who continued to see value in the culture of their ancestors would work to sustain and further enrich that culture. The worry arises, however, that in this case, we are wrongfully hanging on to “race” when we have a perfectly good word for social groups connected by culture as well as by lines of descent: namely, ethnicities.<sup>63</sup> To be ethnically Italian, for example, is a matter of being born Italian. Perhaps it

61. For an alternative view, according to which racial identities might be preserved in a nonracist world but white identity would not be among them, see Andrew Pierce, “Reconstructing Race: A Discourse-Theoretical Approach to a Normative Politics of Identity,” *Philosophical Forum* 43 (2012): 27–49. For an argument that white people need to learn how to embrace and love white identity in an antiracist manner right away, see Shannon Sullivan, “Transforming Whiteness with Roycean Loyalty: A Pragmatist Feminist Account,” in *Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism*, ed. Maurice Hamington and Celia Bardwell-Jones (New York: Routledge, 2012), 19–41.

62. In addition to Taylor’s talk of “bloodlines,” cited above, see also Michael Hardimon’s argument that it is part of the “logical core” of the concept of race that a race is “a group of human beings whose members are linked by a common ancestry” (Michael O. Hardimon, “The Ordinary Concept of Race,” *Journal of Philosophy* 100 [2003]: 437–55, 445).

63. See, e.g., Taylor’s discussion of ethnicity as involving a link between descent and culture (Taylor, *Race*, 53–57).

would be better, then, to call the cultural groups linked by descent that survive the end of racism ethnicities, rather than races.<sup>64</sup>

In response to this, I would first admit that the difference between race and ethnicity can often be very unclear even in our present context, and it is not unlikely that this would be the case to an even greater extent in a postracist world. One reason to think the distinction would remain, however, is that just as today one can be ethnically Italian and racially white, we might continue to see races as being made up of multiple ethnicities and nationalities in the future. If the notion of “racial whiteness” in such cases turned out to be nothing more than a reference to appearance, then race in this future might be socially meaningless, but as I have said, it strikes me neither as necessary nor even probable that white identity as a cultural reality will disappear just because racism ceases to exist. It furthermore strikes me, from a personal standpoint, as positively desirable that black identity as a cultural reality will not disappear. Perhaps, just as I spoke of Du Bois’s races as supernations, races in the future could be considered multi-ethnic ethnicities. I have no problem with that label if the goal is simply conceptual clarity. On the other hand, though, if what we would be doing when using the term is attempting to avoid the term “race” because we wish to be free of its troubling historical weight, then I think we would be making a mistake. A postracist world, in my view, would not be a world in which we forget how racial identities came to be. As part of preserving our racial cultures, I would think we should also all strive to preserve our memory of the terrible political origin of races, as preserving this memory would hopefully help to prevent us from ever doing such evil again.

64. Sally Haslanger, who has articulated a very self-consciously political theory of race, has suggested that groups that are otherwise like races but are not “hierarchically organized” might be called “ethnicities” (and she treats the term “ethno-racial groups” as an umbrella term covering both the hierarchical groups that exist today and the nonhierarchical groups that might exist in the future). See Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55, 51. For an argument that we should drop talk of races in favor of talk of ethnicities right away, see J. Angelo Corlett, *Race, Racism, and Reparations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), chap. 1.