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AFTERLIFE: DU BOIS, CLASSICAL HUMANISM, AND THE MATTER OF BLACK LIVES

*Please note that this is a post-print version of this article.

> "'You see,' he said turning to Mr. Norton, 'he has eyes and ears and a good distended African nose, but he fails to understand the simple facts of life. Understand. Understand? It's worse than that. He registers with his senses but short-circuits his brain. Nothing has meaning. He takes it in but he doesn't digest it. Already he is -- well, bless my soul! Behold! a walking zombie!' Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (94).[1]

In Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man,* the protagonist -- i.e., the Invisible Man -- encounters an ex-doctor at the Golden Day, a bar full of discontents. The former doctor explains to the overwhelmed and confused Mr Norton, who is the white trustee of the Southern black college that the Invisible Man attends, how he sees the protagonist. It is no accident that Ellison models the college in the novel after Tuskegee Normal Institute, the historical black college that Booker T. Washington founded in 1881.[2] After the publication of his autobiography *Up From Slavery* in 1901, Washington would become W. E. B. Du Bois's public nemesis, combatant in contradictory solutions to 'the Negro Problem'.[3] In *Invisible Man,* the protagonist models various approaches to being black -- and to being a problem -- in America in the middle of the twentieth century, from Du Boisian humanism, to Washingtonian separatism and self-help, all the while enduring the cruel joke of Jim Crow and segregation in America. He faces expulsion from his Negro college after inadvertently exposing Mr Norton to the unseemly life of a black sharecropper, Trueblood, in the rural areas surrounding the college, and he piles error upon error when he brings Mr Norton to the Golden Day. The episode at the bar suggests a Du Boisian solution to the situation in which the protagonist finds himself, but also to the broader human condition: Invisible Man must attempt to craft a

[1] R. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, New York, 1952.
[2] A. Nadal, *Invisible Criticism: Ralph Ellison and the American Canon*, Iowa City, 1991.
[3] G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, New Jersey, 1995 [1944]; B. T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*, ed. W. L. Andrews, New York, 1996 [1901],

way of being in a world that seems to conspire to hem him in on all sides. Invisible Man's situation in the novel is not unlike that of Du Bois himself, who sought equality for Negro sharecroppers in the South by offering them Cicero's *Pro Archia*, as AUTHOR 1 in this volume recounts.

Invisible Man is the embodiment of the Negro Problem about which Du Bois and Washington debated. Educated, Invisible Man might represent the Talented Tenth, a refined leader of Negro masses, not unlike Du Bois, an exemplum, to use the Ciceronian language of AUTHOR #1. Trained to live a separate life from his white counterparts, Invisible Man could well be 'a walking zombie', as Ellison suggests through the disenfranchised doctor. That is, for the Du Boisian, the answer to the problem of how blacks fit into American society -- a problem still unresolved at the beginning of the twenty-first century -- is not one of limiting the Negro, but rather of the Negro coming to a new level of 'understanding', to use Ellison's language. As we close our discussion of Du Bois's classical humanism, *Invisible Man* gives us another view of Du Bois's influence, the way in which Du Bois's approach drew overtly (and covertly) from a deeper fount, which was then poured out and became influences to other intellectuals of his time. Ellison also punctuates the theme of signifyin(g) discussed in the introduction and in a few of the chapters in this volume and gives a black literary contextualization to the 'fuzzy connections' found throughout. If Du Bois's '*Souls*' is the 'successor to Cicero's celebrated speech', as AUTHOR #1 argues, then Ellison's *Invisible Man* is, in important ways to enumerate for this volume, the successor to Du Bois' *Souls*. Ellison's novel was only the beginning of Du Bois's aftermath, one in a number of iterations of an African American humanism, albeit one poignantly fitting in the context of this volume and, more broadly, in the evaluating the state of black lives in the beginning of the twentieth century.

THE CONTEXT: SIGNIFYIN(G) ON CLASSICAL HUMANISM

The preceding essays focused on the influence, or reception, of the classics. I postpone the word *citation*, especially given the difficulty (pointed to in many of the preceding essays) in locating the exact source of influence within Du Bois's work. Instead of citation or allusion, I offer Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s theory of 'signifyin(g)', a mode of influence that in fact intentionally postpones and represses signs of influence.[4] In *Signifying Monkey*, Gates

[4] H. L. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Oxford, 1989. See also H. L. Gates, *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the 'Racial' Sign*, Oxford, 1989, where an extended passage on Ellison's signification on Richard Wright's *Native Son* -- 'invisible man' for Wright's 'black boy' -- well

presents the approach to literary texts and traditions at the hands of black writers in terms of parody and play. 'Signifyin(g)' is neither allusion, direct quotation, nor citation, and yet it does the work of all of these modes. My introduction of Ellison to the conversation helps to situate Du Bois's work within the African American context of signifyin(g), where there is 'absolutely no anxiety about the influence of any particular Negro'.[5] I find Gates's *Signifying Monkey* helpful in addressing the lack of direct citation in Du Bois's work (or to it, from an author like Ellison), to which these essays point. Ellison's *Invisible Man* is useful not only because of the signifyin(g) way in which the novelist, so to speak, *cites* Du Bois, but also because of Ellison's deeper play on humanism, per se, both classical humanism and its German reception.

By classical humanism, I mean, for the sake both of Du Bois and Ellison, to speak of the authors' interest in Greek and Roman texts, and perhaps also the idea of an African classical period, which AUTHOR #5 discusses. Casting influence wider than Greece and Rome, I parse the way Du Bois signifies on classical humanism alongside German humanism, which is also critical to his works, and for this broader contextualization Anthony Kwame Appiah's *Lines of Descent: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* is a useful study.[6] The term 'humanism' is suggestive of a number of historical turns beginning with its use among Roman authors, as *humanitas*. Its twin concept is the idea of the liberal arts, fields that Cicero himself, going a step further than the humanism he frames in *Pro Archia*, directly names in such works as *De re publica*: logic, art, history, philosophy, and so on. Popular contemporary sources for the idea of *humanitas* and 'liberal arts' elide the contributions of Cicero to the conversation, beginning instead with Roman imperial authors, such as Aulus Gellius, or later, Erasmus and the Renaissance more generally.[7] As AUTHOR #1 argues, Du Bois's debt to Cicero reminds us of the importance of Rome to the discussion, but it also is indicative of broader humanistic citations, direct and indirect, throughout Du Bois's work.

Adding Ellison to the discussion allows us to demonstrate the work of influence in Du Bois's classicism. Ellison, who draws from Du Bois, evidences the kind of citations to which

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demonstrates the power of absence, that is, the lack of direct reference or citation perhaps makes the case even more strongly.

[5] Gates, *Signifying Monkey* (n. 4 above), p. 120.

[6] K. A. Appiah, *Lines of Descent: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity*, Cambridge, MA, 2014.

[7] A student perusing the internet would find the following on 'humanism', which leaves classical contributions out of the discussion: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanism. Helpful for a genealogy of classical humanities within the United States is C. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment*, Cambridge, MA, 1994.

the essays in this volume point. The protagonist in *Invisible Man* is like the subject about whom Du Bois writes in *The Souls of Black Folk*, on at least three counts. First, he has a distinct cultural experience, that of a second-class citizenship. His individual trials as a black man map onto the similar experiences of others like him: racial discrimination in the South, a false illusion of freedom -- and second-class citizenship -- in the northern states, and violence and brutality at the hands of institutional authorities, whether those institutions be local (his college) or state-sponsored, e.g., the death of a black character, Tod Clifton, at the hands of the police.[8] In the language of AUTHOR #5, these experiences prevent the 'full participation' of Invisible Man in Du Bois's Aristotelian democracy. That is, he gives form to the problems that Du Bois wrote about in broader sociological terms.

Secondly, following from the first, like the 'folk' of Du Bois's narrative, the protagonist of *Invisible Man* is in need of education as a succour to his despair. Even the white Southerners who send him to college recognize the need to educate him somehow, although they do not want him studying alongside their sons and daughters, nor should he gain the type of elite education offered to them.[9] Here the problem of 'equality' for the African American comes into play, and 'economic inequality was an important source of social unrest' (AUTHOR #2).

For Du Bois, thirdly, such a person as Invisible Man is teachable toward the unique contributions of his race, though even the concept of race has evolved since the mid-twentieth century. Regarding these unique contributions, AUTHOR #3 shows the unique role Du Bois felt the Negro played in American life and world history, through *The Star of Ethiopia*. As we will see, Du Bois's opponents, the chief among whom was Booker T. Washington, would set certain limits on the education of the Negro. For this distinct and teachable 'folk', however, Du Bois would offer Cicero's *Pro Archia* because of the way that it endorses liberal education, one move toward social equality and broader democratic participation. In education and equality, Du Bois differed drastically from Washington, who felt such education was, bluntly, a waste of time for Negro Americans, and for whom 'separate but equal' was a concession to full equality. Du Bois conveys his sense of a unique, Negro contribution or 'genius' (*ingenium* from *Pro Archia*, as AUTHOR #1 argues) through rich metaphors drawn from classical and German humanism: 'soul' (Geist) of the folk; the

[8] P. Rankine, 'The Body and *Invisible Man*: Ralph Ellison's Novel in Twenty-First-Century Performance and Public Spaces', in *The New Territory: Ralph Ellison and the Twenty-First Century*, ed. M. C. Conner and L. E. Morel, Jackson, MS, 2016, pp. 55-74.
[9] S. Adell, *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth-Century Black Literature*, Urbana, IL, 1994.

veil, which separates the hidden realities of black lives from the white majority; the cave, a realm of illusions similar to that of the Platonic myth (see AUTHOR #2's contribution in this volume).

The way in which Du Bois deploys these metaphors is echoed in Ellison. Similar to the Negro masses in *Souls*, who do not yet understand the profundity of their contribution to humanity, Invisible Man lives with the shadows of his own illusions, to use the symbol from Plato's *Republic* to which AUTHOR #2 points us in his essay. Du Bois borrows this metaphor, perhaps indirectly, from Plato, all the while weaving in the fabric of his own learning and experience. Put in Du Boisian terms, the protagonist in *Invisible Man* lives behind the veil, the white line that separates the black masses from white lives.[10] The Du Boisian solution to this problem, drawn from a classical, humanistic past, requires the deeper 'understanding' that the protagonist now lacks but will come to fathom by the novel's close, and here is the Ellisonian riff on Du Bois that evidences the signifyin(g).

The degree to which Du Bois is shot through Ellison's 1952 novel is not my primary concern here, though *Invisible Man* instantiates a number of themes raised throughout these essays and does so in a way that pulls us back to a particular existential condition. Rather than a close reading of *Invisible Man*, per se, I am interested in how Ellison's novel ties together the preceding essays through cultural specificity within a universalist, classical framework. *Invisible Man* is an important part of Du Bois's afterlife, evidence of the degree to which he points to a style of humanism, which involves classical allusions, however elusive or indefinite. Within Gates's framework of signifyin(g), however, *Invisible Man* is more than just one additional example of Du Bois's influence. Rather, the novel demonstrates that an African American vernacular style is part and parcel of Du Bois's classicism, and of his creative process, more broadly. Similar to the way in which Du Bois riffs on 'Atlanta' through the myth of Atalanta, which AUTHOR #2 explores, the African American style of creating a patchwork of texts is evident in Ellison, and Du Bois now becomes part of the texture of *Invisible Man*. Du Bois's intellectual ancestry is mixed, but all of the preceding articles point to the persistence of Du Bois's interest in classical authors. Du Bois's citationality, his signifyin(g), was a particular instantiation of a broader phenomenon. That is, black authors in America, from as early as Phillis Wheatley, have always been exposed to classical humanism; how these authors have deployed the classics, moreover, has ever

[10] For an extended study of the symbol of the white line, see G. Stephens, *On Racial Frontiers: The New Culture of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley*, Cambridge, 1999.

demonstrated particular points of cultural inflection.[11] Du Bois's classicism is no exception and, within the context of this phenomenon, should be no surprise. Gates's 'signifyin(g)' is one, though not the only, way of reading this influence, this particular play on the classics.

Cicero, whom AUTHOR #1 covers extensively, is perhaps in rarefied company as one of the authors whom Du Bois actually cites. AUTHOR #1 shows Du Bois modelling Cicero when he offers *Pro Archia* as 'the chance to soar in the dim blue air above the smoke'. The line is a riff that, as AUTHOR #1 suggests, calls to mind Cicero's discussion of Archias's everyday classicism and its uses, one of which is repose, which we might well find 'above the smoke'. For Du Bois, the rural Negro has as much need for Cicero as any human being from any age. Du Bois cites Cicero as an exemplum, and Du Bois's *Souls* itself 'must be considered a classic' (AUTHOR #1) because of what it accomplishes in the context of a liberal education. *Pro Archia* makes a strong case for liberal arts, but other Ciceronian texts, such as *De re publica*, are even more explicit about what the liberal arts were – logic, geography, mathematics, music, and theatre – and what their impact might be on the learner: 'What is more excellent than when we join the management of great affairs and their practice with the study of and reflection upon the liberal arts (*artes liberales*)' (*De re publica* 3.5.6-9). More important to Du Bois than an outright case for the liberal arts, however, was an active play on what he had learned and how that learning pertained to his own context. Thus, he cites Cicero, but the patchwork that he creates through signifyin(g) is harder to discern. It is in this context that the contributors to this volume have provided an archive of strong evidence. AUTHOR #2, for example, notes that Du Bois does not cite Ovid as a source for his Atalanta 'rendition', as the author calls it. Nevertheless, Du Bois darkens Ovid's Atalanta, likely in part through his signifyin(g) on Ovid's *eburnea* to turn 'ivory' Atalanta into 'ebony'. As AUTHOR #3 argues, Du Bois transforms Plato's cave into the 'veil' of racial segregation in America, though he leaves images of the cave lingering. All the while, Du Bois demonstrates an actively engaged humanism, one that draws on the classics of Europe *and* Africa, as AUTHOR #4 shows, in order to build a more perfect union, a fuller democracy. Du Bois certainly cites Aristotle, but not in a way that allows the fully articulated ideal of broader democratic participation, one inclusive of the African in its trust of 'collective wisdom', that AUTHOR #5 provides. All of these examples are cases not of direct

[11] For one study of this influence, see Patrice Rankine, *Ulysses in Black: Ralph Ellison, Classicism, and African American Literature*, Madison, 2006.

citation but rather of the mode of signifyin(g) that allows us to make more of the 'frail' or 'fuzzy connections' than other theoretical approaches have allowed.

THE DU BOISIAN/ELLISONIAN CALL TO UNDERSTAND[ING]

Thus, to situate Du Bois's deployment of the classical texts in the context of a specific, black cultural model, and its aftermath, I have turned to *Invisible Man.* The call to 'understand' in the epigraph provides us with another instance of signifyin[g]. The black college, the misguided protagonist in need of succour, the unlikely source of the learning, and other signifiers, all point to Du Bois. The epigraph from *Invisible Man* demonstrates what is at stake for the Negro in the mid-twentieth century, hazards that have never been higher than at the beginning of the twenty-first century. What is at stake in classical humanism is *understanding*, and Du Bois's insistence that the Negro understand and be understood was not a universally accepted approach, as we can see from Booker T. Washington. *Invisible Man* contributes to the conversation by reifying the twentieth-century problem of 'the color line' through the -- albeit implicit -- debate between Du Bois and Washington on the role of liberal learning in 'full[er] participation', which would include the African American and others temporarily excluded, to use the language of AUTHOR #5, from American democracy.

Early in the novel, the protagonist channels Washington when he gives a speech to Southern benefactors regarding social responsibility, at one point slipping into the idea of 'social equality' to a startled, *separate-but-equal* crowd. The speech is reminiscent of Washington's Atlanta Exposition Address of 1895, in which he posited that Negroes could be as separate from whites as fingers on a hand yet, similar to the hand, blacks and whites could move to common purpose in America. The novel's protagonist begins his journey subscribing to this approach to American life. (It is also noteworthy that Ralph Ellison himself attended Tuskegee for two years.) As we have seen, Du Bois had a different approach to the Negro Problem from Washington, one founded in the fundamental humanity -- and equality -- of blacks in America. For Du Bois, this equality would play out in terms of *understanding*, or education. *Invisible Man*'s grounding in the debate between Washington and Du Bois is not superficial but is important to penetrating what seems to be everyday language of 'understand[ing]' in the passage in the Golden Day and throughout the novel. 'Understand[ing]' is a foundational element to Du Bois's relationship to the German reception of Greek and Roman authors and ideas.

At first blush, the call to 'understand' is innocuous. The ex-doctor, like the other veterans at the Golden Day, does not conform to the norms of social life. Invisible Man has brought Mr Norton to the Golden Day after his chance -- unceremonious and damning, for the protagonist -- encounter with a man who embodies the worst of stereotypes about the Negro in the South, the sharecropper Trueblood. Trueblood epitomizes the local bumpkin about whom Washington and Du Bois debated. For Washington, such a man might be taught the rudiments of being a farmhand; attempts to move him beyond a certain station in life through education are a waste of resources. Washington says as much:

> When a mere boy, I saw a young colored man, who had spent several years in school, sitting in a common cabin in the South, studying a French grammar. I noted the poverty, the untidiness, the want of system and thrift, that existed about the cabin, notwithstanding his knowledge of French and other academic subjects…such instances as these, in connection with my own struggles, impressed upon me the importance of making a study of our needs as a race, and applying the remedy accordingly…Some one may be tempted to ask, Has not the negro boy or girl as good a right to study a French grammar and instrumental music as the white youth? I answer, Yes, but in the present condition of the negro race in this country there is need of something more.[12]

Although Washington points to his own desire to understand the Negro problem by 'making a study of our needs as a race', his conclusion is that of an attenuated knowledge for those in need of 'system and thrift'. Washington contrasts unfavourably 'untidiness' and poverty to the Negro's study of French. French grammar is not instrumental to the Negro in his condition. It is noteworthy that, unlike John Calhoun, Washington does not deny the Negro's *ability* to learn the foreign language.[13] Rather, Washington focuses on the surrounding conditions of poverty, similar to that of Trueblood in *Invisible Man*, whose confined conditions force him to sleep alongside his wife and daughter in the same bed, with the incestuous outcome seemingly evident to the incidental onlookers: his daughter's pregnancy. Alongside the separation of the races that keeps a benefactor such as Mr Norton from the likes of Trueblood, Washington scoffs at the liberal education of those unable to sustain their

[12] B. T. Washington, 'The Awakening of the Negro', *Atlantic Monthly*, 78, 1896, pp. 322-8. Washington repeats the anecdote in 1901 in his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*: see AUTHOR #1 in this volume.
[13] M. V. Ronnick, *The Autobiography of William Sanders Scarborough: An American Journey from Slavery to Scholarship*, Detroit, 2005.

own families and property. These are the people to whom Du Bois would give *Pro Archia* (AUTHOR #1).

Although Du Bois for a time subscribed to the notion of a 'Talented Tenth', namely that certain Negroes would lift the masses out of their condition, one realizes with AUTHOR #5 that the 'wisdom of the multitude' for Du Bois requires the education of every 'folk', broadly, if not individually. To Washington's premise that liberal learning is a waste of time for the Negro, Du Bois rejoins that he 'sits with Shakespeare, and he winces not.' The Du Bois retort in *The Souls of Black Folk* is remarkable in its own right:

> Across the color (sic) line I move arm and arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out of the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed Earth and the tracery of stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the veil (29).

Three of the symbols critical to AUTHOR #3's treatment of Du Bois's humanism jump out of the passage: the cave, soul, and the veil. Along with these symbols, Du Bois 'summon[s] Aristotle' in his call, as AUTHOR #5 puts it, for 'citizens [to] collectively influence and shape the polity'.

Du Bois's call for understanding, echoed in Ellison, is based in classical humanism, but as Appiah shows, Du Bois's intellectual formation is traceable more immediately to Humboldt, whose declaration about liberal education finds resonance with the passage from *Souls of Black Folk* cited above. The passage cited in Appiah is worth referencing here because of its resonance with Du Bois:

> The mind of the lowliest day-laborer (sic) must originally be attuned with the soul of the most finely cultivated person, if the former is not to fall beneath human dignity and become brutish, and the latter is not to become . . . sentimental, fantasyridden, and eccentric. . . . Even having learned Greek might, in this manner, be something as far from futile for the carpenter as making tables for the scholar (66).

The striking similarities between Humboldt's passage and Du Bois's demonstrate the deep knowledge of a text necessary for signifyin(g), and yet Du Bois does not cite Humboldt. The idea of the 'lowliest day-laborer' echoes Du Bois's 'folk', for whom there would be neither 'scorn nor condescension' from the classical greats, those who are among the 'finely cultivated person(s)'. Such cultivation, moreover, is a mark not necessarily of class but of 'human dignity'. One approaches the matter of dignity through the benefit of 'having learned Greek', which is 'far from futile' for anyone but, rather, cultivating. The radical democracy

of AUTHOR #6's essay is here in Humboldt's passage, where the shared humanity of all people calls for a sympathy of education as well.

Du Bois's debt to German humanism is well-documented,[14] and Ellison is an inheritor of this humanistic language and its further reaches, not through direct citation, but through a signification that demonstrates deep knowledge. The ex-doctor's seemingly innocuous 'understand. Understand?' is deeply resonant with Du Boisian humanism.[15] In *Lines of Descent*, Anthony Appiah traces the notion of understanding from German humanism to Wilhelm Dilthery: 'Psychological experience, he proposed, was a matter not of explanation, *erklären*, but of understanding— *verstehen*. "Nature we explain, but psychic life we understand", was Dilthey's formulation' (78). Patching together German humanism to Du Bois and from there to Ellison, my aim has been twofold: first, to situate Du Bois, beyond classical humanism, in a broader tradition of liberal learning. Parallel to this, secondly, is the black contextualization of Du Bois's work. In his formulation of social equality and black humanity, Ellison looks as much to Du Bois as he does to the Greeks. Ellison becomes one of many inheritors of the 'classic' that Du Bois himself had become, to cite AUTHOR #1. Rather than a simple allusion to the text, Du Bois (and in turn Ellison) signifies on texts of classical humanism as a respite from -- and retort to -- daily challenges in our lives. These texts are ever more expansive, as the 'classic' now includes Du Bois and, after him, Ellison. The expansion to women such as Toni Morrison by the end of the twentieth century continues the powerful play.

THE RACIAL PROJECT

Much of Du Bois's work points to a promise -- rather than the problem -- of the Negro contribution to American life, and thus I will end my reflections with race, the subject of so much of Du Bois's work. For Du Bois, the American promise is grounded in an affirmation of race, troubling as it is, as a vehicle for personal and collective meaning. At the same time, Du Bois's promise, as the preceding essays affirm, is 'omni-local'. The racial promise is such that Du Bois dreams of an American city on a hill, Atlanta, through his playful riff on the Atalanta myth, as AUTHORS #2 shows. That is, the same city where Washington advances his separate but equal framework for black advancement could be, in Du Bois's imagination,

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[14] See Adell, *Double-Consciousness/Double-Bind* (n. 10 above) and Appiah (n. 10 above).

[15] In the Ellisonian passage alone, 'understand' is repeated three times. The word has 95 other occurrences throughout the novel. Appiah traces Du Bois's own pursuit of understanding to Dilthey: 'Psychological experience, he proposed, was not a matter of explanation, erklären, but of understanding -- verstehen. "Nature we explain, but psychic life we understand," was Dilthey's formulation"' (78).

an American Athens, a place of liberal learning for all races. America's golden apples (to continue the parallel to Atalanta), its promise, rested for Du Bois in an agricultural past, which slaves cultivated, alongside industrial hope, for which Washingtonian, technological training would not suffice, gold would not be enough. Race was of the highest critical importance to Du Bois, and there is also great continuity between race as he understood it and as it is lived in the twenty-first century.

As he did for Du Bois's humanism, Appiah provides a useful framework for defining race when he compares nominalism to ontological approaches. Race is both performative and physical. The performative value of race is what led Du Bois to staged drama. AUTHOR #4 demonstrated the centrality of performance to how Du Bois hoped that the race could be reimagined.[16] The ontological status of race, as Appiah notes, is in the way in which we perform it, bringing it into being through the body.[17] Black experiences were embodied through the piling of dark-hued bodies in the hulls of slave ships across the Atlantic Ocean through the Middle Passage, and these stories are handed down from generation to generation and affirm an identity. The dehumanizing experience of slavery and the history of the treatment of blacks across time is an atrocity, such that Cornel West can assert that the notion of a black person as a full human being is 'a relatively new concept in the West'.[18] If black folk have a 'soul', a way of being in the world that Du Bois wants to articulate, it is the other side of atrocity. The 'soul' of black folks is the striving against the world of Plato's shadows -- the veil -- in the cave that is the reality of race. To return to our German humanism, soul is also Geist, as Appiah points out, the concept that links the day-labourer to the Greek scholar -- but that also sets the races in historical, Hegelian dialectic. (And we might fault Du Bois for his belief in this positivism, but that is for another essay.)

Race exists because of normative practices that affirm its existence. A group of people is treated in certain ways, and that group begins to form an identity around such external pressures. Norms evolve into a kind of shorthand: 'A race was a vast family sharing the same impulses, and striving for ideals of life.'[19] As Du Bois puts it, 'the modern world…knows the Negro chiefly as a bond slave in the West Indies and America'.[20] Du Bois's humanism is not an abstract humanism. Rather, race is central to a particular inflection

[16] Compare D. Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Dance, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927*, New York, 2002.
[17] H. Young, *Embodying Black Experience*, 2010.
[18] C. West, *The Cornel West Reader*, New York, 2000.
[19] Appiah, *Lines of Descent* (n. 6 above).
[20] Du Bois, 'The Negro', 11.

of Du Bois's reception of ideas about humanistic thinking. As we have seen, Du Bois drew Cicero into a local problem of the rural Southerner, a vignette tantamount to the Negro problem. Du Bois's explicit interest in race only becomes clearer throughout his oeuvre, and he was more politically active in his later life.

Because norms evolve, race as it is articulated in the opening decades of the twenty-first century is different from the discourse of Du Bois's century. As an inheritor of classical and German humanism, Du Bois belonged to an era of biological racism, including craniological studies and classification of several 'races' of man. His work can be read in the context of discussions of the races of man, as Appiah shows.[21] Du Bois was not innocent of this framework. Appiah argues that Du Bois settles on seven races, lineages owing to geographic variation and more complex than phenotype alone. Du Bois would evolve from these categories as somehow ontological to their normative status, the assertion that 'today we realize that there are no hard and fast racial types among men'.[22] He also rejected the idea of a talented echelon, the Talented Tenth, that would lead the way for a particular race.

The foregoing essays situate Du Bois in the context of the centrality of race to the troubles that plague American society in the twenty-first century: the shooting of black boys, seemingly indiscriminately, by police officers; #blacklivesmatter, and the revolt on campuses across America; and even the uptick of gun purchases and a bunkering down among whites after each of Barack Obama's elections, culminating in the endorsement of presidential candidate Donald Trump among white supremacists. Dreams of a post-racial society have become the nightmare of the twenty-first century color line.

Perhaps the expansive identity that humanism -- classical and beyond -- offers can be a balm, an afterlife of great thinkers, like Du Bois, whom we appropriate for our own selves. We might define 'black' and 'white' not as post-selves,[23] but as expansive, performative selves able to morph and reform, our soul, our Geist, potentially infinite. Appiah offers in his interpretation of Du Bois German definitions of the *Ich* and the *nicht-Ich*, the self and all it is not, but these borders are movable. Beginning with the use of classical texts like Cicero's *Pro Archia* in service of the local, the text or author becomes an *exemplum* of a certain kind of

[21] For example, 'The French count Arthur de Gobineau posited just…three races in his Essay on the Inequality of Races (1853-1855), arguing for polygenesis, the view that they did not even share a common ancestor; the distinguished Darwinian Ernst Haeckel, a Prussian anatomist, argued in 1878 that there were twelve; the German-born naturalist Carl Vogt -- who mentions Egyptians, Jews, Tatars, Scythians, the races of Assyria and India, Negroes, Berbers, Greeks, Persians, Arabs, and Turks in a single paragraph of his Lectures on Man' (84).
[22] Du Bois, 'The Negro', 16.
[23] See, for example, Houston and K. Merinda Simmons, eds., *The Trouble with Post-Blackness*, New York, Columbia.

life. Just as Du Bois drew from Cicero and his German teachers, so Ellison riffs on everything he can master: Homer, Greek tragedy, Dostoevsky, Faulkner, and Du Bois and Richard Wright. In the hands of later authors, such as Toni Morrison, the self continues to expand to include the likes of Phillis Wheatley and Anna Julia Cooper, African American women inadvertently left out of Du Bois's and Ellison's ever-perfecting union. An expansive humanism, crafted through classical texts, encompasses Du Bois's dream, which AUTHOR #5 and others revisit in these essays, of the 'broadest measure of justice to all human beings'. If Du Bois can reject his notion of a Talented Tenth, perhaps he allows us to reject a provincialism that excludes, and to choose a humanism that moves toward justice and equity. After all, 'the good of politics is justice, and justice is what benefits the commonwealth.' Striving for the common good will not eliminate difference, but it will enrich the matter of our lives.