**Fruits of a Poison Tree? W.E.B. Du Bois, Gender, and the Maladies of Black Thought Under a Black Feminist-Intersectional Scholarly Milieu**

“As long as the slave remains ignorant, docile, and contented, he is often taken good care of, humoured. . . ." On the other hand, "from the moment he exhibits the attributes of a rational being—from the moment his intellect seems likely to come into the most distinct competition with that of whites, the most deadly hatred springs up;—not in the black but in his oppressors."”[[1]](#endnote-1) – Harriet Martineau

“For this group I built my plan of study and accomplishment. Through the leadership of men like myself and my fellows, we were going to have these enslaved Israelites out of the still enduring bondage in short order. It was a battle which might conceivably call for force, but I could think of it mainly as a battle of wits; of knowledge and deed, which by sheer reason and desert, must eventually overwhelm the force of hate, ignorance and reaction.”[[2]](#endnote-2) – W. E. B. Du Bois

***0: The Argument***

With no regard for the historical context that saw the reactionary feminization of the teaching occupation as a stratagem of white-racial dominance, the rise of ethnological justifications for slavery/Jim-Crowism, or the long-range scholarly treatment of his people’s condition “especially in relation to the rise of industry and imperialism in the West” that characterizes his writings, contemporary Black feminist criticism has converged around an anachronistic understanding of W.E.B. Du Bois’ intellectual corpus as one marked by a masculinism that necessarily reproduces sexism and thus marginalizes Black women.[[3]](#endnote-3) However, Du Bois’ pioneering role in establishing the principles of Black sociology, ethnological arguments and long-range development of Pan-Africanism as an ideological rival to colonial imperialism/Western suggests that the masculine roots informing his approach to the Black intellectual endeavor is a humanistic and positive rather than a restrictive marker of his thought. This argument will be conducted in three parts.

In the first section, I will outline the historical anachronism underlying contemporary race/gender debates. In the second section, I will outline the Black feminist critique of Du Boisian thought. For these authors, Du Bois’ clear opposition to patriarchy and misogyny is limited by the aprioritization of the Black male as normative in intellectual affairs. His masculinization of Black thought, for them, implicitly relegates women to an inferior status as intellectuals and thus reproduces sexism. At best, they regard Du Bois’ corpus as the antecedent to an intrinsically more worthy intellectual endeavor: intersectional analyses of the Black condition.

The Black feminist critique insists on the interconnectedness of Dubois’ thinking around race and gender. Such a connection need not be denied, but the arguments put forth by Black feminists to understand his thinking as mimetic suffer from the limited amounts of materials surveyed to support them. Du Bois’ intellectual synthesis of discourses in history, philosophy and social science were in fact bound by the thread of a masculinized subject. But these links don’t warrant the conclusions drawn by Black feminists that they prevented him from recognizing the works and contributions of Black women to the uplifting of the race *in and of themselves*.

As the third section will show, Du Bois’ masculinist epistemology contributed to the first scientific study of Black America through Black sociology. In Du Bois’ sociological and ethnological imagination, Black men, women and children functioned as positive agents of social change. Contrary to the arguments put forth by Black feminists, Du Bois valued Black women’s critical perspectives on society and considered them as not only in possession of a unique epistemology but also as an economic vanguard in society that functioned as agents of social change. Du Bois’s sociological-ethnological thought also included the formulation of a multidimensional account Black manhood that featured the expression of an ethnologically rooted ‘mother-right’ which corresponded to his broader conceptual goal of Black Nationalism, a tradition he revolutionized through his development of Pan-Africanism into an anticolonial theory of freedom later in his life.

If Du Bois’ masculinization of Black agency and intellectual endeavors were simply indicative of mimesis – his internalization of the very sexism against which he fought anchored to a view of freedom for Black people which materialized as a struggle among men over the control of the bodies of Black women – then there should be textual evidence demonstrating that he (like some of his Black female peers) supported the relegation of Black women to domesticity or was in favor of US imperialism against darker races abroad. But rather than an imitative aspiration towards Black nationalist patriarchy and the subordination of Black women to men’s will, the logical consequence of Du Bois’ masculinist (ethnological) thinking as it relates to the Black intellectual endeavor and the problem of race in America materialized as the formulation of Black sociology to study Black men and women as agents of history who were endowed with unique insights stemming from their experiences of marginalization, his articulation of an anti-colonial and egalitarian Black manhood, and his laying an intellectual basis for Pan-Africanism to emerge as an anti-colonial ideology.

The insistence by Black feminist scholars that Du Bois’ masculinism in and of itself implies the degradation of or patriarchal urge to control (protect) Black women is contradicted by his *actual arguments* concerning Black women’s intellectual leadership of and contributions towards securing freedom for the race, the transformative potential of Black children, and his long-range impact that spurred a revolution in Black nationalist thought. Moreover, it is indicative of the deeply embedded historical anachronisms in our contemporary epistemic order, of which by Black feminist is part and parcel, “that allows all sorts of sins and maladies” to be attributed to Black manhood *ipso facto*.[[4]](#endnote-4)

***1: The Problem – The Anachronistic Application of Gender to Black Thought by Black Feminist Theory***

The emergence of the US as a federal republican national-state apparatus was a paradigm shift in political organization which precipitated the “most fundamental transformation of the occupation of teaching” as a profession.[[5]](#endnote-5) As historical sociologist Errol Miller explains in his magisterial account of the teaching endeavor from antiquity into to the 21st century, *The Prophet and the Virgin* (2003), “up to the end of the eighteenth-century teaching was still an occupation that was integrated with religion and still an occupation within the clergy.”[[6]](#endnote-6) But under the aegis of the nation-state, teaching became “a full-time secular occupation at all levels of the educational system.”[[7]](#endnote-7) The secularization of teaching also saw its feminization by the 19th century. As Miller explains, the stock phrases of ‘true womanhood’ and ‘women’s true profession’ laid the basis for arguments which invited young White native-born middle class Protestant women to become teachers and thus junior partners “with their men as the senior partners, in the mission to preserve and promote the English/Protestant heritage in the new American nation.”[[8]](#endnote-8) As a group that “could be trusted and relied upon to be faithful to the agreed [Anglo-Saxon] national project,” white Protestant middle-class men – where they lacked the sufficient numbers to occupy these positions themselves – “recruited teachers from among women of their group since to do otherwise would be to allow men of groups, that they perceived as threats, to teach their children” and ensure that “children of all other groups in the society” were socialized in accordance with the broader Anglo-Saxonism at the root of American democracy.[[9]](#endnote-9) Thus, the feminization of teaching “was one of the processes and mechanisms by which” white dominance over other racial groups “was perpetuated and preserved.”[[10]](#endnote-10)

During chattel slavery, almost every southern state barred the Black population from learning or being taught to read and write.[[11]](#endnote-11) Such legislation was part of the broader milieu of slavery in the New World, which was premised on the marginalization and containment of Black resistance and the security of the United States’ self-conception on what Africana philosopher Sylvia Wynter terms the ‘master-model’ of existence. This model laid the basis for the maintenance of a “social process and legal structures” that “deprived the slave of any decision-making power over his environment” and signified the aspiration of the white population to instill “as far as possible a dependency complex in the slave.”[[12]](#endnote-12)

Culturally, this led to the representation of the slave master as the paternal father. In fact, the stereotype of the “Southern slaveholder as the paternal master would underlie the entire mythology of the Southern aristocracy” and thus was a necessary edifice “in the larger social order of the plantation.”[[13]](#endnote-13) Emerging to replace the “Christian paternalist ethic of precapitalist Europe,” the master-model of existence transformed the plantation and the private household into the domain “formerly associated with the [feudal European] King” – “[T]he house indeed became a castle.”[[14]](#endnote-14) The dialectical opposite of the King-Landlord-Paternal Father figure within this schema was the Sambo whose basic nature was one of a court jester.

As historian Joseph Boskin explains, the Sambo stereotype had no female equivalent and was “an extraordinary type of social control” which allowed whites to “make the black male into an object of laughter,” and strip “him of masculinity, dignity, and self-possession.” Its ultimate objective was that of effecting mastery through rendering “the black male powerless as a potential warrior, as a sexual competitor, as an economic adversary.”[[15]](#endnote-15) Moreover, “[f]or whites, humor was the antithesis of rationality” which meant that Sambo signified a corporeal instantiation of life devoid of what the ‘master-model’ of being represented as the most desirable attribute in man: the intellectual faculty.[[16]](#endnote-16) Sambo and its characteristic signification of Black males as child-like entities devoid of rationality and intellectual ability was understood by public relations experts as “the perfect stereotype.”[[17]](#endnote-17) Accordingly, it was “consistently and authoritatively transmitted in each generation from parent to parent” so effectively that it seemed to be “almost a biological fact” well into the 20th century.[[18]](#endnote-18)

As a dialectical antithesis to the Sambo stereotype and the previous anthropological-ethnological justifications for slavery, Black male intellectuals in the postbellum US envisaged Black ethnological (racial) manhood as the product of an undeveloped Black genius. Articulating the vision for the Black scholarly endeavor outside of the Anglo-Saxonism of white America, they understood a primary function of slavery to be the limiting of Black people’s intellectual development. Consequently, they formed a pan-African intelligentsia whose role in securing the ethnological-evolutionary development of racial manhood (civilization) was through scholarly endeavors which brought the contributions to civilization and “historical achievements of the African diaspora to light.”[[19]](#endnote-19)

In his first annual address to the American Negro Academy – one of the first Black intellectual organizations dedicated to such a task – titled *The Attitude of the American Mind Toward the Negro Intellect* (1897), philosopher Alexander Crummell articulated this position by arguing that slavery did not simply economically exploit the Black population but also systematically “undertook the process of darkening their minds” and using every legal artifice available to “blindfold their souls to the light of letters.”[[20]](#endnote-20) Against the ethnological consensus that viewed slavery as an institution that aided in the civilizing Black people, Crummell argued that slavery was the denial of the intellectuality of the race and “was an effort to becloud and stamp out the intellect of the Negro” on the premise that “he was not a human being and did not belong to the human race.”[[21]](#endnote-21)

The dismissal of Black intelligence after slavery made it clear to Crummell that America refused “to foster and cultivate the Negro intellect” and even when they are compelled by pity to provide the race with schooling, it is joined “with microscopic scrutiny, with icy reservation, and at times, with ludicrous limitations.”[[22]](#endnote-22) Rather than scholarly pursuits, the schools opened for Black people were configured on an industrial model of education centered on manual labor. For Crummell, the widespread conviction of white America “that the Negro has no business in the higher walks of scholarship” made it necessary for self-initiated recognition and fostering of the talent and intellectual capacity of the race by Black educators and scholars. In his own words, “the Negro himself is duty bound to see to the cultivation and the fostering of his own race capacity,” which he argued was the “chief purpose” of the American Negro Academy.[[23]](#endnote-23)

W.E.B. Du Bois was one of Crummell’s mentees and a contributor to the volume which the American Negro Academy published that year. Du Bois felt that Crummell was a personification of “the qualities of leadership needed by the race” and his example greatly influenced what would come to be Du Bois’ “theory of Pan-African leadership that he developed for half a century” following his own address before the academy – *The Conservation of Races* – which was marked by “an emphasis on self-help” (Self-Determination) and the imperative of Black intellectuals “to impress upon their people “that they must not expect to have things done for them—THEY MUST DO FOR THEMSELVES.”[[24]](#endnote-24) As historian Sterling Stuckey writes,

He thought no other “race more capable in muscle, in intellect, in morals, than the American Negro.” It is an intriguing formulation, which depended partly on his own authority and partly on the intellectual and moral record of a line of antebellum black leadership with which he had established contact by 1897. That line, passing through Alexander Crummell and Frederick Douglass, helped inspire, through Du Bois, a new generation of black leaders.[[25]](#endnote-25)

This early Black nationalist approach to ethnological racial uplift and envisioning intellectualism as part and parcel of race leadership laid the basis for what would materialize as his “exploring and writing the history of his people, relating it at critical points to the history of Europe and the history of the world” and a corpus that constitutes “the most impressive and argument to date against the theory and practice of racism.”[[26]](#endnote-26) Du Bois’ “urging that the positive values of his people be universalized,” insistence that “Africa strongly influenced Afro-American culture and that this influence was worth preserving” culminated in “a revolution in the development of black nationalist thought” (and human thought writ large) that gave Pan-Africanism an intellectual foundation and climaxed in the decolonization of the African continent.[[27]](#endnote-27)

Over the last four decades, the core tenets of Black thought exemplified in the scholarly corpus of Du Bois has been replaced by intersectionality, which is now the contemporary “lingua franca of gender studies programs” and Black Studies.[[28]](#endnote-28) But the theoretical discourses and debates that animate intersectional thought is premised on an historical anachronistic understanding of race and gender. Said differently, the theoretical milieu of Black thought is such that the dominant rubrics of race, class, and gender taken to be valid today are thought to be able to describe “the dynamics between and within (social) groups over the past two centuries.”[[29]](#endnote-29) The anachronism that stems from this axiomatic approach to understanding the ideas of race and sex held by black thinkers historically generates from the assumption that there is no “difference between nineteenth century understandings of race, class, and gender and our contemporary deployment of these categories.”[[30]](#endnote-30)

Thus, canonical intersectional historiographies and discourses not only erase the historical particulars of ethnological-racial discourse but also the fact that Black thinkers deployed it as a scientific justification for “racial uplift” and the basis of many of the positions scholars now consider to be “radical black political theory.”[[31]](#endnote-31) Demystifying the basic divisions among races according to 19th and early 20th century ethnological (racial) thinking and its historical relationship to Black thought, philosopher Tommy Curry writes in *Ethnological Theories of Race/Sex in Nineteenth Century Black Thought* (2017) that:

Founded upon analogy, many contemporary ventures into the study of race and gender in Africana philosophy mistakenly assume that manhood and womanhood are synonymous with masculinity and femininity, and thereby imply the presence of a dominant or hegemonic masculinity structure and patriarchy in the black community. Under ethnological systems of thought, races were gendered as proof of their evolutionary development above other races. This meant that there were no shared categories of manhood or womanhood across racial groups. The white man was a member of a completely different species than that of a black man. Rather than simply being political designations or derision against the female sex, designating races as feminine or “ladies” indicated their racial temperament—what they were capable of thinking, or aspiring toward—their spiritual strivings.[[32]](#endnote-32)

In white ethnological discourses, the Black “race was designated as female as a mark of its uncivilized lack of the masculine” – in this sense, “gender was a property of races that led to the divisions between sexes within the race” rather than simply implying “ideas of privilege and identity as it does today.”[[33]](#endnote-33) Akin to other “primitive races, the Negro was thought to be too savage, and degraded to have evolved gender distinctions between the male and female sex.”[[34]](#endnote-34) Thus, “black men did not yet meet the evolutionary registers to be “men,” and black women were not women in the sense that white women were.”[[35]](#endnote-35) This ethnological-anthropological perspective informed the strategies for race leadership and uplift. Indeed, “racial manhood, just like lady-like womanhood, was accepted as necessary for evolutionary development and political progress.”[[36]](#endnote-36) It also laid the basis for thinkers like Crummell to envision the Black scholarly endeavor itself as a challenge to Western taxonomy and human science, as something centered on racial development or uplift towards the acquisition of civilization (ethnological manhood) and thus the securing of “respect for black humanity.”[[37]](#endnote-37)

Despite this historically verified tendency in Black thought to adapt and contour Enlightenment notions of the human, self-determination freedom, and equality towards the egalitarian ends, contemporary race-gender debates have converged on an understanding of the Black nationalist cum Pan-African tradition as a political reflection of an intrinsic feature of Black masculinity itself—mimesis.[[38]](#endnote-38) Mimesis is “the idea that Black males seek to emulate and ultimately realize themselves as patriarchs next to white men.”[[39]](#endnote-39) After being introduced as a central element of Black feminist ideology in the late 70s, this thesis has laid the basis for a theoretical agenda guiding Black thought today which erases the centrality of the Black nationalist/Pan-Africanist tradition “to the political and intellectual history of the African diaspora” and sustains the hegemony of a disciplinary milieu that pre-conceptually delegitimizes “Black nationalism, and by extension, the major tenets of African diasporic conceptual thinking” on the basis of its inherent misogyny.[[40]](#endnote-40) The Black feminist critique that has emerged concerning the intellectual corpus of W. E. B. Du Bois is a particularly striking example of this critique, the theoretical milieu it sustains, its masculinization of (and thus delegitimization of) Black Nationalist thought, and its anachronistic understanding of race and gender.

***2: From the Fruit to the Root – Examining the Black Feminist Critique of W.E.B. Du Bois***

In her work, *The Protofeminist Politics of W.E.B. Du Bois* (1996), philosopher Joy James problematizes the work of politics of W.E.B. Du Bois. His integrative analysis of gender, race, economic justice, and world peace notwithstanding, James charges Du Bois with obscuring “the achievements of women such as [Anna Julia] Cooper and [Ida B.] Wells-Barnett from the political landscape.”[[41]](#endnote-41) In her analysis of his writings and political activism, James acknowledges that Du Bois had a clearly marked “opposition to patriarchy and misogyny.”[[42]](#endnote-42) Nevertheless, she argues that “his writings are influenced by a masculinist worldview which de-radicalizes his gender progressivism.”[[43]](#endnote-43) Thus, despite his rejection of “patriarchal thought that posits the inferiority of women and the superiority of men,” his thought is fueled by a “masculinist framework presents the male as normative.”[[44]](#endnote-44) Such a masculinist psychology works to reinforce gender roles even without patriarchal intent, “minimize black female agency,” and consequently “naturalize as normative the dominance of black males in African American political discourse.”[[45]](#endnote-45)

Refusing what she sees as the doxa in the academy – that is, “an uncritical acceptance of Du Bois’ pro-feminist politics at their face value” – James posits an asymmetry between Du Bois’ fictional representations of Black women and two of his political contemporaries: Cooper and Wells-Barnett.[[46]](#endnote-46) Probing what she takes to be Du Bois’ “problematic literary representations of and political relationships with influential African-American women activists,” James avers that his thinking around is gender is muddled with contradictions.[[47]](#endnote-47) In her own words,

Both profound strength and deep suffering exist in his fictive depictions of African American women. In general, Du Bois’s fictional and nonfictional writings present varied and contradictory relationships with African American women. He evinces relationships of: symbiosis with his fictional female protagonists; admiration for the generic, composite symbol of womanhood in African American women’s suffering and strength; reverence for his mother, familial women as well as personal friends and acquaintances; concern and committed activism to end the abuse and exploitation of African American women; censorious revisionism in obscuring the pioneering works of Cooper and Wells-Barnett. The multiplicity and contradictory nature of these relationships point to a “double consciousness” muddled with the contradictory gender politics.[[48]](#endnote-48)

Taking a closer look at Du Bois’ marginalization of Cooper and Wells-Barnett, James explains that a male-centric view of historiography has obscured Cooper’s role in spearheading numerous initiatives like the 1st Pan-African Congress, the Colored Women’s YMCA and was a very successful educator who “worked as a lifelong activist in African-American liberation.”[[49]](#endnote-49) Despite his early tendencies towards anti-imperialism and socialism that mature into more egalitarian ideas than her, James wants to position Cooper as a protofeminist influence on a young Du Bois. Cooper was “an important ally of Du Bois” and his 1935 work *Black Reconstruction in America* was written in part “as a response to Cooper’s urging and her declaration of support for financing and distribution.”

But Du Bois “never acknowledged” her request “that *the Crisis* serialize her biographical sketch of Charlotte Grimke, the prominent activist-intellectual.”[[50]](#endnote-50) On James’ account, Du Bois would “draw upon Cooper’s intellectual resources more than once.” She writes that Du Bois’s “later democratic revisions of the “Talented Tenth” adapt Cooper’s gender critique and expands upon the assertion that elite African Americans were neither the cure nor the criteria for black liberation” in *A Voice From the South* without quotations crediting her.[[51]](#endnote-51) Still, James notes that Cooper’s conservatism lead her to repudiate male elites, but not “feminine elites, or privileged black female intellectuals.”[[52]](#endnote-52) Personally, Cooper “had a great stake in the prestige, the respectability and the gentility guaranteed by the politics of true womanhood” or the “cult of womanhood” in line with “standards of white bourgeois “respectability”” by which middle-class African-American women were judged by that day.[[53]](#endnote-53) Du Bois’s resistance to this “cult of womanhood” and his “increasingly nonclassist writings surpass Cooper’s” thinking about social change because his revised ‘Talented Tenth model attributed more radical agency to non-elite and working class black women and men.[[54]](#endnote-54)

However, race women like Ida B. Wells-Barnett were not “trapped by rigid social conventions.” [[55]](#endnote-55) Like Cooper, Wells-Barnett advocated liberal arts education for the Black masses but was also a “anti-lynching crusader” in her own right who “embodied the race militancy and intellectual of a responsible womanhood that reflected *and* rejected the cult of womanhood.”[[56]](#endnote-56) However, the university-educational campaigns she took part in with Du Bois “directly affected fewer blacks than the anti-lynching campaigns.”[[57]](#endnote-57) In her work against lynching, Wells-Barnett “unique contribution” consisted of “ her documentation and incendiary rhetoric on the hypocrisy of American sexual politics in which white men were the predominate assailants of white and black females, yet masked their violence (as well as their attempts to politically and economically dominate blacks) with racist terrorism. ”[[58]](#endnote-58)

James charges Du Bois with never “fully acknowledging his debt” to Wells-Barnett based on his benefiting from her “political and intellectual radicalism” but “refusing to name Wells-Barnett and her dynamic leadership” in his writings that “erase her contribution as much as he renders Cooper anonymous.”[[59]](#endnote-59) Observing this phenomenon of erasure in his autobiographical record of the birth of “the NAACP, James avers that Du Bois “omits any reference to Wells-Barnett being ostracized at the founding conference” in *Dusk of Dawn* (1940). Rather, Du Bois simply recalls that of all the members of the Niagara Movement that were “invited to the new conference, but all save [William Monroe] Trotter and Ida Wells-Barnett came to form the backbone of the organization.”[[60]](#endnote-60) Though her radicalism and anti-Tuskegee views bears “the primary culpability for” her isolation, she “consistently supported Du Bois until the 1907 break at the NAACP conference” but this “support was not reciprocated by him” and she was forced to suffer “the backlash from the Tuskegee machine” on her own.[[61]](#endnote-61)

But the “most glaring omission by Du Bois regarding the significance Wells-Barnett’s anti-violence activism” that occurs in *Dusk of Dawn* related to an erasure of her “unparalleled contributions to anti-lynching activism.”[[62]](#endnote-62) For James, Du Bois’ depiction of political activism concerning the cases of Steve Green and Pink Franklin exemplify this erasure. In 1910, Green “arrived in Chicago” with wounds from a shoot-out with a white man in Arkansas who tried   
to indenture or enslave him on his farm.” Green was “safely spirited” to Canada with the help of Wells-Barnett, who “raised money and organized a defense committee” for him as well.[[63]](#endnote-63) Pink Franklin was a Black man who “shot and killed a white farmer breaking into his house in order to return Franklin to sharecropping.”[[64]](#endnote-64) Wells-Barnett “struggled and failed to save” Franklin from a legal lynching or state execution” as well, but her role in both of these cases were neglected by Du Bois’ *Dusk of Dawn*.[[65]](#endnote-65) He also neglected her role in struggling to stop the executions of soldiers assigned to the Texas Twenty-Fourth colored infantry unit who “engaged in armed rebellion against the local whites.”[[66]](#endnote-66) As James writes,

Following the revolt, the U.S. Army executed nineteen soldiers and court-martialed and imprisoned fifty. Wells-Barnett’s activism for the release of the 24th Infantry was so noteworthy that secret service agents threatened her with charges of war-time sedition if she continued agitating on behalf of the prisoners. Despite government threats to imprison her, she extended her organizing and remained free. Dusk of Dawn forgoes relaying this information to detail the expansion of the NAACP’s organizing to end lynching.[[67]](#endnote-67)

This centering of the NAACP activity allowed Du Bois to paint his organization “as the anti-lynching movement” and deflect attention away “from the work of the Negro Women’s Club Movement, Wells-Barnett, and other anti-lynching activists whose radicalism and analyses laid the foundations for later NAACP campaigns.”[[68]](#endnote-68) James asserts further that Du Bois’ “political distance from Cooper and Wells-Barnett persists in his autobiographies, despite his increasing radicalism” that eventually led him address economic exploitation and state repression in ways that they largely ignore.[[69]](#endnote-69) This radicalism notwithstanding, the “lack of specificity” and “detailed account of agency and subject identification” is posited by James to problematize Du Bois’ egalitarian tendencies of thought.[[70]](#endnote-70) Said differently, Du Bois’ gender thinking is mimetic. As James writes, it sought to democratize Black leadership but “inadvertently reinscribed” elitism and patriarchy by it assertion of “black women’s leadership in theory” but minimizing of “the empirical record of African American women leaders, masculinizes black agency and implicitly relegates women to an inferior status as intellectuals.”[[71]](#endnote-71)

The strength and limitations of Du Boisian thought reveals it to be marked by a paternalistic conception of “the ‘black woman’” that “supplants historical or empirical data in representation: black women’s victimization stands in place for their political praxis in the suffragette movement or anti-lynching crusades.”[[72]](#endnote-72) In conclusion, James generalizes the critique of mimeticism to be a tendency that plagues all black male intellectuals. Thus, “it is unsurprising that black male intellectuals intentionally or inadvertently reproduce sexist thought” and Du Bois’s “prove no exception.”[[73]](#endnote-73) Indeed, James argues that contemporary “thought on African American politics reflects both Du Bois’s profeminist politics and his gendered oversights.”[[74]](#endnote-74) On James’ account, Du Bois’ profeminism allowed him to “include women in democratic struggles” but his “paternalism allowed him to naturalize the male intellectual.”[[75]](#endnote-75)

In her work, *Race Men* (1998), Hazel Carby surveys the history of the representations of black masculinity and the black male body to explore the nature of the cultural representations of various black masculinities at different historical moments in the US via various media technology. The first chapter probes Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folk* on this basis due to the book’s canonical status Black intellectuals’ and its canonical status as a work that is “representative of black intellectual, psychological, and existential reality.”[[76]](#endnote-76) Rather than a diachronic analysis of Du Bois’ entire intellectual corpus, the chapter is comprised of a close analysis of *Souls* and argues that although Du Bois opens by declaring “that he intends to limit his striving” as an individual” to be in a spiritual unity with the masses of the race, “beneath the surface of this apparent sacrifice of individual desire to become an intellectual and race leader is a conceptual framework that is gender-specific; not only does it apply exclusively to men, but it encompasses only those men who enact narrowly and rigidly determined codes of masculinity.”[[77]](#endnote-77)

Resisting what she takes to be a lack of rigor in explicating Du Bois’ “patriarchal sensibilities” by the contemporary Black male intellectual establishment, Carby aims to reveal implicit gendered structures of Du Bois’ intellectual and political thought.[[78]](#endnote-78) For her, this inquiry is not intended “to claim that W.E.B. Du Bois was a sexist male individual,” but to highlight what Carby takes to be a mimetic dynamic in Black thought and activism “in which ideologies of gender have undermined our egalitarian visions in the past and continue to do so in the present.”[[79]](#endnote-79)

With this framing of *Souls* (and thus Du Bois) as a founding text/father of Black intellectual approaches to study Black history and culture, Carby identifies the work of Cornel West as a primary in the “contemporary recovery of Du Bois as a major influence in” Black intellectual thought.[[80]](#endnote-80) Despite West positioning “himself as a contemporary embodiment of Du Bois,” he neglects to inquire into the ideological and political effects of the gendered nature of Du Bois’s theoretical paradigms.”[[81]](#endnote-81) Filling this gap in knowledge, Carby probes the gendering of Du Bois’s “genealology of race, of nation and manhood” by analyzing the “general structure of the essays and a consideration of the order in which they occur.”[[82]](#endnote-82)

Accordingly, Carby outlines the gendered structuring of Du Bois’s narrative of the folk/masses before turning to the figures of Alexander Crummell and Booker T. Washington. On Carby’s reading, the masses/folk are introduced in the fourth chapter in a narrative that introduces readers Josie Dowell, a little girl whose family Du Bois became acquainted with during his as a student at Fisk University in Tennessee in the 1890s. Josie is positioned as “the center of her family and essential to its survival.”[[83]](#endnote-83) When Du Bois returns to visit the family after a decade-long sojourn, we learn that Josie is dead. Thus, “Josie’s life and death become a metaphor for what progress has mean for the folk; her body is the ground upon which the contradictions between African American desires and ambition and the ambition and desires of white society are fought.”[[84]](#endnote-84) Indeed, the “individual story of Josie is immediately followed by the collective narrative of Atlanta” – the female embodiment of the desires and ambitions of the white world, which are premised on materialism and greed. If “Atlanta represents a possible future for the nation, it will be a future that grows from the outcome of the struggle for the ‘soul’ of the black folk,” and be one “built upon the literal and metaphoric deaths of all Josies.”[[85]](#endnote-85) In the fifth chapter, Du Bois “personifies and genders the city as female and elevates it to a central character in his narrative.”[[86]](#endnote-86) As she explains,

“He uses the myth of Atalanta and Hippomenes, in which Atalanta, who could outrun and outshoot any man with whom she came into competition, was betrayed by her own greed. Constantly chased by suitors, Atalanta declared that she would only marry the man who could beat her in a foot race, knowing that no one ran faster than she. Hippomenes decides that only guile can help him win, and during the course of his race with Atalanta rolls golden apples in her path, knowing that she will not be able to resist retrieving them. Atalanta falls to temptation and when she swerves to pick up the final apple loses the race to Hippomenes.”[[87]](#endnote-87)

These “sexually charged” narrative metaphors indicate a deficit in Du Bois’ racial imaginary regarding women in Carby’s estimation.[[88]](#endnote-88) As she writes, “the metaphoric and symbolic characteristics of Josie and Atlanta determine that neither is a symbol of hope for the future of the African American folk.”[[89]](#endnote-89) Thus, “neither have a viable political, social, or intellectual future in Du Bois’s text.”[[90]](#endnote-90) Said differently, Carby argues that despite being surrounded “by black female intellectuals who were his peers” while at Fisk during a student Du Bois was not “able to imagine a community in which positive intellectual and social transformation could be evoked through female metaphors and tropes.”[[91]](#endnote-91) This denial of female capacity for positive change and race leadership in society lays the basis for a narrative transition towards the examination of the black world after slavery. As Carby writes, this is typified by “embittered men who are hopelessly in debt” and trapped in a neo-slavery “system of forced labor.”[[92]](#endnote-92) In fact, Carby continues, *Souls* draws readers closer to the center “of Du Bois’s black folk” and “becomes increasingly African in soul and masculine in its body.”[[93]](#endnote-93)

Chapters 11 and 12 show that while the “souls of black folk are to be revealed through religion and music, the heart and soul of the author are revealed through the grief of a father after the death of his son.”[[94]](#endnote-94) Furthermore, Du Bois’ positioning of himself as the “only remaining conduit of [Alexander] Crummell’s work and principles” of race leadership are seen as evidence of this masculine tendency in Du Boisian paradigms of thought.[[95]](#endnote-95) For instance, Carby turns toward ‘The Coming of John’ and explains that the chapter elaborates upon a gendered structures through a narrative that communicates “anxiety about a lack of a viable future for the race” in the aftermath of the violent conflict over “white and black male desires and hopes” which threaten their “mutual destruction.”[[96]](#endnote-96)

Indeed, Du Bois using ‘The Coming of John’ to consciously confronts and contradicts “claims that white male aggression is met only by black male passivity—Black John kills his white childhood companion, also named John, for attempting to rape his sister.”[[97]](#endnote-97) For Carby, this narration expresses a “struggle over the control of female sexuality and sexual reproduction” wherein John is the victor and “gains self-respect in his own black manhood” through force despite the fact that “his bravery leads to his death.”[[98]](#endnote-98) As Carby explains, even John’s “manner of dying can be a model of manhood for future generations.”

Nevertheless, Carby argues that black women’s status is relegated in Du Bois’s imagined black community to be “determined by the nature of the struggle among men over” their bodies: they are to be possessed by men either way.[[99]](#endnote-99) As an intellectual, Du Bois was very concerned with extending the model of leadership of Black nationalists before him and the “reproduction of Race Men” through his intellectual pursuits.[[100]](#endnote-100) That is to say, his thinking about race leadership and the intellectual endeavor itself was conditioned by his view of black manhood. As Carby writes, this focus “permeates and structures the essays on his son, on Alexander Crummell, and on the two Johns.”[[101]](#endnote-101)

For her, the anxiety of “male production and reproduction” conveyed in Du Bois’ idealization of the intellectualism and leadership of Alexander Crummell lays the basis for a broader understanding of “the figure of the intellectual and race leader” as a Black male that is “born and engendered by other males.”[[102]](#endnote-102) Furthermore, Carby continues, the masculine anxiety that stems from this homosocial dynamic “continues to be evoked in the work of contemporary black male intellectuals” that grieve the failure of intellectual reproduction due to the premature deaths of young Black males “who could have become intellectuals and race leaders.”[[103]](#endnote-103) From this, Carby shifts towards a conceptual (opposed to narrative) analysis. On her account, Souls exposes a tension between “the internal egalitarian impulse inherent in the concept of nation and the relations of domination and subordination that are embodied in a racially encoded social hierarchy.”[[104]](#endnote-104)

Du Bois rewrote the “sociological genealogy of black people” to situate them as “equal citizens within the [American] national community” while also articulating an early conceptual goal of Black nationalism through a novel intellectual strategy that lead him not only to refuse to “contest the claim that black people should be viewed as a race” but to transform race into a means of Black political unity by imagining Black people “as a race in ways that are conceptually analogous to imagining them as a nation.”[[105]](#endnote-105) Thus, Souls is conceptually “organized and framed by the symbolic unification of race and nation,” imagining Black people as integral to the nation-state which they contribute their cultural [ethnological] gifts to and a self-determined people at once.[[106]](#endnote-106) Still, his attempt to synthesize these two ostensibly oppositional categories – that is, race and nation – and navigate them is gendered. As Carby writes, the “process of gendered at work in the Souls of Black Folk distinguishes not only between concepts of masculine and feminine positions but” also make “distinctions within his definition of masculinity itself.”[[107]](#endnote-107) Moreover, the “multiplicity and complexity of Du Bois’s intellectual project, which integrates the discourses of history, philosophy and social science is bound with the thread of an apparently unified gendered subject position”— an exceptional male individual.[[108]](#endnote-108) Outlining this male-centric vision of the Black intellectual as race leader, Carby writes that

“Du Bois’s intellectual and political intention to integrate *his* voice with the voice of the wider black community displaces a number of ideological contradictions, not the least of which is his class position. In order to retain his credentials for leadership, Du Bois had to situate himself as both an exceptional and a representative individual: to be different from and maintain a distance between his experience and that of the masses of black people, while simultaneously integrating his existential being with that of his imagined community of the people. The terms and conditions of his exceptionalism, Du Bois argues, have their source in his formation as a gendered intellectual.”[[109]](#endnote-109)

The particulars of this gendered intellectualism, Carby continues, are expressed in the ‘striving’ that was “required in order to exist n a racist society” for all Black men, but Du Bois particularly.[[110]](#endnote-110) Even as a schoolboy, Du Bois articulates his ability “to beat his white classmates at examination time” and this success as stemming from “his emotional maturity” which compliments his self-acknowledged “intellectual ability and superiority.”[[111]](#endnote-111) Indeed, from his younger years, to his rejections by a white girl a teen, to his ostensibly urge to control Black female bodies from white male to rape in ‘The Coming of John’, Du Bois “genealogy of race and nation has, at its center, the dilemma of the formation of black manhood.”[[112]](#endnote-112) Said differently, for Du Bois “the ‘problem’ of simultaneously being black and being American is coming into manhood, and it is the latter that is the most vulnerable to attack.”[[113]](#endnote-113)

This misandric logic of racism and the observation by Du Bois that it disrupts the adolescence of black boys and “dooms these young men to a life” without dignity is understood by Carby to be reflective of an aspiration of mimesis by black that is negated when they are “denied a full role in the patriarchal social and political order. Furthermore, she thinks that this trait continues to be echoed in contemporary black male intellectual thought and makes it more “significant that Du Bois claims that his first encounter with racism was the moment when” he was romantically rejected by a young white woman.[[114]](#endnote-114)

Still, Du Bois did think that women “could become mediators through which the nation-state oppressed black men.” As Carby writes, in the mind of Du Bois “the burden of racism was not only poverty and ignorance but a burden carried through black mothers and imposed upon their sons” by way of their sexual victimization by white men. Black men’s inability to “control the sexual reproduction of black women” contributed to a broader regime wherein this group suffered “a deformation in their process of becoming gendered beings” with the result being their subordination in the broader American national community.[[115]](#endnote-115) While many suffer this fate in the genealogy of Souls, Du Bois is prefigured as an exception to the “paralysis of mind and body” that characterizes most Black men. The interweaving of race, the intellectual endeavor, and gender that typifies Du Bois’ conceptual arguments provides him “alternative route to manhood” outside of the quotidian “gendered and racialized subordination, deformation, and degradation” that characterizes Black male life.

As Carby argues, the “practice of intellectual analysis, as narratively encoded within *The Souls of Black Folk* conquers political impotence and leads to an attainment of masculine self-respect.”[[116]](#endnote-116) Reiterating this point, Carby writes that on the whole *Souls* reveals Du Bois to be the “representative black intellectual, leader, and man.”[[117]](#endnote-117) Given this narrative and conceptual structure, Carby suggests that even the central contribution to philosophic thought made by Du Bois in *Souls* – the notion of double-consciousness – may need to be understood as “a product of the articulation of race and nation” which has manhood as its core.[[118]](#endnote-118)

In *Black Feminists and Du Bois: Respectability, Protection, and Beyond* (2000) Farah Jasmine Griffin seeks to extend the critique of Du Boisian thought for its masculinism before offering a Black feminist theoretical methodology to study the complexities of Black life. As Griffin makes clear, black feminist intellectuals claim Du Bois “as an intellectual ancestor.”[[119]](#endnote-119) However, they are critical of his sexism in his personal life and the masculinism of his conceptual thinking. Outlining an intellectual genealogy of this current of Black feminist criticism, Griffin explains that the “most critical voice among contemporary black feminists to wrestle with Du Bois” is Hazel Carby who “extends [Joy] James’s critique” of ways that “the black intellectual tradition has been constructed as masculine” as a result of his scholarship.[[120]](#endnote-120)

Emphasizing the importance of this appraisal, Griffin argues that it is necessary to demonstrate a deeper tendency in Black political activists and intellectuals towards mimesis – that is, the “internalization of the very ideologies against which they fought.”[[121]](#endnote-121) For her part, Griffin deploys Black feminism to “consider how Du Bois advanced our understanding of the oppression of black women even as we are critically aware of his limitations.”[[122]](#endnote-122) Griffin thinks that Du Bois’s arguments in support of black women “are most apparent in four works: the poem ‘The Burden of Black Womanhood’ (1907) and the essays ‘The Black Mother’ (1912), ‘Hail Columbia’ (1913), and ‘The Damnation of Women’ (1920).”[[123]](#endnote-123) For the purpose of exegesis, Griffin focuses on the themes and elements of Black womanhood in ‘The Damnation of Women’.

The essay presents readers with “a description of four women of his [Du Bois’] boyhood: his widowed mother; his beautiful cousin Inez; Emma, the victim of a sexual double standard; and Ide Fuller, the outcast.”[[124]](#endnote-124) In their own ways, each woman “represent the limitations American society places on women when denying them social, political, and economic freedom.”[[125]](#endnote-125) Du Bois also “launches a critique of the inhibitions to the development of women’s intellect and leadership” and in the final analysis defends the position that Black “women must have access to educational and economic opportunity free of their relationships to husbands, fathers, and brothers.”[[126]](#endnote-126) Indeed, Du Bois applauded “the emergence of economically independent black women” and asserted “the necessity of women’s control over their reproduction.”[[127]](#endnote-127) These arguments were combined with others that articulated progressive views on women held by Du Bois that were more pronounced than those held by his many of his female contemporaries, black or white. In her own words Griffin writes that Du Bois “echoes the demands of feminists such as Anna Julia Cooper and Margaret Sanger” and avers that “it is doubtful that even black women thinkers were as explicit in their demands.”[[128]](#endnote-128)

Continuing her exegesis, Griffin writes further that “Du Bois situates the contemporary condition of black women in the historical context of slavery, where they had no protection from the abuses and exploitation of their masters.”[[129]](#endnote-129) Rather than simply depicting them as victims, he “also notes their agency as well by citing women such as Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth.”[[130]](#endnote-130) Though, Griffin finds Du Bois’s “delineation of black female types” in the essay “is somewhat disturbing because of its implied class and color politics” in the descriptions.[[131]](#endnote-131) While figures like Tubman and Truth are hailed for their courage, they are referred to as “‘primitive’ types” of black womanhood who are thought of as “the best the race has to offer” rather than those who embody Black women who are “delicate ladies of beauty and refinement” like Mary Shadd.[[132]](#endnote-132)

Nevertheless, Du Bois follows this typology by launching “into a critique of the white world for caring only about the way a woman looks” and urges black people to respect them beyond their physical attributes.[[133]](#endnote-133) Du Bois even closes with a tribute to the beauty of Black women. But for Griffin, these elements (and the essay as a whole) signify an aporia: “whole he argues for women’s freedom, he occupies many of the stances of which he is critical.”[[134]](#endnote-134) The issue of beauty presents thinkers with this double bind because countering white supremacist valuations of beauty that degrade blackness often entails “focusing on physical attributes at the expense of dismissing all hierarchies of beauty as oppressive.” Griffin argues further that in a similar manner that ideas of beauty have been reworked and deployed as “one means of healing the psychic wounds of white supremacy,” a “more significant attempt” at his has culminated in a politics of respectability.[[135]](#endnote-135)

As Griffin explains, the politics of respectability was spearheaded by Black leaders and intellectuals and first “emerged as a way to counter the images of black Americans as lazy, shiftless, stupid, and immoral in popular culture and the racist pseudosciences of the nineteenth century.”[[136]](#endnote-136) Furthermore, Griffin writes, a consequence of the politics of respectability is that Black leaders internalized the very “racist discourses” that they tried to counter by seeking “to reform the behavior of individuals” and shifting “the emphasis away from structural forms of oppression such as racism, sexism and poverty.”[[137]](#endnote-137) After outlining its historical roots, Griffin focuses in one manifestation of the politics of respectability in particular: the ‘promise of protection.’ As she writes, this phenomenon emerges from a patriarchal “Black male desire to protect Black women” and grew out of their concern for Black women’s “emotional, psychic, and physical safety” but for Griffin remains “reflective of the power struggle between white men and black men and black women” over control Black women’s bodies.[[138]](#endnote-138)

Indeed, Griffin argues that the mimetic nature of black manhood and its aspiration to control Black women’s bodies corresponds to the basic tenets of Black nationalism as a political tradition. As she explains, the offer of a promise of protection “addresses two important concerns of black nationalism: it restores a sense of masculinity to black men while granting black women at least one of the privileges of femininity.”[[139]](#endnote-139) However, this offer has drawbacks. As Griffin writes:

“This is not without its cost. The promise of protection assumes a stance of victimization on the part of those who need to be protected, without allowing much room for their agency in other spheres. It places the woman in the hands of her protector – who may protect her, but who also may decide to further victimize her. In either case, her well-being is entirely dependent on his will and authority.”[[140]](#endnote-140)

To correct analytical commitments that come with politics of respectability with a “vision that not only seeks to protect women from misogyny but also helps to eradicate patriarchy as well as racism,” Griffin thinks Du Bois’ work can be helpful.[[141]](#endnote-141) However, she continues, “we ought to learn from his limitations and mistakes and move on.”[[142]](#endnote-142) Namely, the mistake of not seriously engaging the intellectual work “of politically engaged black feminist intellectuals” concerning “matters of gender, sexuality, and class.”[[143]](#endnote-143)

Said differently, Griffin argues that an analytic pluralization of race analysis with the insights of Black feminist/intersectional theory given that mimeticism has left major aspects of Black life unexplored due to an “adherence to sexist, elitist, and heterosexist norms” among Black scholars that is reflected today in how “many black male intellectuals name black women, but all too often fail to seriously engage their intellectual work.”[[144]](#endnote-144) Thus, the extent Du Bois’ corpus demonstrates some correspondence to a scholarly endeavor premised on Black feminist theory and its goal to understand the ways that “categories intersect [of race, class, gender and sexuality], each defining our experience of the other,” is the extent to which it remains relevant today.[[145]](#endnote-145)

***3: “Man Plants Seeds That Brings Forth Multiple Breeds” – The Conceptual Virtues of Black Manhood as Evidenced by the Ethnological-Sociological Elements and Diachronic Trajectory of Du Boisian Thought***

As has been shown, the Black feminist critique insists on the interconnectedness of Dubois’ thinking around race and gender and that his masculinity “prevented him from recognizing or being informed by the work of the Black women of his day.”[[146]](#endnote-146) This critique has largely been negligent of the ethnological idiosyncrasies of Black thinkers in the late 19th and early 20th century or the broader historical context in which black and white nationalism gained substance in pursuit of divergent agendas that had in common the view that the teaching profession/intellectual endeavor was central race leadership and the development of society. Rather, Black feminists focus on Du Bois’ masculinist psychology and how this is reflected in his conceptual thinking to support the inference that Du Boisian thought was mimetic. Indeed, scholarship reflects the commonly held belief that our understanding of Du Bois’ corpus needs “little clarification” beyond the aforementioned arguments made by theorists like James, Carby, and Griffin.[[147]](#endnote-147)

That Du Bois’s long-range intellectual synthesis of discourses in history, philosophy and social science were bound by the thread of a masculinized subject/psychology don’t warrant the conclusions drawn by Black feminists that this fueled his mimesis and his recapitulation of white manhood/patriarchy and sexism. If it was the case that his idealization of the figure of the black intellectual endeavor as masculine was reflective of a tendency towards mimesis, then there should be *textual evidence* of Du Bois arguing that Black men have more agency as leaders, thinkers, or social actors than Black women or of his reliance on ethnological theories of racial uplift in support of American imperialism. However, his scholarly corpus reflects an ethnological-sociological imagination that centered the unique experiences and contributions of Black men, women and children towards the greater development and eventual self-governance of the race. In fact, his early sociological-ethnological arguments laid the basis for a later formulation of an anti-colonial and egalitarian Black manhood that corresponds to his thinking about Pan-Africanism, which culminated in Duboisian thought and revolution in the development of Black nationalist thought.

But the Black feminist arguments concerning Du Bois’ intellectual thought “suffer from a limitation of the materials surveyed.”[[148]](#endnote-148) As philosopher Tommy Curry shows in his work *It’s for the Kids: The Sociological Significance of W.E.B. Du Bois’ The Brownies’ Books and Their Philosophical Relevance for our Understanding of Gender in the Ethnological Age* (2015), not only does Du Bois’ corpus reflect extensive engagement with Black females intellectually but his ethnological thinking corresponded to the formulation of an idea of racial manhood which saw mothering (matriarchy) as a positive modality. Showing the conclusions of James and Carby concerning Du Bois’ engagement with his female peers to be empirically false, he shows that Du Bois in fact cited Anna extensively in his Atlanta University Papers. In his own words,

“For example, in “A Select Bibliography of the American Negro for General Readers,” published in 1901 as Atlanta University Paper No.6, The Negro Common School, Du Bois cites Anna Julia Cooper’s Voice from the South as necessary reading for an understanding of the Negro condition. Later in that same volume, Du Bois again mentions Cooper’s Voice from the South as an example of the formative “Literature of American Negroes.” Cooper’s work is recognized among noted poets and authors like Frances E.W. Harper, Phyllis Wheatley, Martin Delany, David Walker, Frederick Douglass, T. Thomas Fortune, Angelina Grimke, and Sojourner Truth. Four years later, in Atlanta University Paper No.10, A Select Bibliography of the Negro American, Du Bois included Anna Julia Cooper’s A Voice from the South as a necessary text to explore the conditions of the American Negro in a section titled the “Bibliography of the American Negro,” which again recognized Cooper’s work alongside the writings of Frances E.W. Harper, Pauline E. Hopkins, and of course Phyllis Wheatley. Du Bois was of the view that this bibliography should comprise the elements of a successful curriculum for the study of the Black American at Negro colleges throughout the South. In 1910, almost a decade after his first bibliographic compilation in the Atlanta University papers, Du Bois again cites Anna Julia Cooper’s Voice from the South in a bibliography dedicated to acknowledging the “literary activity of the college-bred Negro American.”[[149]](#endnote-149)

Before examining Du Bois’ actual writings from the Atlanta University sociological project which reflect “a rich intra-racial conversation between Black men and women of his day,” Curry continues by showing that a James portrayal of Du Bois’ interaction with Ida B. Wells-Barnett is also based on a popular negative mythology of Black masculinity rather than evidence.[[150]](#endnote-150) As he explains, “it is popularly accepted by philosophers and gender scholars that Du Bois maligned Ida B. Wells-Barnett by not including her name among the founders of the NAACP.”[[151]](#endnote-151) But “historians have shown that it was actually the white male liberal Oswald Garrison Villard, someone in whom Wells-Barnett had great trust and confidence, who erased her name from the National Negro Committee’s list of forty founders.”[[152]](#endnote-152) Thus, the claims put forth by James and Carby “regarding Du Bois and the women of his day” appear to be false. Yet these assumptions of mimeticism persist as basic assumptions or “defining features not only of Du Bois, but of Black masculinity in general.”[[153]](#endnote-153)

Contradicting the aforementioned consensus around the conditional logical relationship between the masculine psychology undergirding Du Boisian thought and its tendency towards downgrading of Black women’s intellectual and leadership capacities, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes in her work *The Margin as Center of a Theory of History* (1996) provides readers with a broad “review of Du Bois’s diverse writings on women and on women’s suffrage.”[[154]](#endnote-154) As she argues, the value of Du Bois’ work towards this end “rests both in his description of the black female experience and in his incorporation of that experience into a larger theory of history” which “placed the situations of the most rural and marginalized American Americans during and after slavery within the interlocking webs of a world capitalist system characterized by” racism or ‘the color line’.[[155]](#endnote-155)

Gilkes argues that Du Bois valued Black women’s critical perspectives on society and considered them as not only in possession of “an important and distinct angle of vision” that provides them with a unique epistemology but also as “an economic vanguard in society” that functioned as “agencies of social change” who were empowered by “their religious experience.”[[156]](#endnote-156) This amounted to “a view of black womanhood as culture.”[[157]](#endnote-157) Gilkes writes that Du Bois was a pioneer to sociology and “began to address the major problems of democracy and inequality in American society when the basic problems of sociological thought were still being formulated and debated.”[[158]](#endnote-158) A unique theory of history is present early in his work. As Gilkes explains, for overall social progress Du Bois acknowledged “the importance of all categories of human experience” – especially marginalized groups who for him “were the key to the proper evolution of United States society” and thus “were the central motive force in the making of America.”[[159]](#endnote-159) To address the longstanding “concern of the Black community” about the status of Black women, Du Bois synthesized sociological theory with an emphasis on subordinate classes/groups to construct paradigms of social change and historical development that did not idealize, defend or apologize slavery like most 20th century American social scientists.[[160]](#endnote-160)

In fact, Du Bois understood the problems of Black Americans as central to the “dynamics and direction of the United States.”[[161]](#endnote-161) Gilkes clarifies that not only was he “an astute observer of the problems of African Americans and the societal contradictions with which they were inextricably bound,” but he possessed a “sociological imagination” which saw that “the problems and methods of sociology could be beneficial for African Americans particularly and society as a whole.”[[162]](#endnote-162) This was yoked to a historical-theoretical lens by which Du Bois sought “lessons for the future from the past” and postulated that Black “liberation was necessary for social progress” within the framework “of an expanding or emergent democracy included all of the voices on the social margins.”[[163]](#endnote-163) Said differently, the “expansion of democracy in the United States and the role of black people in that expansion” constituted a central place in Du Bois’ sociological imagination.[[164]](#endnote-164) This focus on the Black masses and the sociological significance of race also led him to “assert the importance of black women and men to wider society.”[[165]](#endnote-165)

Despite these pioneering efforts Du Bois “found himself on the margins of mainstream sociological thought” which focused on “questions surrounding social class” and its historical development in modern Europe and on “the problems of socio-economic status and occupational ranking” in the United States. [[166]](#endnote-166) Nevertheless, Du Bois argued that “oppression always was the central issue” to sociological inquiry and went on to construct sociological theory that placed Black men and women “at the center stage in the drama of history” and highlighted their importance to “democracy, social change, society, and history.”[[167]](#endnote-167) Continuing her analysis, Gilkes takes a closer look at Du Bois’ writings on and about women. As she explains, not only did his sociological and historical thinking recognize “Black women’s suffering as a social fact, their collective autonomy as a valuable social institution, and interpreted their experience as a significant social and historical force” but his work also reflects a number of personal relationships with suffragettes and Black women radicals.[[168]](#endnote-168) Certainly, “Du Bois’s writings indicates that he contributed pieces on African American women and their work, literature, birth control, education, and politics to a variety of periodicals, and developed a substantial body of material during his tenure at *Crisis*.”[[169]](#endnote-169) Contrary to James, Carby or Griffin, Gilkes argues that his personal relationships with Black women activists and educators reflect a deeper socialization to “include women and women’s experience in his thinking” and thus ought “to be remembered when examining his writings about women.”[[170]](#endnote-170)

Turning to elements of his sociological thinking regarding Black women, Gilkes explains that a core feature of his approach was grounded in the claim that Black women’s suffering provided them “with a unique perspective.”[[171]](#endnote-171) This view is evident in his earliest works like the 1887 novel *‘Tom Brown at Fisk’*, his 1920 work, *‘Darkwater’*, and several essays published in *The Crisis*. Black women were not simply victims with a unique epistemological insight. Indeed, Du Bois “found the lack of protection for black girls and women and their transformation into breeders the most appalling aspects of slavery.”[[172]](#endnote-172) Nevertheless, he “juxtaposed the details of their suffering” with their “contribution to the community.”[[173]](#endnote-173) Thus, it was their “heroic response to suffering that Du Bois emphasized” most of all.[[174]](#endnote-174)

Moreover, Du Bois attributed to Black women a social function which was a positive “force in the expansion and progression of” American democracy.[[175]](#endnote-175) For him, Black women’s early participation in the labor market transformed the nature of the family unit and “challenged assumptions about women’s place within the economy and society.”[[176]](#endnote-176) In addition to these qualities, they “presented a political challenge to racism” due to “their tradition of political rebellion.”[[177]](#endnote-177) As Gilkes writes, Du Bois considered the lives of women like Harriet Tubman and Mary Ellen Pleasants to exemplify “military leadership” on the one hand, and “economic leadership” on the other.[[178]](#endnote-178) Taken together, Du Bois considered Black women to be active agents of history in the emancipation of women generally and to be part of “ ‘the intellectual leadership of the race’.”[[179]](#endnote-179) The Dubosian approach to understanding the ways Black women’s experience “challenged cultural norms” has come to be “known as ‘the dialectics of black womanhood’.”[[180]](#endnote-180) Politically, this view was “a central pillar in his argument for woman suffrage” but sociologically it informed his view of Black women’s religion. For him, their “faith was not only the basis for the heroism of Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and others, but it was also at the foundations of their organizational efforts” being that all of the “secular black women’s organizations begin in the early twentieth century were started by church women.”[[181]](#endnote-181) Rather than a body of work in need of revision by feminist rubrics, Gilkes presents Du Bois’ scholarly corpus as marked by “perspectives on African American women” that “anticipated and influenced” the “concepts and ideas we currently use to examine the intersection of gender, race, and class” with reference to this group.[[182]](#endnote-182)

Black children also had a prominent place in Du Bois’ ethnological-sociological thought. As Curry explains further in *It’s For the Kids* (2015), Du Bois’ two-year project, *The Brownies’ Books*, was informed by a “recognition of the failure of politics and the inability of corrected facts to rationally persuade the white race out of its racist ideologies.”[[183]](#endnote-183) Du Bois’ sociological studies at the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory engaged “the question of whiteness and the fundamental corruption of European and American colonialism” while at the same time “he was writing on childcare, women, and the health and physique of the [Black] race.”[[184]](#endnote-184) Indeed, his thinking about women and children were “central concerns of his anti-colonial or Pan-African project” and had a theoretical basis in Du Bois’ critique of western physical anthropology.[[185]](#endnote-185) Rather than imitating western patriarchal logics, Du Bois formulated an idea to give substance to his arguments for racial manhood (civilization) which identified a mother tendency in Black males.

As Curry writes, in ‘The Damnation of Women’ – a work whose ethnological themes are oft ignored – Du Bois argues “that the patriarchal racial evolution of Europe had created the economic, and by effect cultural, debasement, not only of the women of the darker races, but of the idea of the African mother.”[[186]](#endnote-186) Continuing, Curry explains that Du Bois “addresses the Bachofen mythos at the root of the west’s supposition of African inferiority—the mother-right—which suggests that the matriarchal is an inferior stage of racial development, especially in contrast to the Apollonian.”[[187]](#endnote-187) Inverting this ethnological-racial schema, Du Bois considers creation of the Black world (its politics and history) to be premised on “the cultivation of this matriarchal presence.”[[188]](#endnote-188) Curry explains further that the mother-right is also at the basis of Du Bois’ view of racial uplift or “method of racial perfection” in *Darkwater* and an idea that posits “a separate evolutionary path where Black children did not have to be educated in the supposed ethnological/civilizational laws of Europe, but could be taught their own history, their own origins, and from those truths, could ultimately be taught civilization.”[[189]](#endnote-189) To achieve this aim, Du Bois co-authored *The Brownies’ Books* with Augustus Dill.

Curry argues that this endeavor was an expression of Du Bois’ “obsession with creating a new paradigm” of Black sociology which was “rooted in the ‘firm belief in a changing racial group’” whose progress up from slavery deserved scientific study.[[190]](#endnote-190) But how exactly could the “‘traits and talents of the Negro’” be developed? For Du Bois, *The Brownies’ Books* posits an answer: it can be achieved through children. On this basis, Du Bois aspired to create, “through teaching Black children Black history, and giving them heroes and heroines, a practical guide to racial pride and consciousness.”[[191]](#endnote-191) Published as a monthly magazine for Black children, *Brownies’ Books* “aimed to create heroes and heroines for the Black race that addressed their sociological condition and inspired children to reach beyond their circumstance toward racial greatness.”[[192]](#endnote-192) Curry explains further that “these stories told of great men and women of the Negro race and Africa” and “showed Black children that they came from a great race, full of history and wonder, and are from a people, who happen to find themselves in America, capable of the same feats.”[[193]](#endnote-193)

In many ways, the magazine became “a voice for Black families” and “sought to encourage the ‘constant co-operation of parents’” through a section called ‘The Grown-Ups’ Corner’ which was “an interactive forum that would gain qualitative evidence of how Black families experienced the world they found themselves in.”[[194]](#endnote-194) Furthermore, this forum “allowed Du Bois, through responding to the questions of these under-studied Black families, to educate and provide the adults of the race with the history and sociological truths necessary to cultivate their children beyond these conditions.”[[195]](#endnote-195) More broadly, *The Brownies’ Books* “attempted to destroy the boundaries separating the educated from the uneducated, the old from the young, and the representative from the rank and file” – Du Bois hoped to both “demonstrate the talent of Black children and respond to the sociological conditions (abandonment, under-education, and poverty) that affected them.”[[196]](#endnote-196)

Du Bois’ ethnological arguments for racial/Black manhood through the mother-right and the teaching endeavor were complimented by other aspects of his thinking around anti-imperialism and Pan-Africanism. As historian Michele Mitchell shows in her work *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (2004), between 1890 and 1910, Black literature authored by men and women was preoccupied with and make claims about imperialism, race, and manhood. During this time American imperialism “both indirectly and directly involved black women and men in efforts that exacerbated or resulted in the subjugation of Native Americans, Hawaiians, Cubans, and Filipinos.”[[197]](#endnote-197) Moreover, European imperialism in Africa threatened Liberia and the long-held aspiration of the Black masses that “Africans and descendants of Africans could always lay claim to a sovereign haven all their own.”[[198]](#endnote-198)

Some Black writers, an early Du Bois among them, were anti-imperialist. But others – men and women — felt that white “forays into Africa would enlighten the continent.”[[199]](#endnote-199) Probing the racial and gendered ideas popular at this time among them, Mitchel reveals a discourse wherein manhood was a multidimensional concept which could function as a generic “that could include women” while also being used to “confer dignity and power” to Black men “who were, in reality, accorded little respect or dominion” in the US social order.[[200]](#endnote-200) For Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and many others, Black manhood couldn’t be actualized “until they went to a country where their manhood was respected” like Liberia.[[201]](#endnote-201) As Mitchell explains, “emancipated slaves and free blacks emigrated to Libera throughout the nineteenth century, it was not until the 1890s that scores of working-poor and aspiring-class black Americans viewed removal to Liberal as a means of gaining access to opportunities and alleviating their immiseration.”[[202]](#endnote-202) Indeed, many aspiring Black Americans “looked forward to building a ‘Negro nation’” and cited “their inability to vote and the frequent murder of black men whose wives were then seized, terrorized, and assaulted by white mobs” as leading factors shaping their desire to leave the United States.[[203]](#endnote-203)

While Black writing and thought during the mid-1890s would be centered around “basic affirmations that Africans and African Americans possessed manliness,” by end of the decade US imperialism emerged as a modality through which Black manhood could be seized for some.[[204]](#endnote-204) Mitchell writes that “the United States became involved in far-flung political crises in Hawaii, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Wake Island, Guam and Samoa between 1893 and 1900.”[[205]](#endnote-205) But it “was the 1898 entry of the United States in the War for Cuban Independence—commonly referred to as the Spanish-American War—that forged salient connections between race, manhood, and empire for African Americans.”[[206]](#endnote-206) Though, American imperialism “was an uneasy vehicle for black manhood.”[[207]](#endnote-207) Still, Black writers and leaders who were “acutely aware of their liminal status in the United States” were able to use Black men’s experiences in the war as “a tremendous source of race pride.”[[208]](#endnote-208)

However, after the “torn loyalties and domestic factors” relating to the Philippine-American war and the continuing subjugation of Black veterans after service, Black anti-imperialism became more intense.[[209]](#endnote-209) By 1899, two Black anti-imperialist leagues were formed – one named ‘Black Man’s Burden Society – and Pan-Africanism emerged to give voice to a vision of Black self-determination that challenged colonialism. Rudyard Kipling’s articulation of a ‘White Man’s Burden’ to colonize the darker world “widely appropriated so that it spoke to a range of domestic and international issues” by whites.[[210]](#endnote-210) Rather than simply imitating white patriarchy, as the doxa in Black academic theory would suggest, Black men like H. T. Johnson, John E. Bruce, Kelly Miller, Henry Parks, J. Dallas Bowser and W.E.B. Du Bois shared a contempt for white imperialism and collectively “subverted the very notion that the burden [of civilization] was heaviest for any group of men, black or white.”[[211]](#endnote-211) This idea is expressed by Du Bois in the work, ‘The Black Woman’s Burden’, most explicitly.

Importantly, Du Bois used the notion of Pan-Africanism during this time to express “diasporic kinship” beyond conceptual limitations of emigrationism which “did not automatically imbue those looking towards Africa with anti-imperialist ideas.”[[212]](#endnote-212) As Mitchell explains, Du Bois and some of his peers sought to “mobilize people of African descent against imperialism and colonialism” and “chafed at the notion that imperialism enabled either civilization or progress” for Africa/darker races.[[213]](#endnote-213) In fact, it was through the evolution of Pan-Africanism that Du Bois would “a revolution in the black nationalist thought.”[[214]](#endnote-214) Put differently, the insight “that male psychology and power are crucial in the ascent from slavery to full personhood” which informed his earliest works in support of Black autonomy/self-determination fueled his intellectual thought which culminated in the creation of a truly universal ideology of freedom.[[215]](#endnote-215)

Historian Walter Rucker shows in his work, “*A Negro Nation Within a Nation”: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Creation of a Revolutionary Pan-Africanist Tradition, 1903-1947* (2002), that Du Bois’ gravitation “towards black nationalism as an ideological stance and a conceptual goal” during his earliest years as a student at Harvard in the 1880s developed over the course of his life and helped secure the decolonization of the African continent by the 1950s.[[216]](#endnote-216) Clarifying the intellectual roots and diachronic of Du Bois’ development of Black nationalism, Rucker explains that Du Bois’ ideological clash with Booker T. Washington had less to do with his disagreement with “calls for self-help and self-segregation” as ideals but with “the program set forth by Washington.”[[217]](#endnote-217) Rucker writes that the “period between the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling and Washington’s death in 1915 was a time during which Du Bois was forced to reassess and alter his earlier inclination for black nationalism.”[[218]](#endnote-218) It seemed to him that any “efforts to create black autonomy would be undermined by the constant, overwhelming weight of white supremacy” and that under the Washingtonian program of acquiescence “conditions for the collective actually became worse.”[[219]](#endnote-219)

Indeed, Du Bois contended in *Souls of Black Folk* that as a result of Washington’s leadership “lynchings and race riots increased, disfranchisement became a fact instead of a process, segregation received Supreme Court sanction, and sharecropping, debt peonage and tenant farming became more pervasive.”[[220]](#endnote-220) It was these brutal conditions that saw Du Bois “call for ceaseless agitation as a means to achieve full equality and first-class citizenship in America” – he understood that “the white establishment in the South would interpret any call for ‘self-segregation’ as an approval of the ongoing movement to erode and deny black civil rights.”[[221]](#endnote-221) Still, during this time Du Bois “began his move towards a Pan-African orientation.”[[222]](#endnote-222) In June of 1900, Du Bois attended the first Pan African Conference at Westminster Hall in London. He was appointed “as Chairman of the Committee of the Address to the responsibility of drafting an official statement to be ‘sent to the sovereigns in whose realm are subjects of African descent’.”[[223]](#endnote-223) The address was Du Bois’ first articulation of “his oft repeated statement that ‘the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line’” and included a “diatribe against imperialism and worldwide white supremacy.”[[224]](#endnote-224)

These two conceptual stances – “resistance to white supremacy at home and resistance to European imperialism abroad” – were a “practical re-orientations in Du Bois’ ideas.”[[225]](#endnote-225) This Pan-African orientation would continue to develop throughout Du Bois’ life. Booker T. Washington was critical to his evolution of how to resist white supremacy in the US. Despite their early ideological conflict Du Bois began to value Black economic development “after Washington’s death in 1915 and especially after he visited the Soviet Union in 1926.”[[226]](#endnote-226) Du Bois even “joined the Socialist Party as early as 1911,” but his “connection to the party was brief and he would sever his ties within a year.”[[227]](#endnote-227) Nevertheless, this period saw Du Bois beginning to consider “the dangers of ignoring the economic side of black life and, through personal experiences, he began to become extremely critical of the talented tenth.”[[228]](#endnote-228) Du Bois felt that “the black educated elite and black intellectuals were more interested in distancing themselves from the masses and adopting norms and values of white American society.”[[229]](#endnote-229)

As Rucker explains, this focus on economics was fueled by Du Bois’ early interest in socialism but also reflects that he began to see “some value in Washington’s emphasis on industry, vocational training, and economic development.”[[230]](#endnote-230) Moreover, his thinking about economics led him to resign as editor of *The Crisis* magazine and the NAACP by 1934. At this point, Du Bois “began to advocate, once again, the need for independence from the white community and reliance on black institutions and organizations” premised on the notion of ‘self-segregation’.[[231]](#endnote-231) After writing a number of speeches on Black autonomy and self-segregation, Du Bois published an essay in 1935 titled “A Negro Nation Within the Nation” which “would be the most sustained treatment on” the internal colonization of the Black American population to date.[[232]](#endnote-232)

In these speeches, Du Bois understood “the social, economic, and political problems” facing the Black masses stemmed from the failure of radical Reconstruction to “provide freed people with land upon which they could base an independent existence in America.”[[233]](#endnote-233) As Rucker explains, these arguments would be developed to “serve as the basis for his 1935 work *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.”[[234]](#endnote-234) Du Bois credited Booker T. Washington with offering a comprehensive economic plan in *Black Reconstruction* and attempting to break the “cycle of dependency” placed on Black people after slavery but saw a flaw in Washington’s approach because “it sought to build a new economic foundation for black southerners by incorporating them into white industry.”[[235]](#endnote-235) Rucker avers that Du Bois synthesized Marxism and Black nationalism in his call for Black autonomy or ‘self-segregation’. In his own words, Du Bois’ arguments at this point had an overtone that “is decidedly socialist” but given his awareness of “the realities of racism” made racial separation from whites “the only plausible solution” to the problem of race.[[236]](#endnote-236)

In fact, the synthesis in Du Bois’ “call for ‘self-segregation’ closely mirrors community-control black nationalism espoused by Black Power advocates” and presage the “combination of black nationalism and socialism” that would emerge later as “the basis of Nkrumahism.”[[237]](#endnote-237) Through his organization of Pan-African Congresses though, Du Bois evolved the second aspect of his thinking – resistance to European imperialism – and laid the intellectual basis for the emergence of Pan-Africanism as a universal theory of human freedom. In so doing, Du Bois took Western Liberal self-determination as the chief philosophico-ideological rival to decolonization in Africa. As Rucker explains, President Woodrow Wilson put forth a “framework for a new world order in the aftermath of World War I” premised on “the notion of national self-determination—the idea that nations deserve the right to autonomy and sovereignty.”[[238]](#endnote-238) But by the time of Paris Peace Conference of 1919, it became clear to the colonized world “that Wilson’s declarations in favor of self-determination were to benefit some nations and not others” because his framework “did not, in any way, alter the realities of imperialism in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.”[[239]](#endnote-239)

Du Bois drafted an official platform that addressed “the issue of self-determination and decolonization in Africa” that was read at the Paris Peace conference by James Weldon Johnson. He also used the platform to suggest “that a Pan African Congress should be organized by ‘the thinking classes of the Negro world’ to discuss the issue of self-determination.”[[240]](#endnote-240) Thereafter, the first Pan-African Congress “was quickly arranged” and took for itself the task of drafting a “document of its demands” concerning decolonization of Africa.[[241]](#endnote-241) Though, the initial resolution “stops short of demanding that Africa be ruled by Africans” and instead “sought to appeal to the newly formed League of Nations for peaceful humanitarian reforms.”[[242]](#endnote-242) However, Rucker explains that during subsequent Congresses the “tone and aims” of their resolutions “would more aggressively seek the full independence of African colonies as it became clear that European powers would continue their unfettered exploitation of Africa and its people.”[[243]](#endnote-243)

By the second Pan-African Congress in 1921, Du Bois adopted the ideas of another ideological rival – Marcus Garvey – and “used it as the basis for the next step in his own intellectual and philosophical evolution.”[[244]](#endnote-244) Authored by Du Bois, the “Manifesto of the Second Congress became the first official statement in favor of an independent Africa.”[[245]](#endnote-245) As Rucker writes, borrowing “from the ideas of his chief rival, Marcus Garvey, Du Bois’ explicit description of a black African state represents a significant departure from the language and aims of the 1900 Pan African Conference and the First Pan African Congress in 1919.”[[246]](#endnote-246) Clarifying the context of Du Bois and Garvey’s conflict, Rucker explains that “Du Bois’ main opposition to the UNIA was not the ultimate goal of establishing an independent Africa, but its approach.”[[247]](#endnote-247) Nevertheless, by the time of the Fourth Pan African Congress held in 1927, Du Bois had fully assimilated Garveyism and “used unequivocal language regarding European imperialism and the subjugation of people of African descent.”[[248]](#endnote-248)

Again, while none of the first four Congresses called for revolution to free Africa, “the demands of each successive Congress became less conciliatory to European imperialism and more insistent on self-determination and autonomy for Africans.”[[249]](#endnote-249) The most significant Pan African Congress “was held in October 1945.” During the proceedings, Du Bois “universally recognized as the true father of the Pan-Africanist movement” by attendees like Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta “who would later lead their respective nations to independence” from white rule.[[250]](#endnote-250) Rucker avers that Du Bois’ “shift away from the cautious and patient tendencies of the past” was most expressed in his ‘Declaration to the Colonial Powers’ wherein he demanded autonomy and independence for Black Africa.[[251]](#endnote-251) The “African leaders who had been under the tutelage of Du Bois, took position of power in independent African republics.”[[252]](#endnote-252) Kwame Nkrumah, who attributed “the very expression ‘Pan-Africanism’ to Du Bois among others” credited for the “momentum generated by the Fifth Congress” which “impelled him to lead the liberation movement of his homeland.”[[253]](#endnote-253)

Spearheaded by the intellectual and philosophical evolution of Du Bois’ thinking about Black nationalism, “Pan-Africanism finally arrived on the African continent” in a tangible way when Ghana secured its freedom and emerged as a sovereign state in 1957.[[254]](#endnote-254) In 1960, Du Bois was invited to Ghana and to Nigeria “to take part in independence and the inaugurations of African prime ministers,” exemplifying his contribution to the Black Diasporic “oppositional discourse” of Pan-Africanism and its expression of the “umbilical link” between Black people dispersed by slavery around the world and “their historic motherland.”[[255]](#endnote-255) His evolution of Pan-Africanism as a universal ideology of freedom was a “revolution in the development of black nationalist thought” and shows that despite accusations of Eurocentrism or mimeticism by scholars today, “Du Bois fought for, helped achieve” the overthrow of European imperialism in Africa.[[256]](#endnote-256) Moreover, his “keen insight into African culture and history, his strong sense of racial pride, his commitment to ending European domination and white supremacy, and the intellectual legacy he produced” served as the basis subsequent “conceptualizations of Black Power, African Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism.”[[257]](#endnote-257)

***4: Conclusion***

Contrary to the dominant arguments put forth by Black feminist scholars, this essay argued that Du Bois’ pioneering role in establishing the principles of Black sociology, ethnological arguments and long-range development of Pan-Africanism as an ideological rival to colonial imperialism/Westernism suggest that the masculine roots informing his approach to the Black intellectual endeavor is a positive and humanistic rather than a restrictive marker of his thought.

In the first section, I outlined how historical anachronisms underlie and limit contemporary race/gender debates in the US academy. In the second section, I outlined the Black feminist critique of Du Boisian thought. These authors rely on the aforementioned anachronisms outlined in section one. Accordingly, for them Du Bois’ clear opposition to patriarchy and misogyny is limited by what they take to be the aprioritization of the Black male as normative in intellectual affairs. His masculinization of Black thought, for them, implicitly relegates women to an inferior status as intellectuals and thus reproduces sexism. At best, they regard Du Bois’ corpus as the antecedent to an intrinsically more worthy intellectual endeavor: intersectional analyses of the Black condition.

The intellectual synthesis of discourses in history, philosophy and social science that characterize Du Bois’ corpus were in fact bound by the thread of a masculinized subject. But these links don’t warrant the conclusions drawn by Black feminists that they prevented him from recognizing the works and contributions of Black women to the uplifting of the race *in and of themselves*. As the third section showed, Du Bois’ masculinist epistemology contributed to the first scientific study of Black America through Black sociology. In Du Bois’ sociological and ethnological imagination, Black men, women and children functioned as positive agents of social change.

The doxa among Black feminist scholars that Du Bois’ masculinism in and of itself implies the degradation of or patriarchal urge to control (protect) Black women is contradicted by his *actual arguments* concerning Black women’s intellectual leadership of and contributions towards securing freedom for the race, Black children’s transformative potential, and his long-range impact that spurred a revolution in Black nationalist thought. In the end, this line of thinking is indicative of the deeply embedded historical anachronisms in our contemporary epistemic order, of which by Black feminist is part and parcel, “that allows all sorts of sins and maladies” to be attributed to Black manhood *ipso facto*.

1. Quoted in: Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: the Rise & Demise of an American Jester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 64. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Quoted in: Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 282. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 334. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Tommy Curry, “It’s for the Kids: The Sociological Significance of W.E.B. Du Bois’ The Brownies’ Books and Their Philosophical Relevance for our Understanding of Gender in the Ethnological Age,” Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, 36, no. 1 (2015): 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Errol Miller, *The Prophet and the Virgin: The Masculine and Feminine Roots of Teaching* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishing, 2003), 325. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Miller, *The Prophet and the Virgin*, 325. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid, 325. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid, 328. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, 329. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid, 338. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid, 320. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Sylvia Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,” *Social Text* no. 1 (1979): 151. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,” 151. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid, 151. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Boskin, *Sambo*, 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid, 63. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid, 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid, 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 103. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Alexander Crummell, “Civilization: The Primal Need of the Race and Attitude of the American Mind Toward the Negro Intellect,” (Washington, D.C.: The American Negro Academy, 1898), 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Crummell, “Civilization: The Primal Need,” 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid, 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Stuckey, Slave Culture, 298. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid, 298-299. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid, 307. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid, 307. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Freeden Blume Oeur, and Saida Grundy. "Allyship in the Time of Aggrievement." *Black Feminist Sociology: Perspectives and Praxis* (2021): 253. Alexander G. Weheliye, Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014). Fabio Rojas, From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007). Tommy Curry, "Black Studies, Not Morality: Anti-Black Racism, Neo-Liberal Cooptation, and the Challenges to Black Studies Under Intersectional Axioms,” Emerging Voices of Africana: Disciplinary Resonances (Third World-Red Sea Press, 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Tommy Curry, “Ethnological Theories of Race/Sex in Nineteenth-Century Black Thought: Implications for the Race/Gender Debate of the Twenty-First Century” in The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race, ed. Naomi Zack (New York: Oxford University Press), 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Curry, “Ethnological Theories of Race/Sex,” 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Siep Stuurman, *The Invention of Humanity: Equality and Cultural Difference in World History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017). Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: the Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). V.P. Franklin, *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of the Fail of the Fathers* (Westport: Lawrence & Hill Company, 1984). [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Tommy J. Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre and the dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Norman Ajari, *Dignity or Death* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Joy James, “The Protofeminist Politics of W.E.B. Du Bois with Respects to Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells Barnett,” in *W.E.B. Du Bois on Race & Culture,* ed. Bernard W. Bell, Emily Grosholz, and James B. Stewart (New York: Routledge, 1996), 142. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. James, “The Protofeminist Politics,” 142. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid, 142. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid, 142. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid, 143. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid, 144. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid, 147. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid, 146. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid, 147. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid, 148. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid, 149. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid, 149. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid, 149. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid, 149. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid, 150. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid, 150. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid, 150. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid, 152. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid, 152. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid, 153. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid, 153. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid, 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid, 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Ibid, 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid, 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid, 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid, 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid, 155. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Ibid, 155. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
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