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**Modern Order and the Promise of Anarchy:
From the “Writhing Age” of *Souls* to World Reconstruction**

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Since its 1903 entry into American culture, *The Souls of Black Folk* has generated literally hundreds, possibly well over a thousand, responses in the form of lesson plans, lectures, panels, keynote addresses, articles, essays, and books. A considerable amount of thought, therefore, has been devoted to Du Bois’ views on double consciousness, slavery, aesthetics, political strategy, and other themes of his remarkable book. Unsurprisingly, a great deal of study has also been directed on the impact of these same views on a century of black political thought and practice. Like so many, I think this level of fecundity and illumination is precisely as it should be.

As with any complex work, however, Du Bois’ *Souls* continues to present hermeneutic challenges. One in particular has proven especially difficult, namely ascertaining the deep influences on *his* thought and, hence, understanding the longitudinal context of his writings. There seem to be at least a few reasons for this. Du Bois sometimes discussed figures central to his education or mentioned more contemporary influences, but rarely did he directly reference their articles or texts. This is surely because most of Du Bois’ defining works were intended for a general audience and, hence, were unencumbered of the usual academic apparatuses. But, as a result, conceptual lineages have been left ambiguous. In addition, Du Bois possessed some remarkable synthetical abilities. When these abilities were applied, the original influences often underwent subtle or unusual alterations and became embedded in sophisticated eclectic frameworks. This kind of synthetical work, therefore, often obscured inadvertently the ideational origins and trajectory of positions that Du Bois ultimately espoused. Consequently, much scholarly work has been directed at extrapolating influences on his thought on the basis of conceptual affinities identified between his writings and those of figures or movements that contributed to his education or political context.

The impact of pragmatism, Marxism, liberal political economy, and the black political tradition have received a good deal of attention in the effort to clarify Du Bois’ forums of engagement and the complex wholes he produced.¹ But comparatively little

¹ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* [reprinted from 1983 edition] (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986); Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Shamooin Zamir, *Dark Voices: W.E.B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888-1903* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Adolph L. Reed, Jr., *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Ronald T. Judy, ed., *boundary 2*, vol. 27, no.3 (2000).

has been offered on romanticism and, dare I say, anarchism.² The impact of the former was surprisingly deep, enduring across many decades of Du Bois' long career. The latter was clearly less influential overall. Nevertheless, Du Bois' reflections on anarchism were a good deal more than nothing at all. They offer an unusual perspective on his existential struggle with a system of oppression that seemed to have no end in sight. And they intersected in important ways with his views on romanticism, Marxism, and the tradition of black insurrectionism. A full discussion of this confluence of ideas is beyond the scope of this essay. But, in what follows, I offer an account of Du Bois' peculiar flirtation with anarchism across much of the first half of the 20th century.

The essay has three parts. I first present a sketch of what seems like a suppressed history of anarchist struggle and violence, a kind of "white insurrectionism," from the late 19th through the early 20th century. Some emphasis will be placed on Emma Goldman's thought and activism with the aim of broaching the question as to how far anarchism might be related to abolitionism. The brief history I provide will fill out the backdrop of a period of black politics typically characterized in terms of the pervasion of lynchings, the consolidation of Jim Crow, and the ascendance of Booker T. Washington's accommodationism. In the second section, I offer a general account of Du Bois' profound ambivalence, from *Souls* onward, regarding violence, lawbreaking, and the hallowed tradition of pre-Washington black insurrection. Du Bois' ambivalence was an expression of what he called the "writhing of the age translated into black," and it was dramatically conveyed through the prism of the anarchist politics of his day, an expository device rife with implications and normative conflicts. In the third and final section, I offer an account of Du Bois' post-*Souls* experimentation with the concept of anarchy. In particular, I examine his use of the idea to criticize the imperial orders of his day and his subsequent inversion of the anarchy trope into a positive conception by which to characterize the expansive solidarity necessary to move from the "writhing age" to World Reconstruction in the aftermath of WWII.

From Harper's Ferry to Homestead: Anarchism as Abolitionism?

I think it is safe to say that most Americans, insofar as they know anything about it, sense the stigma attached to anarchism. Indeed, right or wrong, most Americans will likely contribute to the enduring stigma by dismissing this political position out of hand or by casting aspersions at it. In the 2003 protests against the war in Iraq, anarchism received some press, and clearly of a negative kind, due to the vandalism and more confrontational methods of the Black Bloc, many of whose members are anarchists. In the 1960's, the Weathermen and the Symbionese Liberation Army, whatever their precise ideological commitments, helped consolidate the ill repute of anarchism due to the violence and significant lawbreaking they pursued in their revolutionary agendas. The remarkable upheavals of the 1960's may lead some to think that anarchism has its origins in that exuberant period. But, in fact, the anarchist movement has a much longer history,

² For important links between *Souls* and romanticism, among other things, see Robert Gooding-Williams, "Du Bois' Counter-Sublime," *The Massachusetts Review: A Quarterly of Literature, the Arts, and Public Affairs*, vol. 35, no.2 (Summer 1994), p.202-24, and "Intimations of Immortality and Double Consciousness," ms, presented at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Du Bois Symposium, December 28, 2003.

reaching back to the mid to late 19th century. In the context of the U.S., this history has intersected significantly with the history of labor reforms, immigration and deportation practices, constrictions on civil liberties, and the complex inclusion of Southern and Eastern Europeans into American whiteness. Although a general amnesia about this history currently prevails, anarchism has occupied the popular imagination in spectacular ways in times past.

Various scholars have illuminated these aspects of anarchism, and I will rely on their research below. But I know of very little work that has connected anarchism with 19th century black insurrectionism and early 20th century black radicalism. What little there is indicates that Lucy Parsons may have been the only black American who was both a pro-violence anarchist and a public figure during that period.³ Anarchists, then, were nearly all white, or in virtue of being Spanish, Italian, Russian, or Polish, were in the process of being “whitened.” Indeed, the fact that so many of the anarchists were Southern or Eastern European may have delayed what would otherwise have been a more rapid inclusion of these groups into mainstream whiteness. In any case, despite the fact that there were very few links between black and white violent anarchists – again, because there were almost no black radicals of that type – striking conceptual parallels and resonances did exist between black and white radicalisms that contended with the issue of violence and upheaval more generally. As I shall point out, we find just such connections in *Souls*. In order to properly appreciate this, we must have at least a sketch of the political context against which Du Bois raised the problematic of black and anarchist traditions of insurrection. Du Bois called this context a “writhing age,” for he knew well that it was one of potential upheaval and catastrophe for the nation’s disfranchised groups. I begin with a brief and basic account of anarchism itself.

Anarchism is often cast as having very long historical roots and a wide geographic span. Rudolf Rocker, for example, has cited the early Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu and the pre-Socratic philosopher Zeno as holding prototypical anarchist views.⁴ The most consolidated of its earliest expressions, however, is the late 18th century work of William Godwin and the 19th century publications of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and of Michael Bakunin.⁵ And the most elaborated of the early accounts can be found across the

³ Although often depicted as only black, Lucy Parsons is believed to have been of mixed heritages including black, American Indian, and Mexican. She was a remarkable figure. Sadly, we have little available on her life and of her writings due to a fire that burned down her house and tragically killed her, and the government’s confiscation of the writings that survived the fire. David Roediger offers a compelling collation of black radicalism and white anarchism and their mostly lost opportunities for solidarity, and he does this partly through the life of Lucy Parsons. See his “Strange Legacies: The Black International and Black America,” in David Roediger and Franklin Rosemont, eds., *Haymarket Scrapbook* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1986), p. 93-96. For a biography on Lucy Parsons, see Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons – American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1976). And some of Parsons own writings have been compiled in Gale Ahrens, ed., *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality, and Solidarity: Writings and Speeches, 1878-1937* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 2003).

⁴ Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 1989), p.12. And Rocker follows Peter Kropotkin. See Roger N. Baldwin, ed., *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets: A Collection of Writings by Peter Kropotkin* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970), p.287-8.

⁵ William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* [3rd ed.] (Harmondsworth and Baltimore: Penguin, 1976), edited by Isaac Kramnick; Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), edited and translated by Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith; and Michael Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970).

many books of Peter Kropotkin.⁶ I cannot do justice to the anarchist system as a whole or to its various notable proponents. And it is not in any case my aim here to offer a reconstruction or critical analysis of this body of thought.⁷ But at least a preliminary statement of it is in order. We can say that anarchism is a philosophy of freedom based on a radical opposition to coercive structures, especially the state and capitalism, in order to ensure individual liberty and to restore people to liberated communities. On a provisional account of this general idea, anarchism's fundamental commitment to human liberty is centrally configured by:

- 1) a sociological paradigm of unfreedom: centralized power generates both coercive capacities and tendencies, especially when it is embodied in the state and in capitalist industry;
- 2) a normative communal conception of the self: the self, though "sovereign," is naturally a constituent of a community⁸; and
- 3) a praxis imperative: *radical* advancement of *concrete* possibilities toward full liberty must be pursued.

This kernel of anarchism has its origins in the modern conception of freedom and some anti-establishment empirical claims. Regarding the former, anarchism, like liberalism, seeks to preserve the self's integrity and inviolability before the encroachments of governing bodies. But, unlike modern liberalism, it seeks not the

⁶ Kropotkin's output was remarkable. For just a sampling, see Paul Avrich, ed., Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid, A Factor of Evolution* (London: Allen Lane, 1972); Peter Kropotkin, *Ethics: Origins and Development* (New York: Black Rose Books Ltd, 1992); Marshall S. Shatz, ed., *Kropotkin: The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Roger N. Baldwin, ed., *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets: A Collection of Writings by Peter Kropotkin* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970).

⁷ See George Crowder, *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Aileen Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin: A Study in the Psychology and Politics of Utopianism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Michael Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom* (New York: Black Rose Books, Ltd., 1993).

⁸ I put some stress on the normative communal concept of the self to separate classic anarchism from rightwing libertarianism. The latter often seeks unfettered capitalist markets along with the diminution or abolition of the state in order to maximize individual liberty. Although both classic anarchism and rightwing libertarianism are anti-statist in conception, the former abhors capitalism and the latter typically advocates it. This division over capitalism seems to me, in nearly every case, to hinge ultimately upon a strong individualism espoused by rightwing libertarianism and a more collectivist impulse espoused by classic anarchism. Nearly every major anarchist, and especially Kropotkin, has argued not simply that the state is undesirable, but I think more interestingly, that it is *unnecessary* due to the powerfully coalescing, reciprocating, and community-forming nature of the self. So I would regard anarchism and rightwing libertarianism as two separate species of anti-statism, rather than characterizing anarchism as a genus that accommodates rightwing libertarianism as one of its (despised) species. I think this emphasis on the self-in-community is an important consideration because otherwise anarchism becomes a merely negative perspective, merely an opposition to the state, without any accompanying substantive elements. And if the theory of anarchism does not recommend the move I have suggested, then I would suggest we focus on the practice of anarchism, which has nearly always emphasized the centrality of the solidarity imperative and has often recommended and even worked itself out in cooperatives and communes. As my remarks intimate, I think anarchism has traditionally not been very clear about its attempt to unite an enlightenment sovereign self with a strong communal impulse. Does, for example, the ideal of solidarity mean anything more than working together on the basis of shared interests? Does it include as well a conception that regards the social world as permeating the self itself?

diminution but the complete abolition of the state, and not the creation of fair wages but the abolition of the wage system altogether. Opposition to the wage system hangs on the familiar socialist thesis that control of materials and the means of production in the hands of the few inhibits gravely the freedom of the masses. This socialist thesis is among anarchism's central anti-establishment empirical claims. And its roots lie in the historically-grounded contention that centralized power – the state being the paradigm – invariably becomes coercive and that radical action must be undertaken to replace it with viable humane alternatives.⁹ This idea of radical action for concrete possibilities leads anarchism to list among the virtues: solidarity, sacrifice, courage, the spirit of revolt, creativity, and spontaneity. It lists among its means, various forms of direct, often collective, coercive acts. In some variants of anarchism, calibrated violence, like assassinations and targeted bombings, is occasionally recommended. In the late 19th and early 20th century, these particular virtues and the more violent means infamously coalesced in certain anarchist quarters under the dreaded slogan, “Propaganda of the Deed.” This slogan conveyed the idea that only violent acts against the state and the economic elite can send the right moral message to those in power and rouse a compliant populace to form radical solidarity movements.

This focus on anti-authoritarian freedom clarifies how classic anarchism differs from classic Marxism. Since many anarchists and many Marxists have endorsed violence and have stood together in repudiating capitalism and supporting certain kinds of labor movements, their respective positions are often amalgamated in popular consciousness. Occasionally, they share a space that is called “Revolutionary Socialism.” But significant differences exist, primarily in regards to their views on politics and power. First, Marxists have traditionally defended the idea that a historically evolved economic substrate determines much if not all of what transpires in politics, culture, law, and the many other aspects of the social world. Second, Marxists have insisted that an intermediary stage lies between the downfall of capitalism and the rise of true communism, namely a “dictatorship of the proletariat” in which a revolutionary party representing the proletariat leads through a state-managed socialism. Anarchists typically reject both of these ideas. They defend the primacy of maximum freedom and cast historically-informed deep suspicion upon significant centralized power of any kind. So anarchists have argued that political domination, far from being a mere epiphenomenon of the economic substrate, often itself influences economic exploitation.¹⁰ In addition, anarchists have rejected even the idea of state-managed socialism because, quite simply, it involves a state and, hence, an institution easily and likely to be abused against those it claims to represent. Consequently, anarchism is anti-capitalist because it is anti-authoritarian, and for this same reason, it is opposed to the state socialism of classic Marxism.¹¹

But anarchism is not opposed to organization and order *per se*, contrary to what its name, “anarchism,” might suggest and contrary to its caricatures in popular culture. It

⁹ See, for example, Alix Kates Shulman, ed., *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches by Emma Goldman* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p.98. See also *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p.31, and *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, p.47.

Interestingly, and I do not know if this connection has been made, anarchism could cite the experimental work of Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo to advance its political psychological stance.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Red Emma Speaks*, p.99, and *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p.24-25.

¹¹ Bakunin goes as far as to oppose not only the economic elite and politicians but all who have any sort of coercive powers, including “the smallest vendors of sweetmeats”. See *God and the State*, p.17.

militates only against those forms of organization that centralize power and thereby construct the edifices, often hidden, of coercion. So in place of state capitalism or state socialism, anarchism recommends flexible federations of voluntary socialist cooperatives. On this conception, politics and economics must be made more and more participatory and less and less representational until there is a qualitative shift from a vertical coercive arrangement to a horizontal one of “mutual aid.” Individual wills, then, are made more deeply connected to each other as they are driven more deeply upward into the already flattened organizational structure. This way, anarchism eliminates as much as possible intermediaries in which coercive capacities may lurk.¹² Finally, let me note that this all-too-brief summary has focused mostly on classic forms of anarchism and Marxism. I do not deny that there are variants of each that may merge in some versions of anarcho-communism. I turn now to anarchist practice.

Anarchism has had both a nonviolent and a violent wing. Hard as it may be to believe, there really have been distinctly nonviolent anarchists, and perhaps the best known was Leo Tolstoy, who espoused pacifist Christian anarchism. Certainly the most famous of the anarchists were violent, and they propounded the way of *attentat*, or Propaganda of the Deed, the favored methods of which involved blades, bullets, and bombs. Lying between these opposing versions of anarchism is anarcho-syndicalism. This variant was popularized by Emma Goldman and Rudolf Rocker, and it was foundational to the labor organization, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). This middle-road anarchism is worth considering a bit further because of its greater popularity and its partial links to violence. Here, for example, is Emma Goldman’s summary of syndicalism as an extension of anarchism.

... the ultimate purpose of Syndicalism is to reconstruct society from its present centralized, authoritative and brutal state to one based upon the free, federated grouping of the workers along lines of economic and social liberty.

With this object in view, Syndicalism works in two directions: first, by undermining the existing institutions; secondly, by developing and educating the workers and cultivating their spirit of solidarity, to prepare them for a full, free life, when capitalism shall have been abolished. Syndicalism is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism. ... Syndicalism rejects negotiation in labor disputes, because such a procedure serves only to give the enemy time to prepare his end of the fight, thus defeating the very object the workers set out to accomplish. Also, Syndicalism stands for spontaneity, both as a preserver of the fighting strength of labor and also because it takes the enemy unawares, hence compels him to a speedy settlement or causes him great loss.

The chief ethical value of Syndicalism consists in the stress it lays upon the necessity of labor’s getting rid of the element of dissension, parasitism and corruption in its ranks. It seeks to cultivate devotion, solidarity and enthusiasm, which are far more essential and vital in the economic struggle than money.¹³

She goes on to clarify that the three main lines of anarcho-syndicalist activism are direct action, sabotage, and the general strike. But true to the open character of anarchism, she specifies that, “Anarchism is ... a living force in the affairs of our life, constantly creating

¹² For a classic Marxist criticism of this view, see Lenin’s remarks in “The State and Revolution” in Henry M. Christman, ed., *Essential Works of Lenin* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987), especially p.357-364.

¹³ *Red Emma Speaks*, p.68-71.

new conditions. The methods of Anarchism therefore do not comprise an iron-clad program to be carried out under all circumstances.”¹⁴

Earlier, I mentioned that anarcho-syndicalism constitutes middle-road anarchism. We see this middling character in Goldman’s recommended methods, which do not specifically require *attentat* but do have a tinge of violence and certainly place serious pressure on governing bodies. Consider, for example, that many who oppose violence may nonetheless balk at the method of sabotage, the destruction of property necessary for industry. As well, many may feel discomfort about the idea of shutting down a whole city through a general strike. One could not be, say, a good Rawlsian and commend these methods of social change. Rawls would regard these as inappropriately coercive.¹⁵ In fact, given his rather cautious views on civil disobedience, he would surely also reject direct action of the sort conducted by anarcho-syndicalists. Of course, someone like Goldman would regard Rawls’ condemnation as utterly misconceiving and in effect defending the real source of coercion, namely the state and monopolies.

This intermediary form of anarchism was a longstanding commitment in Goldman’s political thought and activities. The context of her entry into American politics and labor was the late 19th century economic downturn, punctuated by such events as the 1886 Haymarket Strike and the 1892 Homestead Strike. And her disposition then was favorable toward the use of certain forms of tailored political violence. It was the state repression and violence in Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 that led her to abandon her earlier approval of political violence. But it is helpful to consider her outlook prior to this change. The horrifying rise in lynchings and the consolidation of Jim Crow at the end of the 19th century are well-known. But labor agitation and anarchist activism during that period have received less attention in studies on black political thinkers of that era. We can sense at the outset that the suggested comparison between black struggle and anarchist activism may bear interesting results since both traditions were centrally concerned with liberation. Indeed, remove the freedom motif and both become unintelligible. In addition, they often shared an enemy in the form of an oppressive state. Finally, as it turned out, figures in both movements actually referenced each other’s traditions. So consideration of Goldman’s pre-1917 years gives us a window onto some ordinarily unfamiliar features of the tumultuous political context out of which *Souls* emerged.

In the 1886 Haymarket Strike, labor unions in Chicago struck for an 8 hour work day. The confrontation between the police and the workers dramatically culminated in a bombing that killed 12 people, including 9 policemen. Since anarchism was widely repudiated and many of the rally speakers were anarchists, anarchists generally were blamed, and 8 of the organizers were charged on the basis of shaky evidence. In the end, four organizers were hanged, one committed suicide in jail, and three were freed.¹⁶ The

¹⁴ *Red Emma Speaks*, p.60

¹⁵ John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), and “The Justification of Civil Disobedience,” in Joe P. White, ed., *Assent/Dissent* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1984), p.225-236. For excellent critical commentary see Jeffrey Paris, “After Rawls,” *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Oct. 2002), p.679-699, and Angelo Corlett, “What is Civil Disobedience?,” *Philosophical Papers*, vol. XXVI, no.3 (1997), p.241-259.

¹⁶ Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). See also *Haymarket Scrapbook* and *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* for information on Albert Parsons, who was among the hanged leaders, and his wife Lucy Parson’s response.

legacy of this struggle was the spiritual awakening of generations of labor radicals. More concretely, this legacy included the instituting of May Day, which is celebrated internationally by labor organizations on May 1 of each year, and the construction of a statue honoring the dead policemen, which in the decades to follow became a persistent target of anarchist attacks until its removal from public space after it was bombed by the Weathermen.

Several years after the Haymarket Strike, iron and steel workers in Homestead, Pennsylvania struggled over contract negotiations with Carnegie Steel Co., managed there by Henry Clay Frick. After a lock out by the management and increased volatility, Frick hired 300 Pinkerton detectives to subdue the strikers. The result was daylong combat, ending in the death of three detectives and several workers, and the intervention of the National Guard.¹⁷ Later that same year, an anarchist, Alexander Berkman, attempted to assassinate Frick for his tyrannical behavior, but succeeded only in severely wounding him. This assassin was Emma Goldman's lover, and Goldman herself aided in the set-up of his attempt at *attentat*. Berkman was convicted and jailed for several years, and Goldman somehow escaped legal scrutiny.¹⁸

Both the 1886 Haymarket Strike and the 1892 Homestead Strike were among the most dramatic upsurges of labor radicalism and populism in a roiling tormented era. A few other important events in this vein, and there are many others, are worth mentioning. Until its aggressive disruption, crucial transport lines were effectively hampered by the 1886 Railway Strikes, and in the summer of 1894, a similar sort of workers' defiance led to the infamous Pullman Strikes, which generated a punishing response by the National Guard. Roughly the same period in 1894, a dramatic symbolic protest was enacted by "Coxey's Army." Jacob Coxey led the march of an "army" of unemployed or impoverished workers from Ohio to Washington D.C. so that they could present themselves as a "living petition" for labor reforms to the state. As the familiar pattern might lead one to guess, this too was met with state repression. Coxey was arrested for trespassing and his "army" was dispersed, though I should add that it inspired a 1000 member "army" to march from California all the way to Washington D.C. that same year.¹⁹

Years later, in the decade of WWI, this history of labor agitation and the new anti-war activism merged with volatile effect. In spite of being regarded by many as a "good war," WWI generated vehement domestic opposition. During this time, the anarcho-syndicalist labor movement, the IWW, became a force to reckon with. And the shadow of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia fell upon the U.S. As a result of a host of such factors, U.S. Attorney General Palmer launched from 1918-1921 a brutal purging of communists and anarchists, especially those who were Southern or Eastern European immigrants. This development was exacerbated by several anarchist bombings in 1919, one of which damaged Palmer's own house in Washington D.C. So using the war context, and espionage and sedition laws, Palmer set aside civil liberties and concern for

¹⁷ Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

¹⁸ Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks*, p.3-25.

¹⁹ Carlos A. Schwantes, *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

evidence to initiate an overwhelming wave of repression, raiding scores of union offices, arresting literally thousands of people, and authorizing a massive deportation campaign.²⁰

Emma Goldman herself fell victim to Palmer's crusade. She was deported, ironically, not for aiding and abetting Berkman years earlier, but for quite separate and trumped up charges regarding her anti-war and anti-conscription activities. As she described her expulsion, it was "Not because my offense deserves it, but because I am an anarchist."²¹ This remark about how a political commitment can itself criminalize calls to mind the not dissimilar idea that it is so often blackness itself that is criminal in the biased mind. As Du Bois put it in *Darkwater* (1920),

Are we not coming more and more, day by day, to making the statement "I am white," the one fundamental tenet of our practical morality? ... Murder may swagger, theft may rule and prostitution may flourish and the nation gives but spasmodic, intermittent and lukewarm attention. But let the murderer be black or the thief brown or the violator of womanhood have a drop of Negro blood, and the righteousness of the indignation sweeps the world. Nor would this fact make the indignation less justifiable did not we all know that it was blackness that was condemned and not crime.²²

This partial link between the stigma of anarchism and of blackness receives oblique but interesting commentary from Goldman. She states that,

The emotions of the ignorant man are continuously kept at a pitch by the most blood-curdling stories about Anarchism. Not a thing is too outrageous to be employed against this philosophy and its exponents. Therefore Anarchism represents to the unthinking what the proverbial bad man does to the child – a black monster bent on swallowing everything; in short, destruction and violence.²³

On these remarks, the stigma of anarchism is likened to a devouring, and maybe even cannibalistic, black creature that leaves terrible mayhem in its wake. Goldman may have had in the backdrop of her mind the so-called "hereditary anarchist type," characterized by discolored skin and facial deformities, which the widely-read criminologist Cesare Lombroso postulated in his biologically-based taxonomy of criminal kinds.²⁴ I do not wish to psychoanalyze the culture so depicted by Goldman. But it is worth considering that in addition to the criminalizing nature of the two kinds of stigmata, we find here a

²⁰ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Stanley Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer: Politician* (New York: De Capo Press, 1972); Eugene Lyons, *The Life and Death of Sacco and Vanzetti* (New York: De Capo Press, 1970); Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Chicago: Charles Kerr Publishers, Co., 1998).

²¹ See Alex Kates Shulman's introduction in *Red Emma Speaks*, p.11. For more on Goldman's life, see Emma Goldman, *Living My Life: An Autobiography of Emma Goldman* (Salt Lake City: G.M. Smith, 1982), and Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

²² W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999), p.20.

²³ *Red Emma Speaks*, p.49.

²⁴ David Roediger, "Strange Legacies: The Black International and Black America," in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, p.93. For more on American culture's fascination with anarchists, see Franklin Rosemont, "A Bomb-Toting, Long-Haired, Wild-Eyed Fiend: The Image of the Anarchist in Popular Culture," in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, p.202-212.

connotative web involving the trope of blackness, and its imagined link to destruction, used (without being endorsed) by Goldman as a temporary hermeneutic to characterize American antipathy for anarchism.

But Goldman also produced more positive and substantive connections between anarchist and black struggles. For example, in a discussion of the methods of anarcho-syndicalism, Goldman links herself and anarchists generally to the American tradition of freedom revolutionaries. She remarks that, “Universal suffrage owes its existence to direct action. If not for the spirit of rebellion, of the defiance on the part of the American revolutionary fathers, their posterity would still wear the King’s coat. If not for the direct action of a John Brown and his comrades, America would still trade in the flesh of the black man.”²⁵ Moreover, she links the violent abolitionists with the labor anarchists of her day – Harper’s Ferry with Haymarket and Homestead – through the idea of morally justifiable activism that has been politically criminalized by a corrupt state but which may subsequently be vindicated. As she puts it, “...in America ... the foolish notion still prevails that in a Democracy there is no place for political criminals. Yet John Brown was a political criminal; so were the Chicago Anarchists; so is every striker. Consequently, ... the political criminal of our time or place may be the hero, martyr, saint of another age.”²⁶

The life, rebellion, and death of John Brown clearly make for interesting reading and reflection. But his afterlife in the reclamation projects of later activists is no less engaging. Here we find an eminent anarchist positioning postbellum anarchism as an extension of the freedom traditions of the antebellum black insurrectionists. To many, such a move would have been perfectly natural. With their special devotion to human liberty and decisive action, anarchists were fundamentally abolitionists.²⁷ Possibly, some may even have regarded anarchists to be the most consistent kind of abolitionist. However, others sympathetic to the black insurrectionists did not conceive anarchism in this way and sought instead to bifurcate the history of American insurrections into a condemned anarchist wing and a praised black insurrectionist wing. Indeed, as I will show in the next section, Du Bois shared the common contempt of anarchism during the period of *Souls*. Thus, when he himself compared the early black and later white insurrectionists, he did not return Goldman’s favor. In fact, he actually used anarchism as a trope to castigate the unruly potential of what he took to be a certain black collective tendency. In doing this, however, he too saw the potential connections that might be claimed between black and anarchist insurrectionism, and as I point out, he revealed clear ambivalence toward the former and some toward the latter.

The Memory of Black Rebellion and the Specter of White Anarchy

In the foregoing, I have relayed various ideas and events pertaining to anarchism and anarchists because they form a crucial backdrop for Du Bois’ *Souls*. But before turning to

²⁵ *Red Emma Speaks*, p.62.

²⁶ *Red Emma Speaks*, p.290.

²⁷ In fact, John Brown’s own son, John Brown Jr., defended the Haymarket anarchists and their leaders. Although John Brown Jr. was not himself an anarchist, he was a self-avowed communist and claimed his father’s “favorite theme” was the “*Community plan of cooperative industry, in which all should labor for the Common good*” (italics his). See his letter to Franklin B. Sanborn in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, p.143.

Du Bois' text, let me note that the anarchist context was far more engrossing and its stigma far more damning than I have yet indicated. Up to this point, I have discussed the middle-road anarchism of anarcho-syndicalism. As the work of historian Mike Davis reveals, more extreme versions of anarchism (which have overlapped with some forms of anarcho-syndicalism), involving outright violence or Propaganda of the Deed, had a remarkable intensity and international scope during the late 19th and early 20th century. A passage from Davis' work is worth quoting at length. As we shall see, it is important for understanding some of the distinctive language and normative complexities of *Souls*.

Eighteen seventy-eight was the inception of the "classical" age of terrorism: the half-century during which the bourgeois imaginary was haunted by the infamous figure of the bomb-throwing nihilist or anarchist. Beginning in 1878, in fact, Bakuninists of several nationalities and their cousins, the Russian Narodniki, embraced assassination as a potent, if last-ditch weapon in the struggle against autocracy. The calendar of that year is extraordinary. In January, Vera Zasulich wounds General Trepov, the sadistic jailer of the Narodniki. In April, Alexander Solovov makes his attempt on the czar, the beginning of the royal game hunt that will culminate in Alexander II's assassination by Peoples' Will in 1881. In May and June, there are the successive attacks on the aged kaiser in Berlin by the anarchists Holding and Nobiling, which provide Bismarck with his long-sought-after pretext for repressing the utterly innocent German social democrats. In the fall, meanwhile, Moncasi tries to kill Alfonso XII of Spain, and Giovanni Passanante, hiding a dagger in a red flag, slashes at the king of Italy. The year ends with a hysterical encyclical from Pope Leo XIII on the "deadly pestilence of Communism."

... from the 1890s, every ruling-class crime seems to summon a "hero from hell" to avenge dead strikers or executed revolutionaries. The relentless slogan of Russian anarchists was "smert za smert," death for death. Thus Frick was shot for Homestead; Canovas del Castillo, the Spanish prime minister, was killed in revenge both for dead anarchists and the executed Filipino patriot Rizal; King Umberto was assassinated for the women and children killed by his troops during the 1898 bread riots; McKinley was killed for Latimer; the prince of Wales was sniped at in Brussels in 1900—an anarchist response to the deaths of thousands of Boer women and children; likewise King Leopold was shot at in 1902 for his Congo atrocities; ex-Idaho governor Stuenenberg was blown up for the Coeur d'Elene outrages; a Spanish anarchist took aim at General Renard who slaughtered 2,500 Chilean nitrate miners in 1907; Colonel Falcon, who killed May Day demonstrators in Buenos Aires in 1909, was punctually given an anarchist send-off as was, thirteen years later, General Varela, the butcher of Patagonia; four New York anarchists blew themselves up with the bomb they intended to use against Rockefeller for the Ludlow massacre; Count Sturgkh was shot in Vienna [by the son of a leading socialist] as an antiwar protest; Australian IWWs fought conscription with arson, while the Galleanisti in the United States used letter bombs; in 1920 Wall Street was bombed for the Palmer raids; Petlura, the butcher of Ukrainian Jews, fell before an anarchist bullet in Paris in 1926; and a year later, the Bank of Boston in Buenos Aires was blown up in retaliation for the electrocution of Sacco and Vanzetti.²⁸

This inventory of deadly dealings is simply astonishing. Although the full catalogue was likely unknown even to those of that era, a significant number of the events listed by Davis or somehow connected to them must surely have been familiar and even all too familiar: the Haymarket Strike, Berkman's revenge on Frick, Czolgosc's assassination of President McKinley, the bombings that rationalized Palmer's Raids, and the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. In fact, even if only a handful of these were known, their public size and vivacity greatly outstripped what their smallness of number might have suggested. Front page news or talk of the town – only those in a coma could have been

²⁸ Jon Weiner, "Mike Davis Talks about the 'Heroes of Hell'," *Radical History Review*, vol.85 (Winter 2003), p. 227, 231-232.

oblivious to this recurring phenomenon of grassroots political violence. And black leaders and intellectuals of the era were no exception.

Frederick Douglas, for example, invoked the anarchist image in his excoriations of lynchings and legal condonations of them. In the year of the Homestead Strike (1892), he published an article in which he placed the shadow of anarchism within his condemnation of both Northern contempt and Southern malice toward blacks. Specifically, he linked the familiar anarchist trope of the assassin with the lawless, or more literally anarchistic, white hordes on a lynching rampage. As he put it,

The finger of scorn at the North is correlated to the dagger of the assassin at the South. The sin against the Negro is both sectional and national, and until the voice of the North shall be heard in emphatic condemnation and withering reproach against these continued ruthless mob-law murders, it will remain equally involved with the South in this common crime.²⁹

On another occasion, Douglas was quite direct in his invocation of anarchism, and he even linked it, this time, with black unrest. He contended that “If the southern outrages on the Colored race continue the Negro will become a chemist,” and that “Anarchists have not a monopoly on bomb-making, and the Negro will learn.”³⁰ Was this a veiled threat that a Nat Turner-like slaughter of postbellum whites was in the offing? Possibly more frightening, was it a heralding or a premonition of a new interracial militancy against the white oligarchy of the U.S.? Or perhaps it was simply dramatic language infused by the political energies of the moment? Whatever the answer, Douglas could no more evade the tumult of this era than could his white counterparts. And this was equally true of other black spokespersons of his day. Many of them held a labor position even more conservative than that of the early Du Bois, and maintained a correspondingly negative view of anarchism. I am as yet unaware of Booker T. Washington’s stated opinion on anarchism. But we can safely surmise that his view was decidedly negative given his commitment to the economic status quo and his praise of the “docility” of the black laborer.³¹ A similar view was held by Anna Julia Cooper. Published in the same year as the Homestead Strike (1892), here is her telling account of blacks in the American future:

...his instinct for law and order, his inborn respect for authority, his inaptitude for rioting and anarchy, his gentleness and cheerfulness as a laborer, and his deep-rooted faith in God will prove indispensable and invaluable elements in a nation menaced as America is by anarchy, socialism, communism, and skepticism poured in with all the jail birds from the continents of Europe and Asia.³²

And where does Du Bois stand in relation to these late 19th and early 20th century black political conceptions?

²⁹ Frederick Douglas, “Lynch Law in the South,” in Philip S. Foner, ed., [abridged and adapted by Yuval Taylor], *Frederick Douglas: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), p.750.

³⁰ Source from David Roediger, “Strange Legacies,” p.95-96.

³¹ In addition to his autobiography, see his essays collated with those of Du Bois in, *The Negro in the South: His Economic Progress in Relation to His Moral and Religious Development* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Company, 1907).

³² Anna Julia Cooper, “Has America a Race Problem? If so, How Can it Best be Solved?” in Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, eds., *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. 132.

In *Dusk of Dawn*, published 37 years after *Souls*, Du Bois confessed that it was not until he finished his first phase of teaching, presumably in 1910 when he concluded his stint at Atlanta University, that he came to see how much economy influenced politics and, correspondingly, that his appreciation of labor and class issues deepened. He further admitted that in such matters, he had been a child of Harvard and that Harvard had been a child of its age.³³ Consider the following remarks that reveal his understanding of the era's, Harvard's, and thus his own general attitude toward labor unrest and anarchist activism during his pre-1910 years, which clearly includes the decade of *Souls*.

... the attitude of Harvard toward labor was on the whole contemptuous and condemnatory. Strikes like that of the anarchists in Chicago, the railway strikes of 1886; the terrible Homestead strike of 1892 and Coxey's Army of 1894 were pictured as ignorant lawlessness, lurching against conditions largely inevitable. Karl Marx was hardly mentioned and Henry George given but tolerant notice. The anarchists of Spain, the Nihilists of Russia, the British miners – all these were viewed not as the political development and the tremendous economic organization but as sporadic evil. This was natural. Harvard was the child of its era. The intellectual freedom and flowering of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were yielding to the deadening economic pressures which made Harvard rich but reactionary. ... The social community that mobbed Garrison, easily hanged Sacco and Vanzetti.³⁴

As the many concrete references indicate, Du Bois confirms the context I have been describing thus far. Perhaps most intriguing here is the way he draws together Garrison, the acclaimed abolitionist, and Sacco and Vanzetti, the Jewish Anarchists famously executed on the basis of the flimsiest evidence. According to Du Bois, there is a common root unifying this elite, yet representative, community's opposition to abolitionism, on the one hand, and anarchism and labor agitation, on the other. It is not simply that the elite had desired earlier to preserve slavery and has since desired to maintain an unfair wage system (or wage slavery, according to anarchists and Marxists). More pointedly, they have been deeply threatened by radicalism attempting to destroy such forms of ordered inequality and have felt lethal disdain for such "disorderliness." So, in the outlook of the white elite, according to Du Bois, abolitionists were thus grouped with anarchists or "white insurrectionists." We might ask then about how the antebellum *black* insurrectionists fit into this general portrait.³⁵ How did early 20th century figures link Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and John Brown to the Haymarket anarchists, Alexander Berkman, and Emma Goldman?

The celebrated lineage of black insurrectionists begins with the pre-Revolutionary War era and ends roughly in the mid-19th century with John Brown and the Civil War, whereas the periodization of the Propagandists of the Deed begins shortly after the Civil War and extends into the first third of the 20th century. Black insurrectionists all met the same deadly fate, unlike Propagandists of the Deed, who sometimes escaped or were sometimes only jailed. But all were significant violators of order and were accordingly confronted by the violent restorative order of the state. This means that in the decade of *Souls*, Du Bois' memory stretched back to a bygone era of black political violence, but

³³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New Brunswick: Transactions Publishers, 1997), chs.3-4.

³⁴ *Dusk of Dawn*, p.40.

³⁵ Although, John Brown was white, I here provisionally include him in the grouping, "black insurrectionists," since he was so central to this history and his raid did involve blacks.

his deliberations were shadowed by the present specter of white anarchist and pro-labor violence. As we know from the content of *Souls*, he spoke favorably, if ambivalently, about the black insurrectionists. But, as indicated in the passage from *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois felt a Harvardish contempt during the time of *Souls* for the disorderliness of the radical labor movements, rather than for what he later in retrospect deemed to be their justified target, namely wage slavery. In the next and final section of this essay, I discuss how Du Bois resolved this discrepancy in a generally Marxist fashion and how this resolution involved a partly anarchist vision of what we might call, “World Reconstruction.” I turn now to Du Bois’ deep ambivalence about political violence and the black insurrectionist tradition, an ambivalence made more complicated by the anarchist context and the Harvardish contempt described in the foregoing.

We might begin by considering the insurrectionist claim that nonviolence is the luxury of the privileged. The basic idea here, of course, is that “Sure, one can denounce violence, but wait until it is one’s own life or the life of loved ones that is on the line!” But there is more. A general pacifist may yield to a complicated situation and use violence to protect self or kin in this or that isolated instance. But what if it is a whole system that exerts a crushing force upon oneself and nearly one’s entire community? In addition, what if no amount of praying, civic service, arguing, or shouting by generation after generation of the community produces genuine systemic changes? Is there not a compelling character to the insurrectionist’s claim that nonviolence is a luxury of the privileged?

I think it is clear that this claim can get under one’s skin. Its truth is debatable, however. As the Gandhian anti-colonial and the American Civil Rights movements might be invoked to show, even those most oppressed by severe systemic injustice may follow nonviolent agendas of social transformation and do so in massive numbers. For these protestors, nonviolence, far from being a luxury, was an absolute necessity for moral integrity and social transformation. I do not wish to adjudicate this debate over the legitimacy of bottom-up political violence. I want only to highlight and sustain the normative tension it reveals and, hence, the gripping existential dilemma it presented. Indeed, one aspect of the insurrectionist’s claim definitely seems true, and it too can get under one’s skin: the ability to avoid the *issue* of or the *temptation* to violence is the luxury of the privileged. I think most black activists of the past, including the pacifists of the Civil Rights movement, would agree.

Throughout *Souls*, Du Bois contends that precisely this point – the issue of and temptation to violence – is central to understanding the collective tendencies and personal existential dilemmas of black America. In various parts of the book, Du Bois characterizes two general collective dispositions with corresponding traditions, and recommends a third tradition. Specifically, he claims that out of “the fire of African freedom” emerged the collective tendency toward defiance and the correlated tradition of black insurrection, which includes the early slaves, Toussaint L’Ouverture, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and John Brown. And out of the American condition of subordination emerged the collective tendency toward subservience and the correlated tradition of accommodation and abject compromise, most powerfully exemplified by Booker T. Washington. As noted earlier, their historical arrangement is one in which black insurrectionism stretched from the Middle Passage to John Brown and the Civil War, and black accommodationism, while perhaps having a similarly long history, emerged

ascendant a few decades after the Civil War. Upon this template, Du Bois posits a third tradition, and he casts it as being continuous with the first collective tendency, which again is characterized by defiance. Reflecting the “fire of African freedom” and typified by Frederick Douglas, the third tradition is constituted by political self-assertion through legal advocacy and nonviolent agitation. And it is recommended vigorously by Du Bois as the political stance of the black community in the 20th century.³⁶

Du Bois brings two axes of evaluation to these tendencies and traditions. One concerns political strategy and the other moral, and even masculinist, validity. In regards to strategy, he contends that insurrection is deeply misguided because it severely underestimates the overwhelming order-imposing power of American white supremacy. Although Toussaint L’Ouverture succeeded in overthrowing white rule in Haiti, black Americans are comparatively so few in number and so disenfranchised that attempts at revolution in the year 1903 would meet the same deadly system as that which descended upon the Turner Rebellion and John Brown’s Raid at Harper’s Ferry.³⁷ But Washington’s accommodationism is little better since it consolidates the effects of Reconstruction’s failure and the rise of Jim Crow. It is, according to Du Bois, a recipe for a permanent caste system.

Regarding normative validity, Du Bois maintains that nonviolence is an ideal and that black insurrectionism clearly violates it. However, he is at pains to show that black insurrectionism gets something deeply right: Through assertiveness and insistence on equality and political efficacy, it preserves the dignity – and the manhood – of black America in the face of a dehumanizing culture.³⁸ So it has the right moral vision, but the wrong means. Black accommodationism, on the other hand, rightly avoids violence, but it swings to the other extreme and commends caste in all but name. Moreover, it surrenders the moral dignity – and manhood – of black Americans by endorsing second-class citizenship. Therefore, Washington’s agenda has the wrong moral vision and, though rightly nonviolent, the wrong means nonetheless.

Du Bois’ final tally, then, is configured by a moral asymmetry. Basically, we need John Brown’s courage and moral vision, but a better political strategy; and we must do away with Washington’s normative project altogether.³⁹ This tally of course clears the decks for recommending Douglass’ third way of political self-assertion since it inherits the moral and spiritual legacy of black insurrectionism without advocating violent mayhem or caste submission. It also enables Du Bois to present himself as taking up Douglass’ and, by implication, Brown’s and the rest of the black insurrectionists’ mantle

³⁶ For his discussion of these collective trends, see *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1999), edited by Henry Louis Gates and Terri Hume Oliver, in particular chs.1, 3, 6, and 9.

³⁷ Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Benjamin Quarles, *Allies for Freedom and Blacks on John Brown* (New York and Cambridge: De Capo Press, 2001).

³⁸ For more on the gendered aspect of Du Bois’ meditations, see Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), and Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³⁹ I leave aside here the question of the extent to which Du Bois opposed the more practical aspects of Washington’s project.

for black leadership in the new century beset by the Problem of the Color Line.⁴⁰ A great deal more can be said about Du Bois' aims and arguments here, but I leave it to attend to a fascinating shift in his presentation of these postulated basic collective tendencies.

In chapter 9 of *Souls*, "Of the Faith of the Fathers," Du Bois maintains that black religion clarifies poignantly the insurrectionist and accommodationist tendencies he described in previous chapters. But whereas earlier he invoked merely the memory of the early black insurrectionists to unseat Washington, here he raises through metaphorical work the clear and present specter of anarchism or white insurrectionism.

For fifty years Negro religion thus transformed itself and identified itself with the dream of Abolition, until that which was a *radical fad in the white North* and an *anarchistic plot in the white South* had become a religion to the black world. Thus, when Emancipation finally came, it seemed to the freedman a literal Coming of the Lord. His fervid imagination was stirred as never before, by the tramp of armies, the blood and dust of battle, and the *wail and whirl of social upheaval*. (italics mine)⁴¹

In discussing this dream-turned-religion and the "social upheaval" of the slave order, Du Bois seems to hail Garrison and Douglass through reference to "the radical fad in the white North," and Vesey, Turner, and Brown through reference to "an anarchistic plot in the white South." In doing so, he brings to bear an anarchism-laden hermeneutic to dramatize the basic tendencies of the black collective soul. The energy of the postbellum era, made so volatile by Propaganda of the Deed and labor agitation, is absorbed and harnessed in the language with which he invokes the memory of the antebellum black insurrectionists. And this same energized language is used to connote an anarchistic nature to "the Coming of the Lord" in the Civil War explosion of the slave system.

Later, he plies this linguistic force further by depicting the two basic collective tendencies in the starkest terms possible in a crescendo-like structure. Consider the following remarks by Du Bois that encapsulate and conclude his discussion of religion and black political trends.

Thus we have two great and hardly reconcilable streams of thought and ethical strivings; the danger of the one lies in *anarchy*, that of the other in *hypocrisy*. The one type of Negro stands almost ready to curse God and die, and the other is too often found a traitor to right and a coward before force; the one is wedded to ideals remote, whimsical, perhaps impossible of realization; the other forgets that life is more than meat and the body more than raiment. But, after all, is not this simply the *writhing of the age translated into black*, – the triumph of the Lie which to-day, with its false culture, *faces the hideousness of the anarchist assassin?* (italics mine)⁴²

Here, the anarchy disposition is elaborated through the ideas of blasphemy and impossible dreams, and the hypocrisy disposition through the notions of betrayal, cowardice, and a stultifying pragmatism. And in the surrounding passages, he links to the anarchy disposition, radicalism, revolt, vindictiveness, and a "morbid sense of personality," and under the hypocrisy disposition, he lists pretense, "moral hesitancy,"

⁴⁰ In thinking of these matters, I am indebted to Ronald Sundstrom, "Longing for the End of Race," ms, which explores masterfully the complexities of Douglass' politics.

⁴¹ *Souls of Black Folk*, p.126.

⁴² *Souls of Black Folk*, p.127.

“hypocritical compromise,” and features of the “old Negro.”⁴³ The anarchy and hypocrisy “streams of ethical strivings” reveal for Du Bois the symptoms unique to the black community of a larger spiritual malaise. Or as he puts it, they are the “writhing of the age translated into black.” My discussion of labor agitation in the first section of this essay, then, can be seen as conveying America’s agony “translated into white.” And in one final fantastic contrast, Du Bois draws on the ill repute of recent assassins – perhaps Berkman (1892), surely Czolgoz (1901), and probably still others – and intones resoundingly that the “Lie” and “false culture,” produced by the ascendance of hypocrisy “ethical strivings,” is in danger of falling into the crosshairs of anarchistic destruction, a force that he depicts as hideous.

As I noted earlier, Goldman characterized postbellum anarchist uprisings as continuous with antebellum black insurrection, raising both violent traditions to a special moral limelight. Du Bois, however, clearly wished to morally disconnect black and anarchist insurrectionism because of his despising of the latter. As just discussed, he used the latter to deride the extremes into which he believed one black collective tendency could fall. He could not, however, fully succeed in dividing or bifurcating Goldman’s freedom history. Three concerns or issues complicated Du Bois’ efforts at division, leaving his position on both forms of insurrection ultimately ambivalent. I present these in increasing order of depth.

First, as just seen in his discussion of the two ethical strivings, Du Bois believed that severe Jim Crow repression may impel some blacks not simply to reclaim but actually to replicate the earlier rebellions and thereby complement and mirror current anarchist violence. If this had happened, would Du Bois have placed the contemporary black revolutionists in the same hallowed lineage of Vesey, Turner, and Brown, and accorded them a similarly positive overall evaluation? Would he have said that Douglass’ way is superior but that these modern day Veseys, Turners, and Browns were nevertheless heroic, if misguided, figures? Would they at least have been more praiseworthy than Washington and the accommodationists? In fact, what did Du Bois think of the black anarchist Lucy Parsons, the wife of one of the leaders hanged for the Haymarket incident and a dazzling orator in her own right? So far as I know, and we know too little about her life, she commended but did not carry out Propaganda of the Deed. But what if she had used guns or dynamite for the cause? Beyond denouncing the use of violence and commending the way of Douglass, it is unclear what else precisely Du Bois would have said of Parsons or other postbellum black insurrectionists.⁴⁴ The

⁴³ *Souls of Black Folk*, p.127-128.

⁴⁴ There are actually two kinds of hallowed lineages that concerned Du Bois. One, as discussed, was of black or pro-black male rebels. The other was of black women liberationists. See for example, *Darkwater* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc, 1999), p.96-97. With his emphasis on manhood, Du Bois privileges the former and fails to integrate the two heroic lines. Interestingly, Du Bois most likely had heard of Lucy Parsons since she gained quite some notoriety, but he did not place her in either lineage, though a case could have been made for her inclusion in either of them (an interesting point in itself). Importantly, Du Bois may have faced a special difficulty in assessing Lucy Parsons because she minimized the issue of her black identity. Indeed, it seems unclear whether she put any weight on it at all, directing as she did all her devotion to the destruction of the state and capitalism. She seemed to be an anti-racialist anarchist, not unlike some blacks who were anti-racialist Marxists. She of course denounced anti-black racism and lynchings, but these were for her *nothing but* expressions of the state and capitalism. So if she herself found black identity to be peripheral, distracting, or even illegitimate, then it would be difficult for Du Bois to

ambiguity is rather telling. We know only that his account of the anarchy and hypocrisy strivings indicates he believed the rebellious past was not yet safely in the past and that this was an overall negative condition.

This concern about the recurrence of black insurrection hangs on a negative evaluation of insurrection in the first place. So a second and more important obstacle to Du Bois' efforts at dividing the Goldman freedom history has to do with normative consistency. Since the violence and the disorder Du Bois abhorred in anarchist violence were necessarily features of insurrection, black rebellion, precisely as a kind of insurrection, would seem to invite similar abhorrence. As seen above, however, Du Bois did not maintain parity of devaluation.⁴⁵ On the contrary, he used the anarchist as a trope with which to revile the violence and chaos of insurrection, yet he did not revise downwardly his overall positive estimation of, for example, John Brown. The black insurrectionists, apparently on the strength of their moral convictions and service to black uplift, survived the charge of being anarchistic. But, of course, postbellum black insurrectionists might have had similar convictions and offered similar service. So perhaps Du Bois might have said that they were not *merely* anarchistic because they sought to produce a new moral order on the ashes of the old. But, as I noted in the first section of this essay, any substantive use of the notion of anarchism must acknowledge that a harmonious new world, not chaos or destruction, is central to the ultimate aims of anarchism. So it might rather be said that John Brown was *truly*, not merely, anarchistic, if he were to be depicted along these lines at all. For it was a moral vision of radical equality that fueled his vehement efforts to build anew. But if this is the case, then parity of praise, even if qualified, seems to have been in order. So if, as Du Bois claimed, Douglass' way was exemplary and John Brown was simply the "extreme of its logic," then he might also have said that nonviolent labor agitators were exemplars and the Propagandists of the Deed, or at least the anarcho-syndicalists, were the "extreme of its logic."⁴⁶ He did not, however. Therefore, if we focus strictly on the issue of violence, disorder, and ultimate aims, then parity of evaluation dictates that either John Brown be derogated more strongly or that the anarchists, or at least some of them, be more strongly praised.⁴⁷

It is clear that the asymmetric evaluation did not ride simply on the issue of violence and mayhem. It also turned on the question of whether the economic order is morally bankrupt in the way that the political order of white supremacy is. A gulf divided the unabashedly stateless socialism of the anarchists and the not yet fully socialist view of the early Du Bois. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Du Bois seemed to have a racial reason to be fundamentally opposed to the existing economy and its awesome power to impact life and livelihood in the black community. Consequently, he had a reason internal to his

place her into *black* freedom traditions of either kind. I leave aside here some important connections that might be made between Parsons, Goldman, and Du Bois on feminism, abolitionism, and anarchism.

⁴⁵ I should note that Du Bois is not at all atypical in his conflictedness over John Brown. As Robert F. Williams has pointed out, Thoreau himself, in *Plea for Captain John Brown*, was ultimately sympathetic to Brown's raid.

⁴⁶ *The Souls of Black Folk*, p.39.

⁴⁷ Space does not permit discussion of the Niagara Movement of 1905 and Du Bois' 1909 book on John Brown. Both reveal that the sorts of issues discussed here persisted. Interestingly, Du Bois preferred his 1909 book to be on Frederick Douglass. When this was rejected, he stated his preference for doing it on Nat Turner. And finally after this too was rejected, he and his editor arranged for him to write on John Brown.

own standpoint to be somewhat favorably inclined toward the idea of class insurrectionism, not just race rebellion. This racial but non-socialist reason brings us to the third issue that complicated Du Bois' desire to sever black and anarchist insurrections.

As Du Bois later acknowledged in *Dusk of Dawn*, he possessed a Harvardish class elitism during the decade of *Souls*. And he later also regarded himself to have erred in supposing that the economic order was mostly fine and that blacks simply needed to be allowed freedom to participate in it. His retraction was primarily due to the endorsement of Marxism, but it also stemmed from thoughts concerning how *deeply* race configured the economy. As *Black Reconstruction* (1935) and *Dusk of Dawn* (1940) reveal, he later believed that even if the elimination of capitalism was an ultimate race-neutral goal, a complicated series of race-sensitive measures must be undertaken along the way due to the entrenched racial stratification of nearly every aspect of the social world, including the economy and in particular the proletariat. But long before he developed these views with articulacy, he revealed in *Souls* their seedling, and it ought to have inclined him more favorably toward Goldman-like parity of evaluation regarding black and anarchist rebellions.

Specifically, he noted in *Souls* various features of an overall racialized economy, one in which the "South was convinced of the impossibility of free Negro labor."⁴⁸ The features described by Du Bois include the following: 1) the black labor foundational to the previous slave economy remains uncompensated; 2) during and since reconstruction, the black community has been arguably the most economically impoverished subgroup in America; 3) the legislative system has ensured *de jure* political and, hence, *de facto* economic disfranchisement; 4) the *de facto* political structure has almost completely eliminated black recourse to the means of economic or political transformation; 5) the judicial system, through the racial dynamics of the court of law, was being used as "a means of reenslaving the blacks;"⁴⁹ and 6) the police system, designed originally for slave patrols, was being used to pacify the black populace in the new political economy. In light of these many outrages, Du Bois clearly understood that racism had saturated the political economy with its poison. Recall that Du Bois had brought his characterization of the anarchy and hypocrisy ethical streams to a head in his pronouncement of a "writhing age translated into black." We can see now, then, that there is no way that he could so depict his day without bringing forth the far-reaching brutality of the prevailing economic regime. The situation was surely felt to be desperate, and the debate between Du Bois and Washington regarding the future of black politics, could not have been more momentous.

Consequently, even if Du Bois wanted a generally capitalist economy maintained, he ought to have seen anarchist agitation as unsettling, even if misguidedly, the profoundly anti-black character of an overridingly powerful institution, the economy. Indeed, could an anti-black caste system ever be destroyed without the elimination of an anti-black economy? And so Du Bois might have thought: "Anarchism is overkill, but then again we need strong medicine against this new strain of the old plague." More specifically, he could have envisioned the potentially destabilizing effects of white labor radicalism as directly benefiting blacks qua laborers (e.g. protection of work hours and wage increases) or indirectly helping black activism to expose and attack the roots of the

⁴⁸ *The Souls of Black Folk*, p.113.

⁴⁹ *The Souls of Black Folk*, p.113.

racialized labor hierarchy in the U.S. economy. Certainly, there were no assurances that these downstream effects would transpire. Indeed, white labor radicalism may have secured white advances only. But the case he made for the existence of an anti-black capitalism affecting the black community in such a totalizing manner might have inclined him to say, even if guardedly, that Douglas was the exemplar and that Emma Goldman or Lucy Parsons or the IWW was the “extreme of the logic.” Thus, here as before, Du Bois’ attempt to divide antebellum black insurrection from postbellum anarchism gets mired in some difficult, which is not to say inescapable, conflicts within his system of thought.

In concluding this section, we might note that Du Bois actually had a bit of familiarity with formal anarchist thought. We know from Du Bois’ posthumous autobiography that he had read the work of the anarchist Michael Bakunin and other early critics of classic Marxism during his graduate years. He claimed, however, that nothing in his extensive education offered him a serious opportunity to understand the work of Marx in the first place and, hence, that he read critics of Marx, like Bakunin, without the basis to understand their contexts and criticisms.⁵⁰ But, in the foregoing, we can see that whatever might have been Du Bois’ formal academic replies to Bakunin, the far more interesting situation developed in which the press of current events forced Du Bois to engage with anarchism as a movement and to place some of his thoughts on the matter in his masterpiece, *The Souls of Black Folk*. As I have discussed, Du Bois conveyed a negative judgment against anarchism and used the anarchist as a condemnatory trope in examining black unrest. Importantly, however, this use of the trope was but the visible peak of a mostly submerged set of deep normative conflicts, half- or fully formed, that were central to his early political outlook. By pulling on the stalk of black insurrectionism, we end up exhuming a whole tangle or knot of roots, some number of which concern anarchism and the systemic character of economic injustice. Therefore, much of Du Bois’ engagement with anarchist ideas of the day actually lay hidden beneath his explicit pronouncements. And quite apart from the public vibrancy of anarchism and its uptake in prominent black and white leaders, the internal structure of black insurrectionism reveals various ways in which race rebellion might be normatively joined with anarchism and the postbellum escalation in class radicalism. As I will discuss in the next section, Du Bois’ broadly Marxist unification of white supremacy and what he called “industrial imperialism” moved him a few steps toward parity in the evaluation of American radicalisms, but this movement was launched in part by his sustained post-*Souls* consideration of insurrectionism and the theme of anarchy. Although he did not at these later points praise anarchist insurrectionists as he had black insurrectionists, he did use the idea of anarchy in an interestingly positive way. Specifically, he focused on the creative rather than destructive aspect of anarchy. In this next and final section, I offer some preliminary thoughts on a few of the ways in which Du Bois carried forward the theme of anarchy.

Song of Emancipation Heard Round the World

It is remarkable that after the publication of *Souls*, Du Bois had 60 more years in which to develop an already fruitful career and to move in many new directions. I cannot do justice

⁵⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1968) p.168.

to the complex ways in which the ideas discussed above altered across these 6 decades. But I wish here to make a *start* on how Du Bois transformed his notion of anarchy after *Souls*. In what follows, I consider quickly two developments: his revaluation of modern order as a kind of imperial anarchy, and subsequently his positive inversion of the anarchy trope in portraying an expansive *anti*-imperialism. I conclude with some general observations on Du Bois' world perspective in the aftermath of WWII and the dawning of Afro-Asian decolonization.

Du Bois maintained the popular belief that modernity was at least *in principle* a promising development in human civilization. Although the details of his position were modified repeatedly, the general idea held sway across most of his life. Only his early perspective concerns us here. From the late 19th through at least the first decade of the 20th century, Du Bois believed the promise of modernity was configured by a dual aspect: a host of modernization advances (e.g. technology, accessible education, efficient government, and crime reduction) for the social group qua society, and cultural enrichment (e.g. music, literature, and modes of living) for the social group qua national or racial community. He complicated this basic idea of societal and cultural aspects of modernity in at least two distinctive ways. First, in terms of the cultural aspect, he divided modernity into a European and an American variant. America was deemed to have followed Europe in the appropriate development of various modernization processes, but to have failed in generating its own distinctive art and cultural forms and to have merely mimicked European creations.⁵¹ Second, he believed America to be deeply racist in sharp contrast to Europe, and that the resulting social and political immaturity or backwardness diminished America's claim to at least a robust societal modernity.⁵² So, on both counts and overall, Du Bois believed that American modernity lagged behind its European cousin.

Clearly, the foregoing is a highly abbreviated account. However it might be elaborated and whatever problems there may be with this grand schema of race, nation, and modernity, I want here only to examine a deep general conviction that underlies the early Du Bois' position, namely that modernity, *as it has in fact developed*, is in its basic design a legitimate ordering of values, peoples, and places. As noted, the early Du Bois believed white American modernity to be so profoundly impacted by white supremacy (and deficient in unique cultural forms) that its immaturity had been prolonged or that it was otherwise deviant in comparison to European modernity. But, in the years that followed *Souls*, Du Bois increasingly regarded Europe to be more like America in its race problems than he had previously suspected. And as I shall elaborate, the idea of anarchy played an interesting role in this transition of thought. But it is useful here first to consider this trajectory in the light of Du Bois' retrospective reflections in *Dusk of Dawn* (1940). There, he offered some remarks that provide a helpful overarching perspective, and they all have to do with one or another aspect of the idea of modernity as a kind of order.

⁵¹ Upon this basis, Du Bois is able to mount his claim that blacks have contributed uniquely to American culture.

⁵² Du Bois sometimes followed up this idea with the claim that in spite of the crushing system of white supremacy, blacks presented America with some of its most compelling models or paragons of the democratic spirit or love of liberty so central to its professed creed.

He confesses, for example, that in his early days he was largely ignorant of, and unable to see a deep unity among, such world-configuring events as the founding of the Industrial Revolution on slavery and colonialism, the post-1885 European partitioning of Africa, and the sort of intra-European rivalries conducive to large-scale wars. And he describes his ignorance with some anti-European and anti-American sarcasm: “I was blithely European and imperialist in outlook; democratic as democracy was conceived in America.”⁵³ Du Bois also maintains that when he later learned of these events and their political unity, he still did not understand the foundational role of economic structures until some time later.⁵⁴ In this retrospective gaze, Du Bois depicts himself as slowly evolving in his thinking but still largely conforming to common trends of the day.

But, of course, this is not the full story. As he notes elsewhere in *Dusk of Dawn*, his race analytic was a progressive and epistemically potent force in his theoretical framework.⁵⁵ The race analytic not only helped him focus on the centrality of white supremacy as a structure in its own right in the U.S. and abroad, but also encouraged him to transform his earlier naïve economic thought. Specifically, it helped to expose the dominative nature of modern capitalism, both in itself and in its racially-configured organizing principles. Many, of course, will recognize this trajectory in Du Bois’ political development. But it may be helpful to emphasize that Du Bois’ partially race-based entry into a more sophisticated and Marxist economic critique was roughly concurrent with a significant deepening of his internationalism. As he became critical of modern capitalism and linked it to white supremacy, he also recognized with greater clarity that the unity of problems of race and class had a *world* scale. He came to see that modernity, both European and American, was constituted by an imperialist *order* and specifically a global white industrial imperium. This is a considerable deepening of his prophecy of the global color line, which in its first utterance was actually open to the prospects of European colonialism “done right.” In fact, Du Bois explicitly reads the period of *Souls* and his activities therein as local expressions of the interplay of forces that generated the white imperium. What he calls in *Souls* the “writhing of the age translated into black” is conceived as the collective struggle of black communities in the era of Empire. Here, for example, are his own words on his outlook then and, through reference to Washington and Trotter, his concern about black submissive and anarchistic “ethical strivings.”

My thoughts, the thoughts of Washington, Trotter and others, were the expression of social forces more than of our own minds. These forces or ideologies embraced more than our reasoned acts. They included physical, biological and psychological forces; habits, conventions and enactments. ... The total result was the history of our day. That history may be epitomized in one word – Empire; the domination of white Europe over black Africa and yellow Asia, through political power built on the economic control of labor, income and ideas. The echo of this industrial imperialism in America was the expulsion of black men from American democracy, their subjection to caste control and wage slavery. This ideology was triumphant in 1910.⁵⁶

We might gather these thoughts together in the following way. Throughout the decade of *Souls*, Du Bois faced the conditions and events everywhere about him with an

⁵³ *Dusk of Dawn*, p.39.

⁵⁴ *Dusk of Dawn*, p.47-49.

⁵⁵ *Dusk of Dawn*, p.51-55.

⁵⁶ *Dusk of Dawn*, p.96.

interpretive gestalt: modern order as modernizing uplift v. modern order as domination. In *Souls*, he found the modern order to be basically just and to be mostly or at least potentially conducive to bringing civilizational uplift to all regions of the world. So he sought primarily to establish political (Douglas-inspired) and cultural paths of entry into it for African Americans. At the same time, however, Du Bois' deep ambivalence about political insurrection, especially his emerging thoughts on the anti-black economy, indicate that the seeds of perspectival conflictedness or gestalt vacillation were embedded in his mind as early as the writing of *Souls*. But, by the time of *Dusk of Dawn*, and even well before it, Du Bois no longer regarded the modern order to be just in its basic design. With little hesitation, he viewed so-called civilizational uplift to be a part of a vast exploitation structure.

There was, moreover, an existential element to Du Bois' s perspectival shift. As we know, the common yearning for a rational, ordered, morally optimistic universe can be simply profound. And though by acts of imagination we can take up the domination perspective of the modernity gestalt, the effects upon many can be tremendously disorienting or unnerving. Such painful imaginings may actually end up consolidating the tendency toward the positive modernization perspective of the gestalt. In keeping with these considerations, we find both world and more local political theodicies everywhere, so many of which actually explain away, rather than account for, evils in the polity or the moral universe generally. It seems clear that the early Du Bois was very much in the grips of this most human temptation to explain away evident evil, and quite possibly this struggle in some form remained throughout his life. But, at some point between *Souls* (1903) and *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), he acquired both the psychological and normative wherewithal to effect a gestalt switch and deny that economic disparities and racial conflicts were merely the "growing pains" or aberrations of a world order whose (Rawlsian) Basic Structure was just. As I have been telling the story, *Souls* revealed a deep ambivalence in Du Bois' thinking about a widened or complete freedom or Abolition. We can now see, therefore, that by the time of *Dusk of Dawn*, the conceptual tension of *Souls* was finally resolved to a large extent, and this against the modern order of his day.

Du Bois' increasingly hard turn toward some variant of Marxism, as in his book *Black Reconstruction* (1935), is well-known, and this turn greatly facilitated the deep perspectival shift just described. But well before *Black Reconstruction*, we can find clear expressions of his modernity-as-domination viewpoint. And they emerged not out of Marxist reflections in any forthright or consolidated sense, but from sustained and deepened consideration of black insurrectionism. Consider, for example, that just a few years after *Souls* – specifically in 1905 during the build up of the Niagara Movement that led to the formation of the NAACP – Du Bois again summoned the spirit of John Brown and did so with admiration.⁵⁷ In fact, John Brown became a focal point of holy rededication to black political uplift and of a new phase of radicalism in Du Bois' life. And though Du Bois became increasingly more militant and less patient in his anti-racism, he persisted in denouncing violent methods generally and those specially linked

⁵⁷ Space does not permit discussion of the role played by Monroe Trotter in Du Bois' newfound militancy, but see his own account of it in "William Monroe Trotter," in David Levering Lewis, ed., *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1995), p.135-137.

to but not destructive of John Brown's greatness. Here are his reflections on a ceremony in which he participated at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, the site of John Brown's Raid.

We do not believe in violence, neither in the despised violence of the raid, nor the lauded violence of the soldier, nor the barbarous violence of the mob, but we do believe in John Brown, in that incarnate spirit of justice, that hatred of a lie, that willingness to sacrifice money, reputation, and life itself on the altar of right. And here on the scene of John Brown's martyrdom we reconsecrate ourselves, our honor, our property to the final emancipation of the race which John Brown died to make free.⁵⁸

As one might have guessed, Du Bois' interest in John Brown had some staying power. Shortly before the visit to Harper's Ferry, Du Bois was offered a contract to write a biography on a notable figure. He wanted to select Frederick Douglass, but as it turned out, Booker T. Washington had secured the commission to write Douglass' biography. Little known to most, Du Bois then decided to write on Nat Turner and his rebellion. But here too Du Bois was foiled. The series editor thought the project unfeasible. So they worked out an arrangement for Du Bois to write on John Brown, and the biography was published in 1909.⁵⁹ Du Bois clearly has much to say in it. But consider just a few of the claims in the concluding remarks of the book.

The color line will mean not simply a return to the absurdities of class as exhibited in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but even to the caste of ancient days. This, however, the Japanese, the Chinese, the East Indians and the Negroes are going to resent in just such proportion as they gain the power; and they are gaining the power, and they cannot be kept from gaining more power. The price of repression will then be hypocrisy and slavery and blood.

This is the situation to-day. Has John Brown no message – no legacy, then, to the twentieth century? He has and it is this great word: the cost of liberty is less than the price of repression. The price of repressing the world's darker races is shown in a moral retrogression and an economic waste unparalleled since the age of the African slave-trade. . . . Not only is the cost of repression to-day large – it is a continually increasing cost: the procuring of coolie labor, the ruling of India, the exploitation of Africa, the problem of the unemployed, and the curbing of the corporations, are a tremendous drain on modern society with no near end in sight. The cost is not merely in wealth but in social progress and spiritual strength, and it tends ever to explosion, murder, and war. All these things but increase the difficulty of beginning a regime of freedom in human growth and development – they raise the cost of liberty.⁶⁰

We encounter here Du Bois' unequivocal denunciation of global white supremacy and some defiant claims on behalf of colored or Third World resistance. It predates *Dusk of Dawn* by 31 years, and it reveals a clarity and solidity of radicalism less manifest in *Souls*.⁶¹ Some salient elements are worth emphasizing here. First, Du Bois' anti-racism, now linked to an explicit anti-imperialism, has become notably more expansive. We find in this passage and elsewhere repeated references to blacks, East Indians, Chinese, and

⁵⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Niagara Movement: Address to the Country," in Gates and Oliver, eds., *Souls of Black Folk*, p.185-6.

⁵⁹ For this publishing history and its travails, see David Roediger's introduction to W.E.B. Du Bois, *John Brown* (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

⁶⁰ *John Brown*, p.228-231.

⁶¹ I leave aside Du Bois's remark that "the curbing of the corporations" is on a par with imperialism in putting a "tremendous drain on modern society." He later, of course, came to see that the *failure* to curb corporations is on a par with more explicit imperialist incursions.

Japanese in a single cluster. Du Bois' normative geography has expanded dramatically to add Afro-Asia in a contrastive mapping relation to Europe, Euro-America, or the white world. As we know in hindsight, such clustered references anticipated Afro-Asian decolonization and even explicitly Afro-Asian alliances (e.g. the Bandung Conference) by some 40-50 years. Second, it is significant to note not simply the book's focus on an insurrectionist figure, but also the language – the tone, timbre, and connotative network – with which Du Bois ascribed escalating defiance to the colored world. Specifically, it has a structure that distinctly resembles what Du Bois used in *Souls* to characterize black anarchistic “ethical strivings.” Now, Du Bois does not, here, idealize Afro-Asian violence against the white imperium. Quite the opposite, he denounces violence, as seen in his remarks at Harper's Ferry. He does, however, issue a stern warning to the white world, and he is absolutely unapologetic about his militant language. He contends that if the present course of the modern order does not change dramatically, an anti-imperial or Dark World insurrection will, as a simply descriptive matter, transpire. Moreover, he implies that the collective threshold for tolerating subjection and, hence, insurrection is quickly being approached. So if we combine these two points – i.e. the expanded anti-racism and the anarchistic connotations – then the book *John Brown* was, among other things, the occasion for noting a global colored anarchistic collective tendency on the model of black anarchistic tendencies discussed in *Souls*. As seen previously, the specter of white anarchy haunted Du Bois as he reflected upon the prospects of black rebellion in *Souls*. Now, we see the specter of colored or Afro-Asian anarchy hovering over ruminations about the lessons of black insurrectionism, specifically the life and death of John Brown, for the era of Empire. But Du Bois was also sometimes more direct in his post-*Souls* engagement with the theme of anarchy.

Two years after the publication of *John Brown*, Du Bois revisited the location at which he first uttered the prophecy of the color line – London, England. He was a participant in the 1911 Universal Races Congress, at which issues of race, imperialism, and international concord were the central focus. Interestingly, Du Bois not only presented a paper on the situation of black America, but was also permitted to address the assembly with a poem, which would later be incorporated as a stanza in a longer poem that concludes his militant text *Darkwater* (1920). Here are the verses delivered to that audience.

We know the Anarchy of Empire, and doleful Death of Life!
And hearing, seeing, knowing all, we cry:
Save us, World-Spirit, from our lesser selves!
Grant us that war and hatred cease,
Reveal our souls in every race and hue!
Help us, O Human God, in this Thy Truce,
To make Humanity divine!⁶²

In the previous two sections of this essay, I laid out a case that the early Du Bois was unexceptional in his inability to avoid consideration of anarchism and that his thoughts on anarchism were mingled in complex ways with his ambivalent take on black insurrectionism and racial capitalism. As I have suggested in this third section, the post-*Souls* Du Bois shifted profoundly in his overall perspective on the modern order,

⁶² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (New York: Viking Press, 1946), p.3-4.

specifically in a direction that was partially more accommodating to anarchist critique. This third section also indicates that considerations of black insurrectionism bridged the span between *Souls* and, say, his Marxist text, *Black Reconstruction* (1935). I think it is no accident that Du Bois continued to reflect upon insurrectionism given the unresolved normative tensions in *Souls* and the deepening entrenchment of Jim Crow. It is also no coincidence, and surely for the same reasons, that Du Bois moved beyond simply reflecting upon insurrectionism and began actually to lean toward (without embracing) what he had earlier condemned as black anarchistic “ethical strivings”. Interestingly, as seen in the poem above, Du Bois actually continued to use anarchy as an explicit evaluative trope. In *Souls*, it was used to castigate some extremes of black unrest. However, in 1911 and again in *Darkwater* (1920), he used it to condemn not the excesses of the oppressed or colonized of the world, but the oppressive phenomenon itself, Empire. And this reversal of the earlier use of the trope is accompanied in the same line by the unmasking of so-called civilizational Life as really a form of death. Clearly, then, Du Bois traversed quite some distance from affirming modernity and rejecting black anarchistic unrest to condemning the modern order as imperial anarchy and siding partially with Afro-Asian anarchistic “ethical strivings.”

Significantly, Du Bois’ engagement with the idea of anarchy did not end there. Space does not permit adequate discussion of at least two further developments, one concerning a romance novel and the other a romanticist psychological concept. But brief mention of each seems in order since they reveal a transformation in Du Bois’ conception of anarchy. After *Souls*, as seen just above, Du Bois used the old trope of anarchy but switched its target from the oppressed to the oppressor. From the 1920s through the end of WWII, he inverted the trope itself by using the expression, “anarchy,” to denote a positive, creative, and promising condition.

During the Harlem Renaissance and the opening decade of the Third Communist International, Du Bois actually wrote an entire novel, *Dark Princess* (1928), focused on the motif of what he called “Divine Anarchy.” In terms of literary structure, the novel is centrally configured by the romance of a black man and an Asian woman, their anti-imperialist and proletarian struggles, and finally the coronation of their Afro-Asian messianic child. In terms of conceptual structure, it presents a kind of black Marxism-Gandhism with a touch of anarchism. Immediately, one can sense that this is a highly unusual work. And as one might have guessed, many commentators have found it peculiar or incoherent. It is indeed an unusual text, but I think it is neither anomalous nor incoherent with respect to Du Bois’ evolving political stance. A wide array of considerations can be brought forward to confirm my claim, but let me offer here simply a few remarks in relation to the theme of anarchy.⁶³

Earlier, we examined the contrast between the hypocrisy and anarchistic “ethical strivings” in *Souls* and then again in *John Brown* (and *Darkwater*). This contrast of strivings returns in *Dark Princess* and forms a dialectical organizing principle in the character development of the black protagonist and the development of the romance as well. The black protagonist struggles with both of these ethical strivings throughout the novel, at one point attempting to blow up a train filled with KKK members and, at another point, serving as a cog in a corrupt political machine. His lover, an Indian

⁶³ I offer a sustained account of this novel in “The Meaning of her Majesty’s Madness: Afro-Asian Anarchy and W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Dark Princess*,” ms.

princess turned union organizer, instantiates a middle road between the two extremes. Hers is the way of non-violent, courageous, humanity-loving political self-assertion. She reflects, in the mind of Du Bois, a Gandhian extension of the way of Douglas. And the love they share and the child they produce offer an unusually intimate symbol of enlarged anti-imperialist, specifically Afro-Asian, solidarity and struggle. In addition, their romantic relationship – as a loving, interracial boundary-crossing, and erotically delirious coalescence – offers a prism through which to sense, even if inchoately, Du Bois’ vision of utopia. And that day of final freedom is envisioned by Du Bois as a world in which all coercive forms, all ordered inequalities, are permanently eliminated and the human spirit is fully liberated, an overall condition he calls “Divine Anarchy.” We see in this novel, then, not merely a continuation of earlier themes, but some unusual alterations of them and, in any case, a considerable commitment of creative energy and effort on the part of Du Bois. The paradigm of anarchy is no longer an assassin or a violent revolt; the theme of anarchy is no longer a critical prod or whip, whatever its target; and the context is no longer postbellum threats of insurrection. In *Dark Princess* and beyond, the paradigm of anarchy is romance and beauty; the theme of anarchy is an affirmative device and a conceptual window onto an imagined utopia; and the context is global, especially Afro-Asian, anti-imperialism.

In addition to this work in *Dark Princess*, Du Bois wrote repeatedly, if elliptically about what he called “anarchy of spirit.” This romanticist psychological concept appears in various guises in *Dark Princess* in the liberating phenomenology of the experience of beauty, love, and shared struggle. And, elsewhere, Du Bois attributes various aspects to spiritual anarchy. It is “the goal of all consciousness.”⁶⁴ It is characterized by freedom to be oneself without interference,⁶⁵ but also the freedom to exercise the “Will to Human Brotherhood of all Colors, Races, and Creeds” accompanied by the “Wanting of the Wants of All.”⁶⁶ In addition, there is no finality to liberation without it because it “alone is true Freedom.”⁶⁷ And though Du Bois does not elaborate discursively upon this condition in any real detail, and mostly offers exemplifications of it in *Dark Princess*, he does take some moments to clarify its politically embedded nature and, hence, rejects the idea that it is a purely internal condition. In *Dusk of Dawn*, for example, he notes that the Spirit cannot be wrested free from connections to what he calls an “environing group,” like the white world and its practices and ideologies. And so there can be no spiritual freedom or anarchy without political freedom or anarchy.⁶⁸ Here is one passage in which the politics of the anarchic spirit emerges.

⁶⁴ *Dusk of Dawn*, p.134.

⁶⁵ *Dusk of Dawn*, p.134.

⁶⁶ *Darkwater*, p.92.

⁶⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Future of Europe in Africa,” (1942) in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887-1961* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), p.198.

⁶⁸ Space does not permit a fuller discussion of Du Bois’ romanticist political psychology. But note that in *Dusk of Dawn*, it intersects interestingly with Du Bois’ thoughts on liberalism, Marxism, revolution, and even with a subtle critique of his friend Joel Spingarn, whom he calls a “natural anarchist of the spirit”. One of the few texts to actually address the trope of anarchy in Du Bois’ work is Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). My account differs fairly significantly.

For long years it seemed to me that this *imprisonment* of a human group with *chains* in hands of an enviroing group, was a singularly unusual characteristic of the Negro in the United States in the nineteenth century. But since then it has been easy for me to realize that the majority of mankind has struggled through this *inner spiritual slavery* and that while a dream which we have easily and jauntily called democracy envisages a day when the enviroing group *looses the chains and compulsion*, and is willing and even eager to grant families, nations, sub-races, and races equality of opportunity among larger groups, that even this *grand equality* had not come; and until it does, individual equality and the *free soul* is impossible.(italics mine)⁶⁹

After the onset of WWII, Du Bois continues to speak of the anarchic spirit and its political context. The following, for example, is a portion of a speech he delivered in the midst of global upheaval, and it offers more concrete reference points for understanding the critical theoretical nature of Du Bois' romanticist political psychology.

As I look upon the world in revolution today, I can well believe that the Democracy which will crown the twentieth century will, in contrast to the nineteenth, involve the social control of the masses of men over the methods of producing goods and of distributing wealth and services. And the freedom which this abolition of poverty will involve, will be freedom of thought and not freedom for private profit-making. For this reason, the colonial and quasi-colonial peoples will be more ready to achieve and accept this Democracy of industry, than the misled people of Europe whose conception of democracy has been industrial anarchy with the spirit of man in chains. Anarchy of the Spirit alone is the true Freedom.⁷⁰

Here, we get both the old and the new trope of anarchy in the very same sentence. Du Bois criticizes the European order and its claims to democracy as being in actuality a kind of "industrial anarchy." At the same time and in the same breath, he continues to uphold the positive import of "Anarchy of the Spirit." It is rather striking that Du Bois insists in this passage that a socialist economy, as part of a thoroughgoing democratization of the modern order, is foundational to spiritual anarchy or "true Freedom." Of course, his overall position as he approached mid-century was adamantly socialist and decidedly Marxist. Still, expressions like, "Spirit" and "Anarchy of Spirit," would seem to lend themselves to narrowly or purely psychologistic discussions. So Du Bois' insistence on a democratically conceived elimination of capitalism powerfully frames or clarifies the radical nature of his reflections on human psychology.

These considerations suggest the following question: why not simply say that Du Bois was more purely a black Marxist in his political psychology and that his use of such expressions as "anarchy" and its cognates were merely stylistic ornaments? One might argue here that, yes, Du Bois was a socialist, was committed to multi-front liberation, and discussed in interesting ways the theme of anarchy, but that none of this confirms that he was an anarchist. My response is easy: I agree that he was not an anarchist in any classic sense and perhaps not even in any stretched sense; however, his discussions of anarchy were certainly no mere ornaments or aberrations.

As discussed in the first section of this essay, anarchism is committed to 1) a sociological conception of the coerciveness of the state and of industry, 2) a normative communal concept of the self, and 3) a praxis imperative. Du Bois clearly held the latter two theses. And his socialism committed him to the latter half of the first thesis. But he

⁶⁹ *Dusk of Dawn*, p.137.

⁷⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Future of Europe in Africa," (1942) in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Against Racism*, p.198.

did not seem to oppose statehood itself, only states that were racist, sexist, capitalist, or imperialist. And since opposition to the state is a critical feature of anarchism, one should stop short of the claim that Du Bois was an anarchist.⁷¹ But this acknowledgement hardly ends the discussion, for one need not endorse all fundamental aspects of a position in order to be inspired by and borrow from it. And I think this is precisely the way we should understand Du Bois.⁷² Besides his endorsing *most* of the *fundamental* components of anarchism, he persisted in his use of the anarchy trope for much of his career; his thoughts on anarchism were mingled with very deep issues in his political outlook, like insurrection and modernity; and he placed a decidedly positive and emancipatory spin on the idea of anarchy as he became increasingly more comfortable with his post-*Souls* radicalism.

Perhaps one way of tying together many of these points is to juxtapose Du Bois' mournful and haunting reflections in *Souls* with his more mature and defiant remarks in *Color and Democracy* (1945). In *Souls*, he famously states that,

Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope – a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins. Is such a hope justified? Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?⁷³

At the conclusion of WWII, with world-scale Reconstruction at hand, Du Bois raises the specter of anarchy once again. Through what should now be familiar anarchistic language, he presents a vision of what we might call World Exodus. Here is the conclusion of his anti-imperialist text *Color and Democracy*.

Let imperialism perish – British, German, Japanese, Italian, Spanish – with that of ancient Rome, empire with its aristocratic tinsel and greed, cruel conquest, slavery of souls, and slave trade in human rights. ...

There has been surfeit of creed, dogma, and priestly assumption to bridle the intelligence of men; there has been enough of the aimless arrogance of science used to heal and kill, destroy and build. The day has dawned when above a wounded, tired earth unselfish sacrifice, without sin and hell, may join thorough technique, shorn of ruthless greed, and make a new religion, one with new knowledge, to shout from old hills of heaven:
Go down, Moses!

⁷¹ Of course, one could argue that just as Du Bois was a black Marxist, and not a pure Marxist, he may have been an analogous kind of black anarchist. For example, he may have held opposition to statehood conditionally in the way that many black Marxists endorsed the primacy of class solidarity conditionally. That is to say, just as black Marxists have claimed that anti-racism in the proletariat would obviate the need for race-based solidarity and make class solidarity indisputably primary, so too a black anarchist might contend that anti-racism in the proletariat would obviate the strategy of compromising with the state to incrementally remedy white supremacy. Whatever the merits of this view, it is as a stronger thesis compatible with the weaker one I have sought to establish throughout this essay, namely that anarchism was (simply) a source of deep and lasting moral exploration for Du Bois.

⁷² Du Bois was no exception in being influenced by anarchism. William James, for example, even publicly claimed to be an anarchist of a moderate kind. See the excellent essay on this topic by Deborah J. Coon, “‘One Moment in the World’s Salvation’: Anarchism and the Radicalization of William James,” in *The Journal of American History*, vol.83, no.1 (June 1996), p.70-99.

⁷³ *The Souls of Black Folk*, p.162.

[Four bars of music]⁷⁴

As we have seen throughout this essay, the journey from *Souls* reveals that Du Bois' ambivalence about anarchism, violence, and upheaval lasted across a large stretch of his political trajectory. As we see here, it also reveals a dramatic movement: The hope of the Sorrow Songs is transformed in its tone and timbre to the defiance and sense of boundlessness of the Song of Emancipation.

Let me note in conclusion that moral convictions tend to get the limelight in attempts to understand an iconic defender of justice, like W.E.B. Du Bois. I think, though, that moral explorations and flirtations are no less important for the full story. This is because creativity is as important as integrity in the effort to dismantle large systems of injustice. The centenary of the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* offers an appropriate occasion in which to reconsider its author's enduring vision of racial justice and some of the exploratory projects that infused that vision with vitality.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1945), p.142-143.

⁷⁵ My thanks to the audience and especially the philosophy department at Hamline University for comments on a presentation of an early version of this essay. And thanks goes as well to Darrell Moore for the extra push in exploring Du Bois' thoughts on anarchy, to Jeffrey Paris for many conversations on the nature of anarchism, and to Ronald Sundstrom for many discussions on Du Bois and the black political tradition.