

Double-Consciousness: The Du Boisian Hermeneutic

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Abstract: *W. E. B. Du Bois was among the first scholars to understand the role that double-consciousness plays in the formation of a hermeneutical process interpreting and shaping worldviews among people of color. When interpreting biblical texts, Du Boisian interpreters, informed by double-consciousness, understand the tensions between how the text looks through the eyes of the dominant community (whether in biblical times or today) and how it looks through the eyes of the community that has been marginalized by the dominant group. Double-consciousness, or “listening against our hearing,” when mobilized in biblical interpretation by persons of color or those interpreting from positions of social dominance, can help the interpreter to read texts as instruments of liberation and in ways that have the potential to re-humanize biblical interpretation. Several elements of a Du Boisian hermeneutic are identified: double voice, psychospiritual awareness, dialectical tension, and extended metaphor.*

The twentieth century began with the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), written by an unnoticed intellectual, W. E. B. Du Bois. For more than a century now, this publication has shaped public racial conversation and debate in social, political and religious spheres. Du Bois declared that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men...”¹ This excerpt indicates that Du Bois was informed by a pan-Africanist’s worldview and that he understood the role that racial classifications play in Western racial, economic and political constructs.

These racially influenced constructs are embedded within and reinforced by Eurocentric aesthetics, interpretations and assumptions that claim *de facto* superiority over all other cultural norms. For most American whites these constructs gain hegemonic status; that is, they remain nearly invisible and unnoticed. For most whites, it has been always this way, and they are not aware of how the unholy trinity of racism, economic privilege, and political control gives to them social advantages that citizens otherwise do not enjoy or socially qualify to receive.

Du Bois crafts *Souls* as a thoughtful response to these and other social arrangements that have bruised whites, blacks and other persons of color, not only in America but globally. Du Bois knew this and used *Souls* to challenge people of the dominate classes to *listen against their hearing*. For Du Bois this was perhaps the only way for people conditioned by Eurocentric claims to understand the pain and suffering that are associated with the socially privileged exclusion of others.

Du Bois was a non-ecclesial prophetic seer. He was among the first to articulate the idea that an inappropriately shaped relationship between race, economics, and politics (this may be reconsidered today to include class alongside race, economics, and politics) emerged in Western thought that affords unfair advantages for a disproportionate number of citizens, namely people of European descent. Du Bois believed socioeconomic and sociopolitical advantages were unchristian and unethical when contrasted with the American ideal that informs democracy.

As a response, Du Bois sought ways to dismantle these constructs. Du Bois attempted to give socio-marginalized citizens a voice by lifting the veil that cloaked white privilege and

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of the Dawn of Freedom,” *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1907), 10.

advantage. Those like Du Bois, who perceive that these constructs are unethical and that they have perpetuated a biased social, political, and economic hegemony may choose to communicate in ways similar to Du Bois. For these reasons and others that will be discussed in this essay, these men and women form part of the Du Boisian prophetic tradition, or what might be called Du Boisian rhetor-preachers: those who employ rhetoric attached to the biblical tradition to persuade and inform their audiences about the effects of these constructs through moral suasion.

At the heart of this Du Boisian prophetic hermeneutic is the way he framed the twentieth century's problem as the color-line, which arguably remains the central problem facing people of the twenty-first century. The color-line's stubbornness spills into our battle over biblical interpretation, creating two worlds: the white world informed by Eurocentric aesthetics, interpretation and its assumptions, and a world of color that is informed primarily by traditions and beliefs from African soils and other global regions inhabited by peoples of color. In other words, biblical interpretation is divided at the color-line. It is embroiled in cultural politics that reflect hegemonies, worldviews, conventions and biases. This sometimes yields interpretations that are culturally limited and serve to reinforce the social power of the dominant culture, but offer no universal vision. The challenge that faces us as preachers and scholars is to forge ahead and *bridge* the interpretation divide.

In order to do this, we can learn from Du Bois a hermeneutic of double consciousness. This Du Boisian hermeneutic is a unique way of interpreting biblical texts through the lens of those who are humanly marginalized. The Du Boisian interpreter, informed by double consciousness, understands how the text looks through the eyes of the Eurocentric majority interpreter *and* how it looks through the eyes of the community that has been marginalized and dominated by the majority group. Double consciousness empowers the Du Boisian interpreter to read a text in such a way as to make it an instrument of liberation rather than a rationale for oppression – an instrument for the humanization of all peoples.

Reconsidering W. E. B. Du Bois and Hermeneutics

In *Souls*, Du Bois begins each of his essays with well-known and well-worn Western, Eurocentric, canonical epithets. Just beneath those familiar epithets are obscure musical bar graphs without lyrics. The inclusion of the bar graphs adds mystery to Du Bois' writings. Du Bois engages in deliberate manipulation of his readers' curiosity. Du Bois knows, as do many of his readers, that the musical bar graphs come from beyond Eurocentric cultural aesthetics. In the last essay of the book, Du Bois solves the riddle of the musical bar graphs, disclosing to his readers an African American aesthetic that was emerging to form a rhetorical and literary tradition. The musical bar graphs represented spirituals or "Sorrow Songs," part of the emerging African American cultural canon. These *Songs* are not merely songs; they are historical and social interpretations that chronicle the African American journey and the search for justice among all people. The *Songs* represent a cultural heritage equal to the Eurocentric cultural tradition.

In adroit fashion, Du Bois reveals to his audience that he is literate in Eurocentric and African American aesthetics, and intellectual canons. Du Bois considers himself as culturally biformal. That is, Du Bois can interpret language, texts and people in multiples. By including Eurocentric epithets and placing Africentric epithets alongside, Du Bois demonstrates that he has appreciation for Eurocentric cultural aesthetics, interpretations and assumptions. He also wants to expose his audiences to the cultural aesthetic, interpretations, and assumptions of

people of color. The most important thing to observe, however, is that Du Bois possesses a bifocal cultural lens. His bifocal lens represents a new kind of human genius that originates from the socio-margins—the cultural seedbed for double consciousness.

It is unusual to identify Du Boisian scholarship as religious in nature. At the same time, it is unconventional to claim that Du Bois' public career parallels the Hebrew prophetic tradition. Recent scholarship has reconsidered the religious nature of Du Bois' work. Jonathon S. Kahn notices in Du Bois' writings that "he constructively relies on religious images and notions as levers for fashioning political sensibilities, deploying 'divinity' – religious language, ideas, and form – to give expression to his discontent."² Kahn argues that Du Bois does this, in part, because he knows that rhetorically, religious language is mysterious and inherently aesthetic. It is a categorical language that defines and accepts otherwise unclear perceptions of reality. According to Kahn, for Du Bois, "Religion serves as an agitating agent; it enables him to image ideals." Kahn goes on to assert that these ideals "are dialectically grounded in unflinching acknowledgement of limitations and infirmities." Kahn suggests that Du Bois reflects a "divine discontent" with traditions or dominant culture.³ Perhaps unintended, Kahn describes Du Bois in a way that is commensurate with the Hebrew prophetic consciousness. The Hebrew prophets spoke against imperial powers such as Assyria, Babylon, and Persia (Daniel 10). Similar to the Hebrew prophets, Du Bois longed for holistic redemption and justice. Throughout his professional and literary careers he spoke against Eurocentric and American sociopolitical and socioeconomic power. In a way similar to the Hebrew prophets, Du Bois critiqued contemporary social systems.

Edward J. Blum, another recent Du Boisian scholar, argues that Du Bois did not attempt to hide his religious nature. In fact, "Anyone who looks for religion in Du Bois's canon will find it in abundance and will discover a deeply spiritual Du Bois."⁴ Kahn and Blum have characterized Du Bois as a non-ecclesial prophet. Redemption and justice for Du Bois are holistic. To live a religious life is to become an attractive, engaged, and public rhetor on behalf of the equality and full humanity of all peoples, that is, educated, informed and actively participatory – democratically in the world.

In Du Bois' formative years, he was not exposed to Lewis Tappan or Charles Finney's evangelical, abolitionist Christianity or the fire and brimstone revivals with Pentecostal fervor that he would experience during his Fisk years. Early on, Du Bois was exposed to orthodox New England mainline Christianity. This background enabled him to understand Eurocentric religion from the inside. In this context he learned that religion and education are inseparable. Du Bois stated that "My grandmother was Episcopalian and my mother Congregational. I grew up in the Congregational Sunday School."⁵

The first two chapters of *Dusk of Dawn* provide readers with a sense of Du Bois' personal piety and cultural understanding of Christian faith. With an air of New England Victorianism, Du Bois associates himself with faith as a deeply personal matter, not worn outwardly on one's sleeve. The evidence of conversion for a Du Boisian Christian is that one believes that she or he

² Jonathon S. Kahn, "Divine Discontent as Religious Faith" in *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2009), 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ Edward Blum, "Rethinking Du Bois: Rethinking Race and Religion" in *W. E. B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 11.

⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, "A New England Boy and Reconstruction" in *Dusk of Dawn* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers – The State University, 1968), 10.

is called to a particular assignment not only in words, but also in deeds. In this way, a person is believed to have been possessed by Christian faith and is a follower of Jesus.

Du Bois began to understand Christianity further through the influence of Alexander Crummell. Alexander Crummell, the father of pan-Africanism, was a nineteenth century Episcopal minister and intellectual. Du Bois perceives Crummell as a sage or something of a seer.⁶ Although Du Bois depicts Crummell as a cosmic hero, readers understand that Du Bois was attracted to Crummell's intellectual prowess. Du Bois appreciated Crummell's pragmatic understanding of sociopolitical and socioeconomic limitations imposed upon him by social establishments and its systems. Due in part to Du Bois's admiration and identification with Crummell's worldview and prophetic vision, Du Bois evidently perceived that his capacities were similar to those of Crummell. A persuaded Du Bois began to discern his prophetic call to a particular assignment. His prophetic call and assignment was specifically to work toward the eradication of racism.

Crummell also serves for Du Bois as an example of how genius grows noticeably from the socio-margin. Du Bois was a victim of racial discrimination as was Crummell. Yet, Du Bois sees in Crummell a person who is called to serve marginalized people groups and classes as their intellectual advocate. Like Crummell, Du Bois became a public intellectual religionist: a prophetic seer.

In this reading of Du Bois, we re-discover him as a rhetor-preacher, someone who employs religious language to express the presence of transcendence in the midst of cultural despair. Those who follow in his tradition as Du Boisian rhetor-preachers will turn likewise to prophetic religious language focused in the biblical witness. These preachers will believe that biblical language witnesses to a reality that transcends the here and now, offering glimpses of an alternative reality. Often this alternative reality is counter-intuitive. It is a prophetic invention that grounds eschatological hope; it is an ethical claim of what "ought to be or "what should be" instead of what is. By taking their lead from Du Bois, Du Boisian rhetor-preachers follow in the eschatological Hebrew prophetic tradition, and in a way similar to Du Bois, Du Boisian rhetor-preachers are (often counter-intuitive) seers.

Du Boisian rhetor-preachers will find it helpful to reconsider Du Bois' *Souls* as parabolic sermons used for public and civic discourse. These sermons are effective on public platforms and in sacred pulpits. With his first sermon in *Souls* (the first essay), Du Bois subtly introduces his understanding of double consciousness. He defines it in this way, "One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."⁷ In these few words, Du Bois explains double consciousness and captures the existential worldview of African Americans and people of color across political, social and religious boundaries. These observations are reinterpreted to express the inner strivings and the psychospiritual heart and soul of people of the African Diaspora. At the same time, Du Bois begins to identify the way forward to a shared worldview across two worlds.

⁶ Ibid., "Of Alexander Crummell" in *The Souls of Black Folk*, 159-160. Also see Edward Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 131-2.

⁷ Ibid., "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," 3.

The Du Boisian Hermeneutic Parallels Postmodern Hermeneutics

The Du Boisian hermeneutic represents, from the side of those who are marginalized, an “other-wise” interpretation. According to John McClure, in *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*, other-wise preaching is built on an “other-directed textual analysis that could be used in support of an ethical perspective on homiletical theory.”⁸ McClure notes the similarity between what he is describing and Du Bois’ idea of “double-consciousness.”⁹ In many respects, therefore, an “other-wise” hermeneutic is the extension to all preachers of Du Boisian “double-consciousness.”

African American people comprise a well-chronicled example of how a different textual interpretation can become a model for forming a different hermeneutic that will influence pulpit speech for decades to come. It is, in part, because people of color have learned to interpret what non-people of color think of them; and alongside what people of color think of themselves. In short, Du Boisian double consciousness constitutes the hermeneutic methodology of other-wise people – and by extension, other-wise homiletics.

Considered from this perspective, postmodern hermeneutics is other-wise hermeneutics. It is the hermeneutics of double consciousness: the Du Boisian hermeneutic. Among marginalized peoples, this hermeneutic has a long history, functioning in multi-voices, multi-faces and multi-places. Du Boisian double consciousness explains how people of color pervasively interpret the world, its texts (and their own texts), their corporate and personal experiences, and biblical worlds.

Interpretation always takes place in a sociohistorical context and more narrowly a communal “world.”¹⁰ According to Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics ... is simply the theory that regulates the transition from structure of the work to the world of the work. To interpret a work is to display the world to which it refers by virtue of its arrangements, its genre, and its style.”¹¹ For effective preaching, then, an organic relationship exists between hermeneutics, rhetoric and homiletics. Preaching begins with hermeneutics. But hermeneutics quickly becomes an informant for rhetoric. Supported by their hermeneutic, people develop a rhetoric that expresses their understanding of nature and aids them in refuting unfair human structures of power. Because hermeneutics is the point of departure for developing rhetoric, it is the informing overlay and point of departure for developing a homiletic theory. In other words, hermeneutically shaped rhetoric deeply informs and shapes homiletic method. As Henry Mitchell writes, “Preaching is carried out in the idiom, imagery, style, and worldview of a particular people.”¹²

Keeping in mind the significance of this “communal world” to the development of a rhetorical method, it is crucial to note that a Du Boisian hermeneutics moves both from and toward a communal “preunderstanding” that informs how the rhetor-preacher communicates,

⁸ John McClure, *Other-wise preaching: a postmodern ethic for homiletics* (Saint Louis, Mo: Chalice, 2001), ix. Also see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 1976); idem, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory and Signs* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1973); idem, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978).

⁹ *Other-wise preaching*, 44.

¹⁰ Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 15. See also *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT University, 1999), 473-474.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, “Metaphor and Reference” in *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1975), 220.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

how listeners and readers understand, and why biblical texts remain our ancient contemporary. Du Bois makes use of what I call *hermeneutic cues* to accomplish this methodological shift from hermeneutic, through rhetoric, to communal world. These cues accomplish what David Randolph called “interpreting life in light of the Bible.”¹³ These cues make use of cultural aesthetics that determine how we view race, economics and politics and institutional spheres such as religion, law, medicine, art, literature and other institutional spheres. Du Boisian hermeneutic cues are primarily rooted in African American aesthetic traditions, especially traditions of rhetoric and literature, spirituals, the blues, jazz and other expressions of personhood and identity that grew out of cultural marginalization. These hermeneutic cues help to shape African American rhetoric which, in turn, informs African American homiletic theory.¹⁴

The Du Boisian master lens, however, is a lens of marginalization, and in the postmodern context, the Du Boisian hermeneutic lens is becoming the primary lens of the West. As Alvin Padilla writes,

Indeed the whole world has come to our doorstep. Learning to live well in the diverse culture of North America is no longer an option but a necessity. The U.S. Census estimates that in 2050 the proportion of whites in the population will be only 53%. Our children will live and serve in a society in which their classmates, neighbors and fellow disciples of Christ will be equally divided between whites and people of color. As new people move into our cities and local communities, the communities undoubtedly will change. The changes could be haphazard and filled with misunderstandings, hurt feelings and even violence, or the changes could permit all to reinvent and reinvigorate themselves for the better.¹⁵

Padilla provides a picture of the two worlds and how they will interface with each other. The two worlds are numerically disproportionate. The world populated by people of color makes up the majority of the world’s populations and includes mostly socio-marginalized people. As the West grapples with this new existential reality, people everywhere will sense their vulnerabilities and the failure of Western mythologies to sustain Western hegemonies. A Du Boisian hermeneutic offers an alternative response and suggests a decisively different metanarrative in which those who are struggling to maintain the dominant cultural worldview receive the opportunity to begin to discover a shared identity – something that will force all of us to reconsider what it means to be human.

In other words, dominant and “other-wise” worldviews, and the hermeneutics implicit within them, are on a collision course. It is important for all preachers to understand these cultural shifts and the hermeneutical possibilities available at this time in our history. Regardless of whether all preachers will appreciate or employ a hermeneutic of double-consciousness, it remains important for all preachers to understand how other-wise people interpret and understand their world.

¹³ Randolph (and Reid), 31.

¹⁴ Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 16. Referring to David Kelsey’s *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, LaRue argues that every faith community develops lenses, templates, or patterns of interpretation. Such a process is what I find described by the “hermeneutic circle”; see Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973), 4.

¹⁵ Alvin Padilla, “A New Kind of Theological School: Contextualized Theological Education Models” in *Africanus Journal* Vol. 2, No. 2, (November 2010), 5-6.

Du Boisian Hermeneutics and Dialectic

If the first part of a Du Boisian hermeneutic is the development of double consciousness, the second part involves cultivating dialectical reasoning.¹⁶ Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, writes that “Dialectic and Rhetoric for all make some attempt to sift or to support theses, and to defend or attack persons.”¹⁷ Du Bois uses dialectic as a tool to refute competing claims. Dialectic, as the art of refutation is a crucial point of departure for the forming of the African American aesthetic and hermeneutic. Dialectic lends itself to the refutation of hegemonic self-defense, making it a significant tool for marginalized people. It presents for them a way to demonstrate that they understand the dominant culture’s thesis and are not fooled. This is noticed consistently in African American rhetoric, sermons and literature.

Examples of this dialectic, found in African American anti-slavery pamphlets such as David Walker’s *Appeal (1829)* and Robert Young’s *Manifesto (1829)*, show how humanly marginalized persons learn to employ the “masters’ tool” to create an antithesis within dialectic argument. Marginalized rhetors create tensions within a thesis that is central to the dominant cultures; they show knowledge of the thesis, while strategically proceeding to reveal its flaws. In this modality, dialectic becomes refutation, redress and argument. Of course, this has social implications because those who employ this strategy tend to generate debate in both public and private spheres.

Du Boisian dialectic is a difficult methodology for Eurocentric interpreters to grasp. Interpreters operating under the hegemonic assumptions of dominant culture typically use dialectic to critique or refute assumptions and arguments that challenge dominant theses. Du Boisian dialectic invites these interpreters to journey outside those assumptions through double consciousness, and join with others to challenge their central theses from the position of the marginalized. In other words, they must engage in critique of themselves from outside of their own cultural box.

For example, the American health care debate has political constructs. The public debate has been solely a Eurocentric argument. This is a narrow consideration that is bereft of democratic solutions. In other words, there is no rhetorical space provided for other-wise interpretation. These constructs do not permit ideologues to move past their ideological impasses: one example of the “gridlock” in Washington. The difficulty is that the dominating culture’s worldview incorporates minimal capacity for transcendence or “other-wise” imagination of what could be from “other” perspectives.

The cultural struggle to adapt the Du Boisian hermeneutic and to employ this kind of dialectic is not exclusive to whites. It is also an issue for those of all colors and races who do not consider themselves called to prophetic proclamation. They may resist or consider this kind of hermeneutic outside of their scope of ministry. This is due, in part, to the fact that many seminary-trained minorities (including women) have been trained in Eurocentric theology, interpretation and homiletic theory. Therefore for many, the Du Boisian hermeneutic may hinder preachers and ministers who are not prepared to interpret texts by a different criterion of

¹⁶ Aristotle begins his *Rhetoric* with these words: “Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectic [-that is, the art of public speaking and the art of logical discussion are the co-ordinate, but contrasted, processes]; both have to do with such knowledge, things that do not belong to any one science.” *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, ed. Lane Cooper (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1932), 1-5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

interpretation that addresses a different socio-cultural thesis that is outside of their hermeneutic domain.

What are the implications of a Du Boisian hermeneutic for preachers? What impact does it have on biblical interpretation for preaching? The following pages are an attempt to present to preachers a point of departure for employing a Du Boisian hermeneutic.

Double Consciousness as Hermeneutic Informant

As an illustration of double consciousness in action, we can employ Du Bois' double consciousness as the hermeneutic informant when preparing a sermon on the "Parable of the Sheep, Lost Coin, and Son (Luke 15)." In this parable, Luke constructs his narrative by placing his theological claims underneath his telling of his story that involves Jesus, the Pharisees and Scribes. Luke creates a mood that subtly reveals the Pharisees and Scribes' disapproval of Jesus, in part because Jesus gave access and attention to the socially marginalized (vv. 1-3).

What else can be determined at this point? The Pharisees and Scribes represented the Hebrew establishment and, on other hand, Jesus aligns with the socio-marginalized. Luke wants his audience to know that Jesus understood how the representatives of the establishment perceived their power. At the same time he understands the situation of poorer and socially deprived citizens. Luke presents Jesus as one who wants the socio-marginalized to know that he understands their plight and further that he understands their need of a voice or agent. He wants to communicate to the under-classes and underprivileged that he knows what their oppressors think and feel about them. By employing something similar to double consciousness, he speaks in their behalf—the oppressed, the powerless—relating a parable about justice and redemption.

From this perspective, Jesus is explaining to the Pharisees and Scribes that they had valued a lost sheep and a lost coin more than addressing human suffering. A Du Boisian hermeneutic helps the preacher to recognize that Jesus admonishes the establishment for valuing things more than people. When read this way, the socio-marginalized are given voice; they have experienced a world of justice that addresses directly their position in life. Many people who live in socially deprived conditions need sociopolitical and economic interventions. In this instance, their human conditions have not changed, but spiritually and emotionally they begin to break the chains of injustice. This leads to redemptive agency for and among those who globally are socially marginalized, which provides a poetic vision of hope.

Double-Consciousness and Double Voice

Double consciousness is always aware of double meaning – with the way things are either actually or potentially double voiced. Sigmund Freud associates double voice with double meaning or a "play on words." He associates double voice or double-meaning with "wit." Freud writes, "If we delve more deeply into the variety of 'manifold applications' of the same word, we suddenly notice that we are confronted with forms of 'double meaning' or 'play on words' which have been known for a long time and which are universally acknowledged as belonging to the technique of wit."¹⁸ For Freud, wit belongs to the psychological and social aspects of communication, and wit used in this way helps us to understand how humans encode and decode a message.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Technique of Wit" in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans and ed. A. A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 617.

Double consciousness, therefore, invites interpreters to both use their own wits in interpretation, and to look for possibilities of wit or word-play in biblical texts. For instance, what if Luke's Jesus is employing wit in his telling of the "Parable of the Lost Sheep, Coin and Son (Luke 15)", creating a discourse that addresses both the dominating classes and socio-marginalized? Double voice usually functions through a deliberate, but nuanced, repetition of a particular theme. We can see this clearly in Luke 15:7, 10, and 32: "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (v. 7), and again, "Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (v. 10); and in the passage of the Prodigal Son (v. 32), "It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found." In short: "Nothing is more valuable than a human body and soul." A Du Boisian hermeneutic searches out Luke's Jesus' rhetorical double voice embedded in a repetitive pattern: celebration, joy focused on the recovery of things of value, namely *people*. This is an example of what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., calls "Tropological Revision." A trope is revised through a wit-ful repetition that highlights contrasts between a conventional interpretation and the emerging interpretation of marginalized people.¹⁹

By recognizing or accentuating nuanced and adroit syntactical strategies, one can understand the powerful existential and reflective role that double-consciousness, as double-voice, plays in biblical interpretation. By *existential* role, I mean that double voice helps interpreters sense how marginalized people decode their present conditions. By *reflective* role, I mean that double voice confronts the dominant classes with critical reflection on language usages and alternatives to traditional interpretations of meaning.

Double Consciousness and Psychospiritual Awareness

Closely related to double consciousness is psychospiritual awareness in the act of biblical interpretation, another characteristic of the Du Boisian hermeneutic when applied to preaching. Preachers operating within a Du Boisian hermeneutic listen to texts mindful of socio-marginalized people's psychology of inferiority, largely imposed upon them by living always just beyond the dominating classes' cultural pre-understanding of self and world. To borrow a metaphor from Du Bois, preachers interpret texts aware of life within the veil.

Houston Baker, Jr. has provided an insightful interpretation of Du Bois' use of the metaphoric veil that helps to define this veil as a form of psychospiritual awareness. Baker's emphasis is on associating the "veil" with performance, parochialism and the human body.²⁰ The veil for Baker functions as a place of forced intimacy among the socio-marginalized that is informed by anxieties about public life and the constant mental fear of public dehumanization (lynching for African Americans). This he believes is the emergence of modern blackness or African American psychospiritual formation. Du Bois uses strong metaphoric language to

¹⁹ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary*.

The black tradition is doubled-voice. The trope of the Talking Book, of double-voice texts that talk to other texts, is the unifying metaphor within this book. Gates lists four sorts of double-voice textual relations: Tropological Revision, The Speakerly Text, Talking Texts and Rewriting the Speakerly, xxv-xxvi.

²⁰ Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism / Re-Reading Booker T.* (Durham, Duke University, 2001), 53. The psychological dynamics, anxieties, phobias, and panic of publicly performing such scientific magic of social change can only be understood in the context – the frame – of the mind of the virulently white supremacist South, 57.

describe this psychospiritual awareness: hate, doubt and despair.²¹ This often becomes a form of self-loathing that haunts people of color.

Psychological well-being is central to Du Bois' employment of double-consciousness and his awareness of the veil. As Arnold Rampersad puts it:

The most striking device in *The Souls of Black Folk* is Du Bois adoption of the veil as the metaphor of black life in America. Mentioned at least once in most of the fourteen essays, as well as in the "Forethought," it means that "the Negro is sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world." If any single idea guides the art of *The Souls of Black Folk*, it is this concept, which anticipated the noted fictional conceit developed by Ralph Ellison, that blacks are invisible to the rest of the nation.²²

According to Rampersad, Du Bois also believes that, because the dominating classes have imposed permanent inferiority status onto African Americans, (and quite possibly the majority of the world's population), they have no true self-consciousness but only see themselves through the revelation of the larger society. Du Boisian rhetor-preachers, therefore, must inform the dominating classes that they too are enslaved as long as others remained marginalized. This hermeneutic is applicable to all situations globally, in which persons are socio-marginalized or enslaved.²³

What do those who listen to texts mindful of socio-marginalized people's psychology of inferiority look for? Perhaps centrally, they will look for *the devaluation of human bodies*, the point of departure for all other social marginalization. For example, as we have seen in Luke 15, socio-marginalized people can be invited to hear Jesus say that their human bodies are as valuable as their dominators'. In this interpretation, Jesus first identifies with the (assumed) status associated with inferior psychological and social status and then we hear Jesus connect psychological and social wellness with human souls' spiritual and social redemption. The interpretation of the text is directed at bodies in need of genuine status and psychospiritual healing and empowerment.

²¹ See W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Alexander Crummell" in *The Souls of Black Folk*, 159.

²² *Ibid.*, xx.

²³ Du Bois understood culture as a local invention (within the Veil); therefore, culture is always political. As Charles Lemert explains, "When cultures come into contact with each other on the borders and battle lines of social differences, they always rub each other the wrong way." Thus, double consciousness is also a function of social constructs—the very nature and purpose of politics. The interweaving of psychological and social dimensions of double consciousness as a principle part of the Du Boisian hermeneutic is validated by what Evans Crawford describes as a biformation process. This biformative process for Crawford involves "the particular legacy of being black in America and its impact upon the homiletical musicality of African American preaching traditions." Although Crawford locates biformation in the theological development of Howard Thurman's understanding of spiritual formations (which I believe is Thurman's masterful amalgamation of social and psychological aspects of spiritual formations), Crawford primarily sees this as a psychological formation as much as anything else. When he prefers to call the process "a preparation for preaching," he is speaking of a commonly held worldview and thus, a shared hermeneutic among African Americans. What is more, Crawford concedes that, "All of this is perhaps another way of saying what Henry Mitchell meant in his early writings when he spoke of the black minister as bicultural." Of course Crawford and Mitchell are influenced by Du Boisian double consciousness. See Evans H. Crawford, and Thomas Troeger, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 19-20.

Double Consciousness as Dialectical Tension in Preaching

In order to fund dialectical reasoning in their sermons, Du Boisian rhetor-preachers will identify dialectical tensions in biblical texts that are refracted by double consciousness. Rampersad is correct to suggest that many African Americans and people of color invent their cultural constructs in response to European interpretation. They are already dialectical thinkers – involved constantly in thesis–antithesis–new thesis forms of thinking.²⁴ As noted earlier, this dialectical reasoning becomes a characteristic form of rhetorical refutation.

Dialectical tension serves a dual function for the Du Boisian rhetor-preacher. On the one hand, tensions uncovered by double-consciousness function to *challenge theological certainty* for preachers who are used to comfortable hegemonic interpretations. Preachers begin to see competing interpretive choices in biblical texts. The decision for an other-wise interpretation may not always be deemed legitimate by the standards of Euro-American biblical exegesis. Although settling on interpretations that are plausible – leaning toward grammatical, literary, social and historical accuracy, direct equivalencies are not foremost in interpretation. The tensions exposed by double-consciousness, often funded by tropes (especially metaphors) and wit (playfulness) will be the result of studying the *connotations* of words and ideas, not just their commonly accepted denotations. On the other hand, the discovery of dialectical tensions in texts' functions encourages the formulation of *new* theological and ethical motifs that lie hidden within the connotative genius of biblical texts.²⁵

Often, the connotative genius in a biblical text is located in its metaphors. Metaphors are built out of semantic tension – which releases ambiguity, connotation, and what Paul Ricoeur calls “the surplus of meaning” within a text.²⁶ According the Paul Ricoeur, metaphors can “provide untranslatable information and, accordingly, metaphors claim to yield some true insight about reality.”²⁷ At the same time, the metaphoric process passes outside itself to facilitate transcendence and transformation.²⁸

²⁴ See W. E. B. Du Bois, “Introduction” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 2005), xx. As Rampersad suggested, “the Negro is sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.” Because the Du Boisian hermeneutic is dialectic, Rampersad reminds us that socio-marginalized human conditions are associated with the Veil, “. . .but only [his social condition] lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.” In so many words, this is dialectic. Since Rampersad’s claims and interpretation of the metaphoric veil, other African American theorists and scholars have proffered cultural theses independent of Eurocentric thought. Instead African and African American thinkers such as Molefi Kente Asante trace African American interpretations to their African roots. I believe that Rampersad’s interpretation of the metaphoric veil withstands more recent scholarship. Rampersad’s insight into the psychology of African Americans closely parallels my understanding of dialectical tension functions in this context.

²⁵ For more on the role of connotation in other-wise hermeneutics, see McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 13-26. According to McClure, other-wise preachers will “follow the connotations that emerge from our reading of the biblical text toward the multiplicity of *other* origins or goals (it makes no difference) of the connotations they are following” (24).

²⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth Texas: TCU Press, 1976).

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling” in *JSTOR* Vol.5 No. 1 (Autumn, 1978), 143.

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “Metaphor and the Semantics of Discourse” in *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, 74.

Again, consider the parables in Luke 15. Luke's Jesus discloses embedded dialectical tensions in the metaphors of lost sheep, the lost coin, and lost child that invite transcendence and transformation. Luke's Jesus filled these parables with metaphors that give expression to dialectical tensions and suggest alternative readings of reality. By using metaphoric process to disclose embedded dialectical tensions, Luke's Jesus presents ethical choices designed to encourage new theological interpretations and meanings that would take into account more fully the lives and experiences of those outside the centers of interpretive power. In each parable, metaphors create dislocations of conventional and traditional ways of interpretation and provide space for otherness.

Double Consciousness and Extended Metaphor

Ultimately, preachers with a Du Boisian hermeneutic lift the metaphoric process from biblical texts and preach it as extended homiletical metaphor – playing freely with the surplus of meaning released by its connotations. It is difficult to imagine any authentic African American preaching tradition that does not make extensive use of extended (biblical) metaphor. According to Cleo LaRue, “extended metaphors are helpful because they allow for preachers a wider sphere in which to act. For example, it would greatly limit our understanding of God's power to proclaim that the sole metaphor in black preaching is God as liberator.”²⁹ LaRue is correct to suggest that African American preachers are intuitively reluctant to place arbitrary limitations on the mysterious providential hand of God. This might be due to their awareness of multiple existential socio-marginalized conditions, each one requiring a different metaphorical dialectic. In response many African American preachers employ extended metaphors and poetic language to express motifs that they cannot otherwise explain adequately. Because of the centrality of such metaphors in biblical parables, many African American preachers are attracted to parables for preaching.

Sally McFague notes, “Current scholarship sees the parable as an extended metaphor also, that is, as a story of ordinary people and events which is the context for envisaging and understanding the strange and extraordinary.”³⁰ McFague sees extended metaphors theologically, as a way to see the story that exists theologically beyond the human story. McFague suggests that a parable reveals otherness: “The world of the parable, then, includes, it *is*, both dimensions – the secular and the religious, our world and God's love. It is not that the parable points to the unfamiliar but that it includes the unfamiliar within its boundaries.”³¹ LaRue correctly points out that preachers of color work tirelessly against the flawed assumption that “God” can be put in a box. “A God who acts mightily in a host of ways in various situations has much more elasticity and is more inclusive [which is represented] by the various extended metaphors likely to be found in a black sermon.”³² In short, preachers who employ the Du Boisian hermeneutic as a point of departure are aware that their textual interpretation must be revisited each time he or she prepares to preach, not assuming that their previous interpretation is correct. There is always room for further illumination – new tensions, new metaphors, new understanding.

²⁹ Cleophus LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 27-29.

³⁰ Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*, 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

³² Cleophus LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 27-29.

Conclusion

I conclude with a précis of the fourth sermon in *Souls* entitled: “Of the Meaning of Progress.” The sermon’s lead character is a young girl who is eager to receive formal education to satisfy the natural yearnings of any human heart. Her name is Josie. Du Bois recalls that the family shared little affection, but Josie functioned at its center, while all worked to eke out a living.³³ Ten years passed and Du Bois returned to the blue hills of east Tennessee. He found that little had changed and that life continued within the Veil: “We had a heap of trouble since you’ve been away.” Jim, one of Josie’s younger brothers was accused of stealing wheat by Farmer Durham. Jim escaped the stones hurled at him, but refused to run from the Constable. He was charged with thievery and was placed in stockades. The family responded, “It grieved Josie, and great awkward John (her brother) walked nine miles every day to see his little brother through the bars of Lebanon jail.” Du Bois tells us that “Josie grew thin and silent, yet worked the more.” Her father grew old, and Josie worked in Nashville for a year, and she earned ninety dollars to furnish a new house, making it a home.³⁴

“Progress” takes on a tragic meaning in this sermon. Du Bois characterizes socio-marginalized life, and its symbolism is palpable – a pulsing reality. Du Bois creates a multi-voiced, multi-faced, and multi-placed worldview, identifying a social condition that breeds ignorance, anger and, eventually, the death of hope. It remains our ancient-contemporary. Josie’s life is an example of cultural identity, and her life is representative of African and African American contemporary life within the Veil. The Veil is filled with hurt and pain. This is Du Bois at his best.

Although Du Bois’ cultural worldview reflects a common hermeneutic within the African-American community that according to Du Bois represents something pan-African, today we can and must revise Du Bois’ doubly conscious, otherwise hermeneutic into a multicultural hermeneutic invention used by all preachers. It is already shared, to a great extent, by people of color everywhere. The Du Boisian hermeneutic symbolizes a cultural response to marginalization, and functions as an alternative to traditional views held by those of dominating cultures and classes.

Establishment preachers who desire to employ a Du Boisian hermeneutic must learn to “listen against their hearing.” This will prove invaluable for transforming communities into advocates for justice and redemption and to nurture trust among believers. African American preachers in cross-cultural settings will also need to listen against their hearing. In the end, although double-consciousness brings with it a legacy of despair, self-loathing, invisibility, and isolation, it may become a formidable tool to make our preaching into a means for proclaiming a new redeemed humanity.

³³ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of the Meaning of Progress” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989), 47.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.