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FROM ABOLISHING UNTOUCHABILITY TO A PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATORY EDUCATION: W.E.B. DU BOIS AND B.R. AMBEDKAR IN DIALOGUE

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my moral ancestors, the generations of teachers and students around the world who refused to practice caste and racial hierarchy and worked hard, with immense courage and sacrifice, to make learning and the experience of gaining knowledge available to all. To Muktabai Salve, Savitribai Phule, Jyotirao Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, E.V.R. Periyar, Carter G. Woodson, Ella Baker, W.E.B. Du Bois, and countless other students and teachers around the world who believed in our shared humanity enough to commit their lives to it. It is also dedicated to my moral contemporaries and our moral descendants: may we continue joyfully on this path and make universal public education across the world a basic human right.

Contents

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore the some of the key shared conceptual questions that W.E.B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar considered in their writings and their political efforts to fight untouchability, caste, white supremacy, patriarchy, class-exploitation, and empire over the course of their lives. This exploration will help lay a basis for a philosophical and historical sociological account of why the Black liberation struggle and the struggle against untouchability and caste were linked at their roots. I will make the case for the mutual imbrication of these struggles by arguing that each thinker's articulation of a problem that they faced can be clarified and sharpened in light of the other's conceptual approach to their own. The first chapter covers Du Bois' approach to spiritual pedagogy in *The Souls of Black Folk* and how his experiences of different spaces informed his theory of how race operated. The second chapter discusses Ambedkar's *Waiting for a Visa* to help us understand the centrality of the experience of untouchability to Ambedkar's political philosophy. Untouchability was legally abolished in both the US and India by the early 1960s and yet systemic caste and racial violence against Dalits and Black people continued. The final chapter discusses Ambedkar's and Du Bois' philosophies of education and why the development of liberatory pedagogy remains a live, urgent question in casteist, racially hierarchical societies today.

[Keywords: Race, Caste, W.E.B. Du Bois, B.R. Ambedkar, Social Thought, Education, Social Movements, Untouchability, Liberatory Pedagogy]

Introduction

"Although I have not met you personally, I know you by name as everyone does who is working in the cause of securing liberty to the oppressed people. I belong to the Untouchables of India and perhaps you might have heard my name. I have been a student of the Negro problem and have read your writings throughout. There is so much similarity between the position of the Untouchables in India and of the position of the Negroes in America that the study of the latter is not only natural but necessary.

I was very much interested to read that Negroes of America have filed a petition to the UNO. The Untouchables of India are also thinking of following suit. Will you be so good as to secure me two or three copies of this representation by the Negroes and send them to my address. I need hardly say how very grateful I shall be for your troubles in this behalf.

[Signed] Yours Sincerely,

B.R. Ambedkar"

Letter from B.R. Ambedkar to W.E.B. Du Bois, c.a. July 1946 [1]

[1] B. R. Ambedkar, 'Letter from B.R. Ambedkar to W.E.B. Du Bois, c.a. July 1946', July 1946, UMass Amherst W.E.B. Du Bois Papers Online Archive, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b109-i132.

“ 31 July 1946

My dear Mr. Ambedkar:

I have your letter concerning the case of the Negroes of America and the Untouchables in India before the United Nations. As you say a small organization of American Negroes, The National Negro Congress has already made a statement which I am enclosing. I think, however, that a much more comprehensive statement well documented will eventually be laid before the United Nations by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. If this is done I shall be glad to send you a copy.

I have often heard of your name and work and of course have every sympathy with the Untouchables of India. I shall be glad to be of any service I can render if possible in the future.

Very sincerely yours,

W. E. .B. Du Bois”

Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to B. R. Ambedkar, July 31, 1946[2]

In July 1946, W. E. B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar shared a brief correspondence which marked their views on the similarity of the “position” of Black people in the United States and the Untouchables of India. Ambedkar informed Du Bois that because of this similarity of position, he had read all of Du Bois’ own writings on the Black freedom struggle. The similarity was such that

[2] W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘Letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to B.R. Ambedkar, July 31, 1946’, 31 July 1946, 4, UMass Amherst W.E.B. Du Bois Papers Online Archive, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b109-i133.

such study on his part was “not only natural, but necessary”. Du Bois’ name was familiar to Ambedkar as it might have been to “everyone else who worked in the cause of securing liberty to the oppressed people”. In his letter to Du Bois then, Ambedkar found Du Bois to be a world-renowned figure who was familiar to everyone in the world who worked for the cause of freedom for the oppressed. Taking inspiration from the plan of Negro organisations to file a petition at the newly formed United Nations Organisation, Ambedkar requested from Du Bois a text of the petition that was presented. Ambedkar sought from Du Bois a pragmatic text – practical language that might help him and his comrades articulate the position of the Untouchables to the United Nations Organisation. The Black struggle for liberation would offer the Untouchable struggle against caste a language for its own articulation.

In response, Du Bois acknowledged his receipt of Ambedkar’s letter and shared that the NAACP was soon to send a much more expansive petition, which he would be sure to send Ambedkar’s way in Bombay, India. Du Bois responded to Ambedkar’s expression of familiarity with his own work by sharing that Ambedkar’s name too was “often heard” by him. The correspondence ended with Du Bois sharing his sympathy with the cause of the Untouchables, and offering Ambedkar and his comrades “any service” that he could “render if possible in the future”. Du Bois responded to Ambedkar’s request for solidarity with generosity, an expression of respect for the stature of Ambedkar and his work, and a promise for this solidarity to be sustained in the future. Reading this correspondence in 2023, it seems as though the promises of solidarity and meaningful mutual relationships between Black Americans and Dalits from South Asia are only now beginning to be understood and widely discussed, though far from being actualised on a mass, popular scale.

What was the similarity in position between the condition of the Negroes and the condition of the Untouchables that Ambedkar had identified in his letter to Du Bois? Why was Ambedkar's name and work so familiar to Du Bois and what made him so willing to extend his solidarity to the cause of the Untouchables in India? What made the conditions of the oppression of Untouchables and Negroes legible to each other? How were their struggles for liberation intertwined? What future does this correspondence between W. E. B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar hold? How can the two thinkers still remain in service to each other's causes?

In this dissertation, I will explore the some of the key shared conceptual questions that W.E.B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar considered in their writings and their political efforts to fight untouchability, caste, white supremacy, patriarchy, class-exploitation, and empire over the course of their lives. This exploration will help lay a basis for a philosophical and historical sociological account of why the Black liberation struggle and the struggle against untouchability and caste were linked at their roots. I will make the case for the mutual imbrication of these struggles by arguing that each thinker's articulation of a problem that they faced can be clarified and sharpened in light of the other's conceptual approach to their own.

In the first two chapters, by means of juxtaposition, I will argue that W.E.B. Du Bois' reflections on the *Meaning of Progress* in *Souls of Black Folk* can best be understood in light of B.R. Ambedkar's reflections on the experience of the shock of the practice of untouchability in his text *Waiting for a Visa*. Du Bois' experience of the complete separation of the world within the Veil and the white world outside it was "similar in position" to the experience that Ambedkar theorised in *Waiting for a Visa*. One can only understand the particularity of the violence of the Jim Crow

regime to Black folk in light of the account of the shock of recognising the violence of untouchability that Ambedkar described in *Waiting for a Visa*. Ambedkar's conceptualization of the particular social institution of untouchability and how it was practiced in India offers Black studies important practical and conceptual resources to understand the practice of white supremacy in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1950, the independent India's constitution abolished the practice of untouchability. Concurrently, a new wave of the civil rights movement in the United States fought to end segregation and abolish the legal basis for racial discrimination over the 1950s and 1960s. These victories in law and historic challenges to entrenched structures of social domination were only made possible for the kinds of travel and solidarity across racial and caste boundaries that Du Bois and Ambedkar thought deeply about in their autobiographical writings. And yet, racial discrimination against African-Americans and the practice of untouchability by dominant-caste Indians took new forms. Legal reforms to defend the rights of Black people and Dalits would prove to be necessary but not sufficient in the centuries-long struggles against untouchability and the colour-line. Untouchability and racial discrimination were the symptomatic manifestations of deeply entrenched beliefs, practices of social hierarchy, and routine violence. These practices would only disappear if the social structures enabling them were to be changed at their roots. Changing these structures would require a complete reconstruction of hierarchical society. For both Du Bois and Ambedkar, higher education institutions were a key site where these hierarchies could be contested and a new form of social consciousness could be developed. From untouchability and the need to cross social boundaries to enable political change then, I turn to the question of pedagogy and liberatory education as central questions that both Du Bois and

Ambedkar posed as they experienced the legal victories and their limitations in the middle of the twentieth century.

In the third chapter, I will lay out Du Bois' philosophy about the education of Black people and the importance of Black higher education institutions to the project of building democracy in the United States. In light of Du Bois' vision of a form of higher education which would research the causes of racialisation and offer students a training in the most important forms of knowledge that they would need to learn and practice to build a just world, the stakes of Ambedkar's vision for a public education become clear. Du Bois articulated in his speeches on education how the aims of Black study were to connect the emergent labour movements and the civil rights movements and give students practical knowledge for understanding and scientifically responding to racial and class hierarchies in society. Ambedkar's emphasis on education as a sacred right belonging to all human beings, and especially as something important for Dalits to pursue to develop the intellectual, political, and spiritual resources to challenge caste on both intimate and political scales can be best understood in light of Du Bois' philosophy of education. Du Bois developed his philosophy of education in response to the victories of the Black liberation movement over the twentieth century and the challenges he witnessed in Black colleges and universities. Ambedkar founded higher education institutions in the 1940s and more so in the 1950s after the independence of India. Both were confronting how formal political and constitutional changes in their countries failed to fundamentally challenge the hierarchies of social power that affected the oppressed, and further, failed to develop ethical human beings who might understand what it might mean to treat fellow human beings with respect and the due care that they deserve. Black study and anti-caste pedagogy were important parts of their respective answers to the question of what it might mean

to overcome the persistence of untouchability and social hierarchy in the second half of the twentieth century.

The first two chapters will read Du Bois' reflections about Black people's position behind the Veil of race as akin to the experience of untouchability as it was theorized by Ambedkar. The shock, indignity, anger and contempt experienced by one when one is treated as part of a class completely outside of the normative social world as experienced by those in the dominant classes was an experience that was legible to both African-Americans and Dalits in the first half of the twentieth century as they confronted powerful social regimes of domination and cruelty. The third chapter's posing of the question of education through the writings of Du Bois and Ambedkar will also help me offer another thorough-line between the philosophical writings of both thinkers – and the historical experience of the two linked social movements for freedom and equality. This thorough-line is that of education and the right to education as a site for demanding respect in hierarchical society, and further, as a site for practicing and forming a new kind of sociability between groups of people – one that makes possible respect, care, and mutuality, and challenges power-structures directly rather than ameliorates their impact on relations between people. For Du Bois, a Pan-African Communist vision of education made possible the cultivation of solidarity between the darker people's around the world against the everyday justifications of empire and racial hierarchy that they came to accept as unchangeable. For Ambedkar, a fierce and pragmatic challenge to a Brahmanical philosophy of education which only allowed those in dominant caste positions to be students and teachers meant reaffirming the dignity and intelligence of every human being and their right to learning and being respected as thinkers as a sacred experience that would form the basis of a rational, kind society. It is by putting together Du Bois' philosophy of a Pan-African

solidaristic education that builds capacities in its students and teachers to "outthink the owners of the world" and Ambedkar's philosophy of the right to education as the right to share in a sacred experience of building knowledge about one's world as equals that I come to an account of the right to public, universal education drawn from the Black freedom struggle and the Dalit struggle to annihilate caste. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will sketch out further lines of research and conceptual development that the linking of Black Study and Critical Caste Studies will make possible.

The Limitations of the Caste-Race Comparison and the Question of Solidarity

This dissertation builds on a vast literature across multiple disciplines that has explored the relationships between South Asia and the United States, and particularly the relationships between caste, racialisation, and other forms of hierarchy across the world. Nico Slate's books and articles have helped to create a useful archive of the connections between social movements in the United States and social movements in India in the twentieth century. His book "Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India" documents the many encounters that occurred between African-Americans and anti-colonial Indians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is deeply salutary and useful insofar as it helps to establish the deep lines of intellectual and cultural influence that have connected two geographically distant nation-states. At the same time, Slate's historical accounts remain agnostic on the question of what it has meant for African-Americans and Dalits to find common cause in modern history. Largely sticking to the contradictions of what social movements themselves can achieve, and usefully laying out divisions within social movements that these encounters

themselves were framed by – for instance Black Power leaders in the US in the 1970s in Slate's view were less interested in India because by then the Indian context was largely remembered as a site of Gandhian non-violent struggle in Civil Rights organising circles – Slate refrains from offering a theoretical or philosophical account of the link between the struggles against untouchability and the struggles for Black liberation.

In the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, sociologists developed a vast literature which considered racial hierarchy as a "caste system", coming to form the "caste school of race relations". In his review of this literature, Immerwahr tells the story of how the sociologist W. Lloyd Warner inaugurated this school of thought in 1936 with an article in the American Journal of Sociology.[3] Warner argued that social stratification in the South looked more like a caste-system than a class-system because middle-class whites were advantaged over Black elites due to the fact that Black communities were systematically deprived of social, educational, and economic opportunities. Gunnar Myrdal's influential text, "Race: An American Dilemma" (1944) argued that European systems of class did not apply to the US because of "the traversing systems of color caste": "caste struggle" would be more apt to describe the contradictions of US society than "class struggle". Caste was also used to describe racial domination in the US to help dispute popular ideas that racial differences could be attributed to genetic or biological differences. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois turned to the concept of caste segregation to describe the separation between white and Black social groups and refute the biological accounts of race which white supremacists proclaim to justify their racist ideology. [4]

[3] Daniel Immerwahr, 'Caste or Colony? Indianizing Race in the United States', *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 2 (2007): 275–301.
[4] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 66.

Immerwahr also found that Black social scientists such as Oliver Cromwell Cox, E. Franklin Frazier, and Charles S Johnson in the 1940s and 1950s came to critique the caste analogy to describe racial hierarchy, for it suggested a social system that was too "static" and "unchanging". Seeing race as a caste system "reified it" and made it seem like a "tradition based in compliance rather than a changing and contested form of oppression maintained by force".[5] Racial hierarchy was made possible by capitalist exploitation and the relations of power that constituted it were ever-changing and ever-contested in Cox's view. Cross-race solidarity was indeed possible, and would be necessary in bringing a democratic revolution to the US – and seeing race as an unchanging caste-order would preclude the possibilities of class-based politics against the dominant capitalists of the time. Yet to make racial solidarity against capitalism seem possible, and to sharpen the stakes of why it was so wrong for social scientists and Black movement leaders to analogise race to caste, Cox drastically misunderstood the caste system in India as a reified, unchanging, unopposed social order of hierarchy. In 1960, Cox came to claim that "there has been no progressive social movement for betterment amongst outcaste castes in Brahmanic India".[6] For American social scientists, race-as-caste allowed them to distinguish racial hierarchy from European models of social order, critique biological accounts of race and emphasise its social malleability. Simultaneously, it became a proxy for debates between some Marxist social scientists who believed race-as-caste would obstruct the view of the possibilities of working-class solidarity in the South for a worker's revolution and other social scientists who believed that race-as-caste and fixed social antagonisms would make visible sites of limited social reform and state intervention on behalf of the racially oppressed. It is notable that Cox believed seeing race as caste made such solidarities seem impossible, while Du Bois, who often used the caste metaphor to

[5] Immerwahr, 'Caste or Colony? Indianizing Race in the United States'.
[6] Ibid., p. 282.

describe race, spent all his life believing in the unity of the darker world, and indeed of the workers of the world as a vital possibility.

Indian intellectuals took a great interest in the history of racial oppression in the United States and had different ideas on whether the caste system constituted something like the racial order of hierarchy in the Americas. Dominant caste and Dalit intellectuals took differing positions on this question. Nico Slate covers some of this history in his two articles "Translating Race and Caste" (Journal of Historical Sociology 2011)[7] and in his chapter on "The Dalit Panthers: Race, Caste and Black Power in India" (in the edited book Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement)[8]. In "Translating Race and Caste", Slate argues that nationalist dominant-caste intellectuals who had travelled to the United States such as Rabindranath Tagore, Lala Rajpat Rai and M. K. Gandhi ranked racial oppression as worse than caste oppression to "protect" the image of "Mother India".[9] Dalit intellectuals and those in the anti-caste movement took inspiration from the Black struggle against racism to inspire themselves and their comrades to undertake a similar struggle against caste, untouchability, and its myriad forms of social oppression. Ambedkar wrote extensively on the enslavement of Africans in the founding and building of American society, and sometimes positioned untouchability as a far more violent form of social hierarchy than what African-Americans experienced during slavery. Slate notes that this line of argument which effectively critiqued Gandhi, Tagore, and Lala Rajpat Rai who would position slavery as a far worse form of oppression as a way of silencing the movement against untouchability and caste, led Ambedkar to severely understate the harms of slavery. Slate ends his

[7] Nico Slate, 'Translating Race and Caste', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24, no. 1 (March 2011): 62–79.
[8] Nico Slate, 'The Dalit Panthers: Race, Caste, and Black Power in India', in *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*, ed. Nico Slate (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 127–46.
[9] Slate, 'Translating Race and Caste', 64–69.

article with the observation that "while the promise of these analogies remains with us, so does their failure".[10] Characteristically, his article documents an extensive archive of the use of the race-caste analogy in both Indian and US intellectual history without offering conceptual clarity on what it would mean for intellectuals in both countries to contest these linked and yet seemingly distinct forms of social hierarchy.

A more promising approach attends to the ways Dalit intellectuals, community members, and artists took inspiration from the Black freedom movement to help articulate their own claims for justice and their visions of freedom from the violent enclosure and submersion forced on them by Hindu-caste society. In Maharashtra, Jotirao Phule dedicated his significant text of political philosophy "Gulamgiri" (On Slavery) to those who had sacrificed their lives in the struggle against slavery in the United States.[11] The Dalit Panthers emerged in Mumbai in the 1970s in response to increasing caste atrocities in the city and the Maharashtra countryside and explicitly inspired by the anti-racist, communist, and armed community defence vision of the Black Panthers in the US.[12] In Tamil Nadu, the Liberation Panther Party emerged in the 1980s, and over the 1990s and 2000s organised to gain representative seats in the Tamil Nadu state legislature (Hugo Gorringe's book *Panthers in Parliament* covers some of its achievements and the contradictions it continues to experience in its particular political conjuncture).[13] Contemporary Tamil film director Pa. Ranjith, who makes commercially successful films that highlight the oppression of caste and untouchability in Tamil society, shared in a recent *Film Companion* interview with Baradwaj Rangan that the

[10] Slate, 76.
[11] Jotirao Phule, *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, trans. G.P. Deshpande (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2002).
[12] Juned Shaikh, *Outcaste Bombay: City Making and the Politics of the Poor* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021).
[13] Hugo Gorringe, *Panthers in Parliament: Dalits, Caste, and Political Power in South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Black arts movement and Black cinema in the US were a key inspiration for his own efforts to create a vibrant Ambedkarite cultural sphere in Tamil Nadu.[14] College magazines that he read, including Dalit Murasu discussed international cinema and introduced him to the film *Malcolm X* directed by Spike Lee. Ranjith was also deeply moved by Alex Haley's book *Roots* and was shocked to find how similar the narrative of enslaved African-Americans in the book who tried to escape their conditions seemed to the stories of indentured Tamil Dalit workers who were sent around south-east Asia to work for the East India Company. An ethic of self-respect, of film and music which captured the world's imagination, a direct confrontation with social forces of oppression and a vision of human liberation in artistic productions, all added up to show the impact of Black arts and Black Power on the Ambedkarite-Periyarite public sphere in South India. Why was this possible? What does it mean for such a solidarity and line of inspiration from one freedom struggle to another to make possible new and exciting cultural interventions in the struggle against caste and untouchability in India?

Shailaja Paik's "margin-to-margin framework" is a significant intervention in the scholarly literature on gender, race, and caste that articulates the significance of the connection between Dalit and Black experiences in their collective assertion of dignity and search for freedom. Responding to the resounding silence about Dalit women's experiences in the vast caste-race and post-colonial feminist literatures, Shailaja Paik's article on "Building Bridges: Articulating Dalit and African-American Women's Solidarity" traces the intertwined histories of African-American women's and Dalit women's double-marginalisations and how key figures – Sojourner Truth and Muktabai Salve respectively – came to link their everyday experiences to systemic frameworks of

[14] Pa. Ranjith, Film Companion With Baradwaj Rangan, 3 July 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXmIPKOwnRE&t=1167s.

oppression: "the anatomy of caste/race, class, and gender hierarchies".[15] Paik traces both intellectual traditions to find that Dalit and African-American women's autobiographies included experiences of poverty and hunger, the denial of education to both groups, the pressure to be respectable and "ideal women" both within the community and to outsiders; and finally to experience public caste/race-patriarchies and private patriarchies due to their experience of simultaneous, multiple oppression.[16] Paik offers in this article a "margin-to-margin framework" which can "revitalise feminist theory and practice" by helping to make "a common cause between African-American and Dalit women".[17] This "common cause" can make possible larger communities, the conversations that these communities have can help open "critical spaces for a sustained political engagement and an enriched feminist theory.[18] Paik looks forward to how such a margin-to-margin approach "allows us to look at the transformative potential of historical and current social and political forms and expressions". [19]

While one can profitably read Slate's books which have begun to catalogue the large archive of political, intellectual, and cultural interactions between African-Americans and Indians over the course of the twentieth century, such collections of narratives remain non-committal on the question of why Africans-Americans and Dalits in particular came to experience an affinity and came to develop a sense of a shared experience of their respective oppressions. As anti-caste and Black studies scholars investigate further and more hitherto silenced voices from the Ambedkarite movement against untouchability and caste are published and translated into languages that can

[15] Shailaja Paik, 'Building Bridges: Articulating Dalit and African-American Women's Solidarity', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2014): 80–81.
[16] Ibid., p. 80-93
[17] Ibid., p. 93
[18] Ibid., p. 92
[19] Ibid.

circulate internationally, a ground-up perspective of the margin-to-margin framework of solidarity will emerge and become clearer over time. Most recently, Thenmozhi Soundarajan's new book "The Trauma of Caste" has been read and promoted by Tarana Burke and Angela Davis[20], while Isabel Wilkerson's book "Caste" – which has generated fierce debates in the US and in India – is being made into a commercial documentary film directed by Ava DuVernay[21]. Students and faculty who proudly identify themselves as being against caste and untouchability, who as a result, are profoundly critical of exclusionary and unimaginative dominant-caste social networks in the South Asian academy in the US are publishing and organising new forms of social and political community that link their struggles with those of indigenous peoples, African-Americans, the working classes, and the multiply oppressed the world over. This dissertation aims to build on this new groundswell of scholarship and solidarity to offer a conceptual framework for how Du Bois' and Ambedkar's works are best understood in light of one another's insights – a margin-to-margin framework that makes clear the mutual relation of dependence and inspiration that sustains the movements against untouchability in South Asia and the movements against white supremacy and racist exploitation in the Americas.

A Note on Philosophical Method: From Contesting Untouchability to Practicing Liberatory Pedagogy

This dissertation aims to bring out the conceptual links between Du Bois' writings on Black liberation and the struggle against racism and Ambedkar's writings on the annihilation of caste and the struggle against untouchability. I take both thinkers to be reflecting on vast historical

[20] Thenmozhi Soundararajan, *The Trauma of Caste* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2022).
[21] Samantha Bergeson, 'Aunjanue Ellis to Lead Ava DuVernay's "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents" Adaptation', *IndieWire*, accessed 1 May 2023, https://www.indiewire.com/2023/01/aunjanue-ellis-ava-duvernay-caste-adaptation-1234799216/.

changes that they themselves played a significant role in by acting as participants and thinkers in transformative social movements, and further that they recognised were much larger than themselves as individuals. The historic conjunctures in which they found themselves included the defeat of Reconstruction and the establishment of Jim Crow in the US South in the 1890s-1900s, the coming of the Great War in Europe in the 1910s which demanded labour and sacrifice of colonised people all over the world to carry out, the development of the struggle against Untouchability in South Asia powerfully challenging dominant Hindu-caste notions of sociality, citizenship, and ideology, the development of the independence movement in South Asia over the 1920s and 1930s which ignored questions of caste and untouchability and laid the basis for the post-colonial state, the Great Migration in the US in the 1900s-1920s where many Black people moved from the violent Jim Crow South to the North-east and Midwest in search for peaceful neighbourhoods and good jobs only to find further racial hatred; the Great Depression of the 1930s which caused a grave humanitarian crisis to Black communities across the US and to the poor in India; the development of the Pan-African Congress which started to articulate anti-imperial demands over the 1920s and 1930s; the development of the NAACP, building a movement against lynchings in the US as white communities aimed to police and control Black aspirations for dignity and freedom, and the Black teachers' movement which laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights movement; the rise of fascism in Europe and the mutual constitution of racist-hierarchical ideologies in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas in the 1930s and 1940s; the rise of communism through the Russian revolution in 1917 and the development of an international communist movement over the course of the twentieth century; the Second World War against fascism in Germany, Italy, and Japan; the emergence of women's movements around the globe, particularly the Ambedkarite women's movement in India which challenged patriarchal social

norms in multiple ways, and in the US, the development of Black women's organising in churches, factories, and across civil society which explicitly defended their dignity, their right to safe, peaceful lives, and imaginatively expanded the boundaries of a democratic education; the victory of anti-colonial struggles and independence finally arriving to most countries in Asia and Africa and promising a new, democratic era in the 1950s no longer singularly controlled by European and American imperial interests. This list does not include developments in ideology and the intellectual conjuncture in which Ambedkar and Du Bois framed and developed their ideas, and how rapidly it changed over the course of their lives.

Put simply, both Du Bois and Ambedkar studied and closely attended to vast changes in political economy in both of their lives that made the dignified life of Black people and Untouchables impossible – relations of empire, of segregation, of the closed social networks to British Indian government jobs, of landlessness, of a lack of capital to found their own businesses and predatory lending to make their lives worse, and relations of sheer force and violence which would be applied to those who did not meet rigid social norms of hierarchy. They also witnessed and participated in truly transformative movements that came to change these rigid social norms of hierarchy and make possible new and freer forms of life for their fellow comrades and co-strugglers. They closely attended to the developments within their movements – contestations of race, class, gender, caste, and empire – and developed their political positions in synchrony with hundreds thousands of other comrades and fellow-travellers. I will attempt to do justice to this vast canvas of history in which both Ambedkar and Du Bois painted their rich, historic lives by keeping these questions of historic struggle in mind but fundamentally focussing on certain key conceptual questions on which they can be brought into conversation: the questions of Untouchability and of liberatory education. Both these questions only came to take the forms that they did due to their own experiences with the

vast horizon of revolutionary history that they witnessed, and my wager is that by considering these questions directly and cogently, the scholarship might come to understand better what was at stake in both of their lives and the struggle for human dignity in the twentieth century.

In the first half of the twentieth centuries both thinkers challenged Untouchability in their respective contexts. After addressing many false ideas of race which Du Bois disputed over the course of his life, he finally turned to the metaphor of the group-enclosure of Black people within a secluded caste in *Dusk of Dawn* as the most apt description for how the racial ideology of white supremacy functioned to dominate and control Black lives. In *Souls of Black Folk,* Du Bois sought to communicate across the Veil of Race and share with readers around the world that the "spiritual strivings" of Black people need to be heard and respected, and not ignored out of a belief in Black inferiority. Ambedkar participated in struggles to access public water-tanks, to attend schools, and universities, and experienced exclusion and Untouchability himself all through his life, and wrote *Waiting for a Visa* to tell bring his readers close to the experience of the shock of being *made* Untouchable by one's dominant-caste colleagues and friends, by Hindu-caste ideologies.

By the second half of the twentieth century, Black feminist and Ambedkarite feminist movements came to radically transform the conditions of everyday life in both US and Indian society by demanding the right to dignity and mutual respect from the ground up through religious education programmes, school and university programmes, and through taking militant leadership in social organising against violence and racial and caste-atrocities. This work laid the foundations for the legal challenges to Untouchability which were to follow in both India and the United States. The Indian Constitution abolished untouchability in 1950, and the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 in the US finally made into legislation the work that was done over decades by feminist

organisers to make mutual and respectful relationships between different groups of people possible. And yet the limitations of these victories were visible to Ambedkar, Du Bois, and many of their comrades at the time. This is why the second chapter looks at the question of education and how Du Bois and Ambedkar – perhaps implicitly, I am careful not to make a causal claim or claim of direct influence here, though both were deeply committed struggles against patriarchal social ideologies – reflected on the successful of feminist comrades to propose their philosophies of education. This educational work would be envisioned as the generational, individual-by-individual, intimate, ordinary labour that would over time come to build social and political consensus on the value of a dignified life for every human being. The scarcity and deprivation produced by political economic relations of hierarchy and exploitation, the terrors of war produced by empire and nation-states, and the relentless contempt of those who considered themselves powerful to those they considered sub-human, would all have to be faced with courage and unity by both Du Bois' and Ambedkar's comrades in the coming decades. Shailaja Paik[22], P. Sanal Mohan[23], V. Geetha[24], S.V. Rajadurai[25], Ramnarayan Rawat[26], Gail Omvedt[27], Rosalind

[22] Shailaja Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India* (London: Routledge, 2014).
[23] P. Sanal Mohan, *The Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[24] V. Geetha, *Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and the Question of Socialism in India* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021).
[25] V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, *Towards A Non-Brahmin Millenium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar* (Kolkata: Samya Books, 1998).
[26] Ramnarayan Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).
[27] Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994).

O'Hanlon[28], Eleanor Zelliot[29], K. Satyanarayana[30], Aniket Jaaware[31] and Gajendran Ayyathurai[32] have done incredibly thorough historical and conceptual work in tracing the long arc of the movement against caste and untouchability across South Asia. I build on Paik's methodological insight in *The Vulgarity of Caste: Dalits, Sexuality, and Humanity in Modern India* that touchable elites in Western India constructed caste and its "normativizing power" and constantly "altered and updated" their frameworks to fit their requirements.[33] Over time, caste as defined and constructed by touchable elites "mutated to keep its systemic structure and hierarchy intact and protect its beneficiaries".[34] Drawing on Ambedkar, Paik argues that caste was a system of "graded inequality" where human beings were ranked and assigned value where "the higher the grade of a caste the greater the number of these [social and religious] rights and also the greater amount of decency its members supposedly possessed. Conversely, the lower the grade of the caste, the fewer the rights and the more likely its members were to be indecent and hence contemptible.".[35] In her book, Paik traces how touchable elites constructed and performed categories of *asli-ashlil* (pure-vulgar),and how Dalits aspired to *manuski* (humanity, mutual respect) and navigated the coercive relationships of power, violence, and exploitation that they had to navigate to live their lives. Paik's naming of the sex-gender-caste complex as the fundamental matrix through which the sexual and gender violence of caste was made to be the norm by touchable elites and other dominant caste

[28] Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Cambridge South Asian Studies, no. 30 (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
[29] Eleanor Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*, 2nd Edition (New Delhi: Navayana, 2013).
[30] Ramnarayan Rawat and K. Satyanarayana, eds., *Dalit Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
[31] Aniket Jaaware, *Practicing Caste: On Touching and Not Touching* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).
[32] Gajendran Ayyathurai, 'Memory, History and Casteless Consciousness: Tamil Buddhists in Modern South India', *South Asian History and Culture* 14, no. 1 (2023): 9–26.
[33] Shailaja Paik, *The Vulgarity of Caste: Dalits, Sexuality, and Humanity in Modern India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022), 13–17.
[34] Ibid., p. 16
[35] Ibid., p. 17.

individuals towards Dalit women, and her attention to the constant shifts in articulation of this sex-gender-caste complex over the course of the twentieth century in Maharashtra is extremely salutary in grounding this dissertation's claim that caste and untouchability were constructed, historical phenomena that made possible through hierarchical ideologies, particular configurations of power, and pervasive social violence. Reading caste as a product of the historical imposition of power by dominant elites enables Ambedkar, and indeed Du Bois, to articulate an alternative. If caste is constructed through touchable elites' maintenance of their dominance, it can be deconstructed and annihilated by transforming the preconditions for their dominance: their hold on civil society and culture, their hold on land and economic power, and their hold on the state and political power.

This dissertation also builds on the foundational work in Black studies done by Khalil Gibran Mohammad in *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime and the Making of Urban America*[36], Paul Gilroy in his book *Against Race*[37], Dorothy Roberts in her book *Killing the Black Body*[38], Barbara Fields and Karen Fields' in *Racecraft*[39], Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California*[40] and finally in Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor's work *Race for Profit.*[41] Muhammad traces in his book the history of how the myth of black criminality was constructed by the use of racialised statistical data in the first half of the twentieth century to produce a discourse that came to debate "blacks' fitness for modern

[36] Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).
[37] Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 2000).
[38] Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017).
[39] Barbara J. Fields and Karen E. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso Books, 2014).
[40] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
[41] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

life".[42] This category of criminality, much like the category of vulgarity discussed by Paik, came to justify punitive and carceral solutions and further, to justify a particular punitive isolation of Black communities by white working-class, white ethnic and other immigrant communities in the United States, and made legible Blackness as a "problem" for the country. Black men were especially vulnerable to the policing, stigma, and contempt enabled by the racialised construction of "black criminality." Roberts argues in her book that Black women's reproductive liberty was always seen as a threat to the US' white supremacist social order (in Paik's terms, a sex-gender-race order), and so since the founding of the colonies into the modern day, the US state, medical communities, white liberals and conservatives alike, sought to police Black women's sexuality and reproductive freedoms: "Blaming Black mothers, then, is a way of subjugating the Black race as a whole.".[43] Black motherhood came to hold the "weight of disgrace manufactured in both popular culture and academic circles": over the course of her book Roberts describes how exactly it came to do so[44]. Ruth Wilson Gilmore's book *Golden Gulag* describes how the surplus populations created by the economic depression in California in the 1970s (post the Vietnam war) were made to be productive by becoming prisoners who could be incarcerated in expensive prisons staffed by community members in rural California, and how increasingly punitive laws and racist discourses legitimised this vast humanitarian crisis.[45] Finally, Yamahtta-Taylor's book *Race for Profit* describes how poor Black people across the US in the second half of the twentieth century fell prey to an extremely exploitative real estate sector and real estate finance sector which lent to

[42] Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*, 1–14.
[43] Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, 10.
[44] Ibid., p. 21.
[45] Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*.

them on predatory terms and made impossible the development of savings and wealth for Black families.[46]

Each of these book detail the way in which racist ideologies came to function in extremely sophisticated ways to justify myths of criminality and criminalisation of Black youth; the disgrace, medical control, and experimentation on Black mothers; the vast expansion of incarceration and expansion of the carceral state with its weight landing squarely on Black and brown communities in response to economic crisis; and finally the implementation of racist systems of valuation to deny Black homeowners consistent capital or value on the real-estate that they came to purchase. At every step of the way, "blackness" imagined as a mythical site for white social control, exploitation, violence and disposability was constructed by particular actors at particular times for particular ends. In their historical precision about the creation of racial knowledge that was used to control and harm Black people, these books and the vast body of knowledge in Black studies form an important backdrop to this dissertation and its approach to understanding race and racial ideology.

Simultaneously, Blackness was also constructed and defended by those racialised as "black" as a liberatory community identity that sought to protect Black life against these powerful historical forces, build solidarity with other racially oppressed and class-oppressed communities in the US and around the world, and bring into being a truly free, egalitarian society unencumbered by white-supremacist mythologies and operations of political-economic exploitation. Michael Dawson's

[46] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 22–23.

Blacks in and out of the Left[47] as well as *Black Visions*[48] offer two perceptive accounts of the diversity of Black political ideologies and how they came to practice alternative forms of solidarity and community politics to white liberal and white conservative subjects. And so as much as one needs to be careful to reject blackness as a historically constructed category imposed by white-supremacist practices and structures of social power and dominance, one needs to also respect Blackness as a category of unity forged out of centuries of a people's struggle for freedom, self-respect, and universal liberation. This dissertation will presuppose both.

By bringing the struggle for Black liberation in conversation with the struggle against caste and Untouchability, this dissertation hopes to show that their encounter and their deep imbrication over history was inevitable. As new forms of racial ideology and fascist discourse attempt to naturalise and impose old styles of hierarchy on the marginalised of the world, the solidarities we build, conceptually, politically, and practically in our everyday lives, will prove necessary for the liberation to come.

[47] Michael C. Dawson, *Blacks in and out of the Left* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[48] Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Chapter 1 – **Uplift, Teaching, and the Impossibility of Progress in Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk***

Introduction

In this chapter I present a reading of Du Bois' autobiographical writings by focussing exclusively on his text: *Souls of Black Folk*. This allows me to situate how the experience of travel informed his early thought on pedagogy and its importance to his vision of social reform. Du Bois in *Souls* articulates a project of spiritual pedagogy that teaches both his white and his Black audiences about the social conditions facilitating the racialised oppression of Black people at the time. He emphasise in particular the importance of economic redistribution in the South, the collusion of Northern liberals and Southern landowners in reversing the gains of Reconstruction, the importance of an assertive Black group leadership that demands the expansion of public schools and institutions of higher education for Black children, and finally a spiritual project of living out the highest ideals of American democracy by adhering to the transformative aspirations of the Black freedom struggle. In *Souls*, Du Bois' travels to the South inform his understanding of the stakes of the social contestation necessary to ensure Black freedom. Du Bois' travels to China and the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s inform his move to a project of internationalist solidarity that presupposes an audience of Black and brown colonised peoples acting collectively to end the conditions of their oppression. For this moment, I turn to a close reading of Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk*.

Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk* was published in 1903 and was a collection of essays written explicitly to tell to "sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand

thousand Americans live and strive".[1] He wrote these essays in the late 1890s and early 1900s. They were informed by his time studying the Negro Problem in Philadelphia at the University of Pennsylvania, his time studying and researching African-American history at Harvard college and at Fisk, and closest to the time of his writing and publishing the book, they were informed by his time in Georgia, where he was hired recently as a professor at Atlanta University. Movement, travel, and how space is divided by experiences of racialisation are key themes discussed throughout the text. Given its first-person address and thematic reliance on autobiographical reflections, it is well worth exploring the question of Du Bois' approach to travel and space in this book as a way of representing the question of how racialisation affects space, and how the experiences of travel across different spaces – from the north-east to the South, from Atlanta to Alexandria, Tennessee, are key stages where he can describe how racialisation operates to delimit and differentiate human experiences, and even basic political terms such as "freedom" or "progress". Before I offer an interpretation of the centrality of the *Meaning of Progress* to the argument of *Souls* as a text, and further, to Du Bois' autobiographical reflections on the value of education in a racialised political economy, this section will offer context on what *Souls* endeavours to accomplish, what the essays immediately prior to *The Meanings of Progress* (*Of The Dawn of Freedom* and *Of Booker T. Washington and others*) have to say about the questions that Du Bois is pursuing in this early autobiographical text.

"Of the Meaning of Progress" is a fascinating autobiographical entry in the broader argument of *Souls*. In the *Forethought* of the text, Du Bois describes the structure of his argument. The text as

[1] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. David W. Blight and Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Bedford/St.Martin's, 1997), 34–35.

a whole describes the "spiritual world" in which African-Americans live.[2] In the first two chapters, Du Bois endeavours to describe what the consequences of emancipation and its aftermath have been for African-Americans. In the third chapter he discusses the "slow rise of personal leadership", and criticises the prominent leader of his time, Booker T. Washington. Then he sets up two chapters, one "Of the Meaning of Progress," and right after, "On the Wings of Atalanta", which he describes as *sketching in swift outline* "the two worlds within and without the Veil".[3] Sketching in swift outline the worlds that are within and without the Veil enables him to come to what he calls the central problem: that of "training men for life".[4] The subsequent chapters cover the history and experiences of the Black peasantry (*Of the Black Belt*); the political economy undergirding their exploitation by white property owners (*Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece*); the rising hatred of white people towards Black people in the South (*Of the Sons of Master and Man*); the history of the Black church and its recent divisions (*Of the Faith of the Fathers)*; the experience of losing his first-born sitting with a sense that his child was fortunate to have escaped the fate of living within the monstrous Veil (*Of the Passing of the First-Born*), the radical fire of his mentor Alexander Crummell, how he spent his life righteously fighting white supremacy and how much the world lost in never learning about the significance of Crummell's work (*Of Alexander Crummell);* of two men named John from Altamaha in South-eastern Georgia, one white and one Black, the white John the son of a local judge and the other, and the Black John from a poor family who devotes his life to teaching fellow African-Americans in Altamaha and is eventually being banned from running a school by the white-supremacist local judge (*Of the Coming of John*), and finally a chapter titled *The Sorrow Songs* about the songs of African-Americans through history

[2] Du Bois, 34.
[3] Du Bois, 34.
[4] Du Bois, 34.

as they carry the memory of the tremendous sufferings of slavery while holding on to a faith in the "ultimate justice of things".[5]

Throughout *Souls*, Du Bois is engaged in a self-consciously pedagogical practice of writing. The questions of what is to be taught to the reader are raised in the famous *Forethought*: "the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century" .[6] Du Bois brings up the metaphor of the Veil in this Forethought as a way of making *visible* the operations of racialisation: "Leaving, then the world of the white man, I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses…".[7] In terms of pedagogical audience, Du Bois' suggestion here is that *Souls* is speaking to a white reader who has not been able to see within the Veil, who would not ordinarily understand the meaning of being black in a white-supremacist society, and would perhaps not even understand the *souls* of those he has been taught to see as less-than-human.

Gaines' *Uplifting the Race* offers useful historical context in helping me frame my reading of Du Bois' *Souls* as a pedagogical text. In his study, Gaines' examines the writings of key African-American intellectuals in the 1900s to find that many shared what he broadly calls "uplift ideology".[8] This ideology was part of a shared discourse amongst middle-class African-American writers and cultural workers who were articulating a collective response to the horrors of white-supremacist domination and the establishment of the Jim Crow social order by the US state and its leading politicians. In their writing to Black audiences, uplift ideology also held together particular

[5] Du Bois, 192.
[6] Du Bois, 34.
[7] Du Bois, 34–35.
[8] Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

attachments to ideals of "bourgeois morality, patriarchal authority, and a culture of self-improvement" as key to the progress of the African-American race as a whole, and as Gaines describes it for the leaders of uplift, "as necessary to their recognition, enfranchisement, and survival as a class".[9] Gaines' project is to examine how the tensions and contradictions of uplift ideology worked to legitimate hierarchies within African-American communities: namely those of class and gender.[10] Further, Gaines' also studies the tension that emerged when Black elites' presentation and understanding of themselves *as* an elite came up against a society and popular culture that "relentlessly denied that status".[11] Certain formulations of uplift ideology came to define the project of social reform in "narrow, racial, masculinist, and class-specific terms".[12] Gaines reads for these moments of narrowness in the writings of his protagonists, as well as moments of democratic potential, where articulations of uplift challenged white-supremacist framings of Black personhood and imagined in their particulars pragmatic steps towards a liberated world.

Du Bois' autobiographical and pedagogical project in *Souls* contends with the contradictions that Gaines' identifies in African-American public writings as the ideology of uplift. As I have discussed above, Du Bois' aim in the Forethought of *Souls* is to introduce to his readers the world "behind the Veil", to offer a picture and a sense of music of the spiritual strivings of ten thousand thousand Americans. In striving for this purpose of finding some common ground with white readers' presuppositions about African-Americans, Du Bois must contend with and challenge the

[9] Gaines, 3.
[10] Gaines, 13–17.
[11] Gaines, 14.
[12] Gaines, 17.

commonly held racist tropes of the Black working class as well as the rural Black peasantry in the South. A key instance of this dialogue occurs in the conclusion of his essay *Of The Training of Black Men*, where he presents the importance of college education as necessary for the successful integration of the majority of Black people into a flourishing national culture, lest their spirit "grasps a gospel of revolt and revenge and throws its new-found energies athwart the current of advance.".[13] The arguments of *Souls* run to disprove the commonly held views on race held by Southern whites of the plantocracy, as well as to challenge the accommodationist Black political leadership of Booker T. Washington which emphasises industrial training and political acquiescence to Southern plantocracy with the aim of building economic self-sufficiency and a vision of power for the distant future. And so in the context of Gaines' discussion of the contradictions of uplift ideology, *Souls* is positioned as a challenge to what Du Bois sees as a particularly elitist and narrow form of uplift ideology as held by Booker T. Washington.

Souls' relationship to Uplift Ideology

And yet, in advocating for the education of a talented tenth of African-Americans who will be responsible for educating and effectively leading the race into an integrated and prosperous twentieth century American society, *Souls* remains a form of self-consciously elitist uplift ideology. Uplift functions in two significant forms of argument in Du Bois' use of autobiography in souls. One is the form of the movement of time and space, Du Bois' travels to the rural South help designate the movement to the living past where education and a certain beneficent teaching needs to occur to help form the democratic Black citizen. And second, the role of teachers and

[13] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 100–101.

preachers, those who form the elite cadre of Black educators and who are in Du Bois' view, the democratic vanguard that will instil in the white compatriots that they educate, and the Black students and neighbours that they inspire, a new respect and a newfound understanding of the possibilities of human intellect as such. The project of *Souls* is of pedagogical uplift, of both the oppressed and the oppressors in the United States. In its form, it describes the tragedy and the tremendous difficulties that Black teachers face in carrying this project out.

Souls as a whole pursues a complex conversation on the stakes of education as an institution of social and spiritual reform: as a question of political philosophy as a question of community practice, and as a question of personal engagement. The question of educational philosophy that Du Bois pursues in *Souls*: is what kind of education is most appropriate for the generations of African-Americans who are struggling to make ends meet and face constant disrespect and humiliation from white elites and the white masses alike? The question of community practice that Du Bois pursues is: what are the existing educational institutions in the South that carry out the work of educating Black people and how can they be improved? The question of personal engagement that Du Bois pursues in this text is: what does it mean to be teaching those who are seen as a "problem"?

To understand the importance of teaching to Du Bois' argument, I turn to his discussion of the halted work of the Freedmen's Bureau in the second essay of *Souls*: *Of the Dawn of Freedom*. In this essay, Du Bois describes the early history of the Freedmen's Bureau post the emancipation of Black Americans. It was the government-run institution that was to take "assume charge of the

emancipated Negro as the ward of the Nation".[14] It sought to redistribute land and establish emancipated Black people as small landholders, it sought to apportion work and income, it helped establish free elementary schooling for all in the South, it sought to provide housing for Black freedmen, it provided basic healthcare to those who needed it, and it sought to establish the recognition of the civil rights of Black people in the courts of the South.[15] Social and political opposition to the Freedmen's Bureau, in the form of Southern politicians that blocked its operations at the Congressional level ultimately defeated the work and practical operations of the institution. In Du Bois' view, "political exigencies, the opposition to government guardianship of Negroes, and the attachment to the slave system", all worked to defeat the creation of a permanent Freedmen's Bureau that might have systematically attended to the many institutional problems of poverty, lack of civil rights, systematic white supremacist violence by the state and civil society, and landlessness, that Du Bois names as establishing the Negro Problem, that *Souls* is written to elucidate.[16]

Du Bois concludes *Of the Dawn of Freedom* with a consideration of what the Freedmen's Bureau failed to accomplish. This failure defined its role in *Souls*' conception of American history. The Freedmen's Bureau did not accomplish the social reform project it was tasked to do because it "*could not*" do that work.[17] Du Bois' writing here plays with a sense of the impossibility of the project of Black freedom in the face of institutional white supremacy. The institution was "unthinkable in 1870" due to its own self-regard as a temporary stop-gap and its focus on voting

[14] Du Bois, 50.
[15] Du Bois, 54–59.
[16] Du Bois, 60.
[17] Du Bois, 60–61.

rights as the only form of political intervention.[18] The oppression and domination of the Negro at the time of Du Bois' writing is comprehensive: "the Negro is not free".[19] In the far-flung reaches of the "Gulf States", he is confined to the plantation in which he was born; outside the cities in the South the Black farmer is bound to an "economic slavery", "from which the only escape is death or the penitentiary"; within the cities of the South, Black people are a "segregated servile caste"; while before the courts they face "a different and peculiar" treatment.[20] While cataloguing the comprehensiveness of the oppression of Black people, Du Bois retains a notion of the uplift of Black underclass when he states that the result of this oppression is "and in nature must have been, lawlessness and crime".[21] Du Bois here is playing with the discourse surrounding the Negro Problem that seeks to find it in the "nature" of Black people, suggesting instead that by nature any society subjected to this form of oppression must only have its pathologies result in "lawlessness and crime". Th problem of the lack of financial prudence and a general disinterest in the higher ideals amongst certain Black people that Du Bois encounters in his travels remains a consistent theme all the way through this text. I shall return to this in a later chapter as we discuss how his thinking changes from a faithful commitment to liberal democratic politics to an internationalist communist politics in his later autobiographical writings. And further relevant to this phenomenon is how his thinking changes from working to teach white people to function as responsible liberal citizens, to working to build organisational power such that white civil society loses its veto power on the workings of American democracy and its hold on a war-making imperialist political economy as such.

[18] Du Bois, 60.
[19] Du Bois, 60.
[20] Du Bois, 60–61.
[21] Du Bois, 61.

After describing the historical predicament that the failure of the Freedmen's Bureau has left democracy in the United States, the next essay discusses the work of Booker T. Washington and briefly stages the debate between industrial and liberal education for African-American students in the 1900s. For the purposes of my discussion of Du Bois' understanding of the importance of education for social reform: I will now discuss his two essays Of *Booker T. Washington and Others* and *Of the Training of Black Men* as parts of the larger argument of *Souls of Black Folk.* In *Of Booker T. Washington and Others*, Du Bois contextualises the rise of Booker T. Washington in Southern politics in a larger framework of the history of African-American group leadership, and more specifically, in terms of an analysis of the relationships of power that Washington's programme assembles to accomplish its goals.

The Political Inadequacy of Washington's Agenda of Conciliation and Industrial Education

First, Du Bois names three forms of political mobilisation that have characterised the history of the African-American people who have faced imprisonment not just by their natural environment, but also by their "environment of men and ideas". These forms are: "a feeling of revolt and revenge; an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater group; or, finally a determined effort at self-realisation and self-development despite the environing opinion" .[22] In the following lines Du Bois notes how before 1750, the leadership of African enslaved people acted with the "one motive of revolt and revenge", which he found "typified in the terrible

[22] Du Bois, 65.

Maroons, the Danish blacks, and Cato of Stono".[23] He contrasts this with a "liberalising" tendency in the politics of African resistance developing in the latter half of the eighteenth century, of whom he finds Phyllis Wheatley, Crispus Atticus, Peter Salem, Salem Poor, Benjamin Banneker, and Paul Cuffe as key examples.[24] Note how he places the emergence of particular forms of Black politics within the historical context that he adduces as key to their emergence. Before 1750 there is a connection to Maroon communities which enables the radical politics of Black revolt. After 1750, he names a number of different Black political figures with varying politics, some of them participants in the American revolution against the British, suggesting that the politics of the settler-colonists' promises of freedom for enslaved Africans who fought on their side combined with the idealistic mood of the declaration of independence made more "liberalising" tendencies in politics possible.

Du Bois' study of the development of Black politics through history continues as he divides the conditions of possibility for Black political mobilisation between the North and the South. Given that the American war for settler independence did not bring about an abolition of slavery, the urgent movement for emancipation manifested in two movements. In the South, enslaved people inspired by the Haitian revolution conducted three notable rebellions: "in 1800 under Gabriel in Virginia, in 1822 under Vesey in Carolina, and in 1831 again in Virginia under the terrible Nat Turner".[25] While in the Northern States, where slavery had been gradually abolished and some free Black communities built support-systems for themselves, "a new and curious attempt self-

[23] Du Bois, 65.
[24] Du Bois, 65.
[25] Du Bois, 66.

development was made".[26] This was the creation of the African Church, partly due to the excommunication of Black congregants from white churches in Philadelphia and New York due to colour-bars on membership. And so the period of the 1780s to 1830s is characterised by Du Bois as a time of self-development and self-organisation in the North and rebellion, inspired by the Haitian revolution in the South. These historical movements then lay the ground for the next period of Black history, and another movement in between the three options of revolt, compromise to the greater majority, and self-development.

In the 1830s, Black politics in the South had taken on the spirit of submission.[27] In the North, the free Black people demanded "assimilation and amalgamation with the nation on the same terms as other men". They sought recognition as "people of color", not "Negroes" and yet only gained it in "individual and exceptional cases", and further they were threatened with the loss of their rights to vote and work and move as freemen. Here Du Bois names the founders of American Anti-Slavery Society: "Forten and Purvis of Philadelphia, Shad of Wilmington, Du Bois of New Haven, and Barbadoes of Boston".[28] This movement in the North crystallised in schemes for migration and colonization and ultimately into the Abolition movement. Here the leaders Remond, Wells-Brown and Frederick Douglass reconciled the two goals of ultimate freedom and assimilation with self-reliant self-development. John Brown's raid was "the extreme of its logic" of the self-assertion of Black people in pursuit of their freedom.[29] After Emancipation and the Civil War, Reconstruction began and less famous but "socially significant" politicians Alexander Crummell

[26] Du Bois, 66.
[27] Du Bois, 66.
[28] Du Bois, 66.
[29] Du Bois, 66.

and Bishop Daniel Payne led Black politics. So from 1830s to 1870s, self-assertion and the aspiration for equality, and finally the desire for radical revolt all aligned to make great strides in Black self-organisation according to Du Bois.

From 1876 onwards the counter-revolution to Reconstruction began, "the suppression of Negro votes, the changing and shifting of ideals, and the seeking of new lights in the great night".[30] Douglass fought for "ultimate assimilation through self-assertion, and on no other terms".[31] But unfortunately the leaders who might have mobilised in terms of radical revolt, self-development, and ultimate equality between people were "little known outside their race, leaving a vacuum for Booker T. Washington to fill as an effective "compromiser between the South, the North, and the Negro".[32] There was a moment when another leader, Price who tried to "re-state the old ideals in a form less repugnant to the white South", but he passed away too early to make a lasting impact. Booker T. Washington then in Du Bois' reading took advantage of the interests of the North which was disinterested in Black liberation and was invested in the Southern economy, and sought conciliation between Black freedmen and white-supremacist landowners who retained a great deal of power despite the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau to instantiate some land redistribution. The power of Northern investment in Washington's leadership led to those criticising Washington's leadership to be "silenced".

Du Bois' critique of Washington's leadership comes from a study of Black history and the different forms of leadership that were apposite to the old ideals of self-development, adjustment to the

[30] Du Bois, 66.
[31] Du Bois, 66.
[32] Du Bois, 67.

majority, and the feeling of revolt and revenge. At different moments, Black political leadership sought an accommodation with "the environing opinion" due to the overwhelming white supremacist power-structures that underpinned racial hierarchies that made such sustained rebellion and autonomous self-development difficult to organise over long periods of time. The Black insurrections of the South from the 1780s to the 1830s succeeded in expanding the movement for freedom but ultimately were violently repressed. The development of the African Church concomitantly in the North would provide a historic foundation for the organising and community-building for generations to come. Both attempts at organising Black politics were circumscribed by the relations of force in which they were made, and yet they brought forward the self-development and self-consciousness of the Black freedom movement as narrated by Du Bois in this essay. These adjustments had been creatively accomplished during the height of the abolitionist movement from the 1830s to the 1860s under the leadership of Frederick Douglass amongst many others. These leaders including Alexander Crummell and Bishop Daniel Payne organised the self-assertion of Black communities, and simultaneously made universalist demands for the exercise of their "manhood rights". Black self-development, the challenge to white-supremacist power relations that governed towns and cities, and the ultimate egalitarian ideal of the right to vote, to organise, to move, and to work freely all were brought together by this creative and dynamic generation of Black leadership willing to take risks, to seek "assimilation *through* self-assertion, and no other terms".[33] Assimilation through self-assertion meant that the polity itself would be transformed through the rise of Black self-development. The process of challenge to these racial power-structures would bring about a form of assimilation that would not continue to degrade and humiliate Black political subjects. Black self-assertion and self-respect through the

[33] Du Bois, 66–67.

means of antagonistic politics along with a transformative political vision would reconstitute the conditions of hegemony in US civil society, and reverse the terms of coercion exercised on Black people and the consent demanded by white-supremacists. It is precisely this imaginative reconciliation of the politics of self-assertion, rebellion, and transformative political change which changes the conditions of power not only as they oppress Black people but also consist in an exercise of power and victory over white-supremacist structures that brings about emancipation, and which post-1876, in the backlash to Black emancipation, is given up on by Booker T. Washington's conciliatory leadership.

And so Du Bois' critique of Washington is not about the different values that Washington preaches to Black communities, but is rather a strategic and *political* critique about what he believes are the conditions of possibility for Black freedom at different historical conjunctures in American history. What makes Washington's policy of appeasement of white majority power to secure some basic livelihood gains for Black people unique is that it comes at "such a peculiar time".[34] From 1876 onwards, the Republican party gave up on the cause of emancipated Black people in the South in the face of threats of the Southern Democrats to instigate another civil war.[35] By the 1890s, the white-supremacist attempt to reinstate the enslavement of Black people through the Jim Crow laws and through periodic public lynching as documented and opposed by Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Du Bois argues that in such a time in the past "all the Negro's tendency to self-assertion has been called forth", and yet in what Washington was recommending, "a policy of submission" was being advocated.[36] Washington's policy "of submission" then is one that accedes to the power that

[34] Du Bois, 67.
[35] Annotation by Blight and Gooding-Williams in Du Bois, 197–98.
[36] Du Bois, 67.

Northern capital and the Southern plantocracy hold over disenfranchised Black people at the time. The submission according to Du Bois consists in reducing the focus on the struggle for political power, giving up on civil rights and finally giving up the higher education for Black youth to focus instead on "industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South". Washington and his supporters might argue that given these conditions of violence, these terms of submission are the only course available for survival.[37] Du Bois' disagreement with this strategy lies in his historical analysis which demands that when white supremacist political actors are trying to grab power, the defence of Black civil rights, political power, and right to higher education for its youth becomes imperative. The three demands fit together as they help form a larger cadre of leadership which can, like the generations of Douglass and Crummell in the past, reconcile the purpose of Black self-development with a practical transformation of a white-supremacist social order into one where equality between racialised groups is respected.

Du Bois notes that those Black politicians descended from the tradition of Black rebellion, that of Toussaint L'Ouverture, disagree with the assimilationist aims of Washington and seek to emigrate out of the United States.[38] This is futile as Du Bois points to the US' moves to colonise West Indies, Hawaii and the Philippines, asking, "for where in the world may we go and be safe from lying and brute force?" .[39] The other set of Black politicians are loathe to criticise Washington publicly but broadly seek the right to vote, civic equality, and the education of Black youth according to ability. They hold with Du Bois the belief that "there is a demand for a few such institutions throughout the south to train the best of the Negro youth as teachers, professional men,

[37] Du Bois, 67.
[38] Du Bois, 68.
[39] Du Bois, 68.

and leaders".[40] This demand, as Gooding-Williams also argues in his reading of Du Bois, is for the cultivation of an effective talented tenth of Black leadership.[41] A leadership educated in the highest ideals of civilisation, through the access to institutions of higher education and through their participation in Black civic institutions, will be most effective in shepherding those Black community members who are less educated and also in navigating the politics of white institutions in imaginative and transformative ways to instantiate an egalitarian state and civil society.

Du Bois ends his essay on Booker T. Washington on the inadequacy of the considerations of power and what might be more efficacious given the constraints of the relations of force operating at the time as determining the choice for his readers to make. The task he proposes is a spiritual one, the task of saving the soul of the United States as a whole:

> "The South ought to be led, by candid and honest criticism, to assert her better self and do her full duty to the race she has cruelly wronged and is still wronging. The North – her co-partner in guilt – cannot solve her conscience by plastering it with gold. We cannot settle this problem by diplomacy and suaveness, by "policy" alone. If worse come to worst, can the moral fibre of the country survive the slow throttling and murder of nine millions of men?".[42]

Du Bois' invocation of the "moral fibre of the country" as the central task ahead brings me to the spiritual dimension of his argument for pedagogy as key to Black liberation. Survival in mere physical and economic terms is not enough if it means that the "moral fibre" of white people in

[40] Du Bois, 69.
[41] Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 157–61.
[42] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 72.

the country dies, and the "slow throttling and murder" of nine million African-Americans continues through Jim Crow institutions and white-supremacist violence. The work of teachers and spiritual leaders, those talented tenth that Du Bois later theorises in *The Training of Black Men* is precisely to keep the moral fibre of the country alive through more humane forms of pedagogy and liberatory practice.

The Spiritual Task of Black Pedagogy

In the first section of this chapter, I discussed the problem of uplift ideology and how within the history of African-American politics an elitist politics of uplift and reform has often worked to legitimate the Black elite at the time. I then discussed how *Souls* is self-consciously a project of uplift ideology and the cultivation of a principled Black elite class through the project of pedagogy. To better understand Du Bois' version of a democratic form of uplift, I closely read his essay *On Booker T. Washington* to demonstrate the differences between Washington's form of uplift ideology and Du Bois' form in *Souls*. Du Bois' theory of the importance of elite pedagogy is best understood as an attempt to reimagine the stakes of Black politics in response to Washington's conciliation with white-supremacist institutions in the South and in the North and the larger trend towards racial violence against Black people over the course of the 1890s. This is connected to the imaginative project of *Souls* as a whole because the book attempts to outline the "spiritual strivings" that characterise the Black struggle for freedom, and outline the terms on which politicians can best articulate their vision for freedom. Gooding-Williams describes these terms as

a form of democratic expressivism: that those who best match the qualities of the *volk* are best suited to lead and speak in its name.[43]

As I discussed in the previous section, Du Bois believes that a knowledge of Black history and contemporary social institutions is necessary for his readership to best understand why Washington's choices are flawed, and what kind of leadership is needed in response to the specific occasion of his writing *Souls*. This occasion is a moment of deep counter-revolution where rising white-supremacist violence, Jim Crow codes being applied across the South, and a complicit Northern industrial class are all instituting a roll-back to Black civil and economic rights that were won during the moment of emancipation and Reconstruction. To pragmatically best defend these basic rights: the right to a vote, the right to civic equality, and the right to a higher education, Black leadership in the twentieth century must be focussed on cultivating an elite that can imaginatively transform public institutions so as to make the ordinary exercise of racial harm impossible. This is not only a pragmatic task but also *spiritual* task designed to ensure that the moral fibre of American society survives and does not continue in its "slow throttling of nine millions of men". In this section, I will consider why this spiritual task consists in pedagogical work for Du Bois. I will do so by first reading his argument for the talented tenth in his essay *Of the Training of Black Men*. Then I will discuss how Du Bois' focus on spiritual education reflects a sense of pessimism about the pace of change in American society. Given the lack of a fighting Black elite class that it might take many years to cultivate and organise in 1903 when *Souls* was published, the slow, multi-generational work of teaching at the school and college level can carry out the spiritual task of

[43] Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America*, 147.

sensitising small groups of people to the deep racial injustices that characterise American civic life.

The need to build and expand institutions of higher education for African-Americans is a key step in Du Bois' argument for spiritual pedagogy as a central priority for Black leadership. In *Of the Training of Black Men,* Du Bois builds this argument to answer three "vast and partially contradictory streams of thought".[44] The first thought is Du Bois' sense of historical time in 1903: there is an intensifying contact and spirit for life and exchange rapidly developing amongst peoples across the world. Du Bois describes this as "a new human unity, pulling the ends of earth nearer, and all men, black, yellow and white".[45] This moment of global contact is driven by the designs of United States and European imperial projects. And so this larger majority of humanity, in Du Bois' poetic presentation, fears the death-making institutions that such empires bring: "If the contact of life and sleep be Death, shame on such Life".[46] The second thought is about the legacy of slavery and how it has denied Black people the right to be recognised as fully human. This is the obstruction of white-supremacy as an ideological and as a social system. Du Bois describes this as "the thought of the older South, - the sincere and passionate belief that somewhere between men and cattle, god created a *tertium quid,* and called it a Negro, - but straitly foreordained to walk within the Veil".[47] Not only does the older South continue to hold this contemptuous view of African-Americans but seeks to make this ideology material in its practices of domination and exclusion, "some of them with favouring chance might become men, but in sheer self-defence, we

[44] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 92.
[45] Du Bois, 90.
[46] Du Bois, 90.
[47] Du Bois, 90.

dare not let them, and we build about them walls so high, and hang between them and the light a veil so thick, that they shall not even think of breaking through".[48] The third and final thought setting up the problem of education is that of Black people themselves making sense of their predicament: "the confused, half-conscious mutter of men who are black and whitened, crying "liberty, Freedom, Opportunity – vouchsafe to us O boastful World, the chance of living men!". Du Bois adds another afterthought to this, the experience of internalised self-doubt: "suppose, after all, the World is right and we are less than men? Suppose this mad impulse within is all wrong, some mock mirage from the untrue?".[49] The three thoughts put together describe the sociological challenge that Du Bois' vision of spiritual pedagogy offers an answer to. The first thought describes the global predicament of economic growth and the rapid expansion of Western empires, the second that of the white-supremacist majority opinion that dehumanises Black people and seeks to maintain their second-class status, and the final the ideological situation amongst Black people themselves who are contesting for equal citizenship and their own self-doubts engendered by an environment of widespread race-hatred.

This predicament is quite fearful. The maintenance of white-supremacist institutions will serve to create a class of people who are exploited and subjected to violence to maintain their racialised and inferior status, the contact between peoples under the aegis of imperialist interests will serve to expand the category of those who are non-human to the "brown" and "yellow" peoples and will serve to extend their exploitation. Further, the continued violence experienced forcefully enacted on the racialised will generate within them a self-hatred that can make projects of collective trust,

[48] Du Bois, 91.
[49] Du Bois, 91.

solidarity very difficult: making impossible the conditions for imagining a different, more humane world. Du Bois' answer to this historical development of ideology as located in social processes of white-supremacist and imperialist institutions, is to set in motion new social processes of liberation through education. The fact of color-prejudice in the South can only be changed by "the breadth and broadening of human reason, by catholicity of taste and culture".[50] Du Bois describes education as the kind of "human training as will best use the labor of all men without enslaving or brutalizing; such training as will give us poise to encourage the prejudices that bulwark society, and to stamp out those that in sheer barbarity deafen us to the wail of prisoned souls within the Veil, and the mounting fury of Shackled men".[51] The spiritual pedagogy the Du Bois recommends teaches its students, the white audience especially, out of their practice of barbarity that deafens them to the "wail of prisoned souls". Further, education is a form of social practice that can ideally "best use the labor of all men" – it can cultivate the individuality of each student and fit them with the work best suited to them without "enslaving or brutalizing" them. For Black students at the time who were prohibited from learning how to read only a generation before, a form of education undertaken without cruelty and disrespect is a crucial life-making reform.

There are two key sites of education in Du Bois' framework: the public school and the college. As is his method throughout *Souls*, Du Bois briefly elaborates how after the Civil War, the development of African-American communities acted on and was affected by the institutional structures of white-supremacist coercion and the economic structures of social reproduction. First, the Freedman's Bureau set up the first public schools in the history of the country and attempted

[50] Du Bois, 91.
[51] Du Bois, 92.

to build a "complete school system" in the South. Colleges were also founded to train teachers who would staff the public school system. Then from 1895 onwards, the industrialisation of the South brought about "glimpses of a new destiny and the stirring of new ideals".[52] Negro colleges established to teach the next generation of Black teachers were "inadequately equipped, illogically distributed", while the public schools were training "but a third of the children who ought to be in them, and training these too often poorly".[53] The imposition of Jim Crow codes made the question of employment even more urgent for Black families – and so industrial schools were proposed as a solution to the crisis of unemployment and of a lack of available educational institutions for Black communities.[54] The larger argument of *Souls* and specifically *On the Training of Black Men,* is that a society organised solely around the ideal of profit will neither be able to properly address the needs of the poor nor will it be able to fight a culture of white-supremacist hatred and the institutional dehumanisation of Black people – and so industrial education for Black children as a means to bring about an increase in their livelihoods is an inadequate substitute to genuine ground-up social reform.

What do public schools and colleges achieve that industrial and vocational colleges would not in Du Bois' view? First, they produce a class of leadership who are "conservative, careful leaders" who are "seldom agitators", and "work steadily and faithfully" in communities in the South.[55] Second, to force Black children to live firmly within the Veil and have no opportunities to experience cultural practices reserved for the elite will create an "ignorant, turbulent proletariat",

[52] Du Bois, 92.
[53] Du Bois, 92–93.
[54] Du Bois, 93.
[55] Du Bois, 98.

on which "no secure civilization can be built".[56] This is why the "Talented Tenth" need to be given "the key to knowledge".[57] A cadre of teachers and college-educators need to be trained so that across the South "the present social separation and acute race-sensitiveness" gives way to "the influences of culture" as a part of the civilising process of the South.[58] Finally, the well-established, well-distributed, and well-staffed Black colleges will "maintain the standards of popular education" – they will train the teachers who will staff public schools and ensure that the ethical standards to which the children are taught to aspire are worthy of civilization and not the barbarity of white supremacy.

Du Bois presents the choice on higher education to his Southern planter audience as such:

> "Even to-day the masses of Negroes see all too clearly the anomalies of their position and the oral crookedness of yours. You may marshal strong indictments against them, but their counter-cries, lacking though they be in formal logic, have burning truths within them which you may not wholly ignore, O Southern Gentlemen!... And finally, when you fasten crime upon this race as its peculiar trait, they answer that slavery was the arch-crime, and lynching and lawlessness its twin abortion; that color and race are not crimes, and yet they it is which in this land receives most unceasing condemnation, North, East, South, and West."[59]

Du Bois also names the crimes of the white planter class against Black women in slaveholders' plantations as a key counter-accusation of "the masses of Negroes". It is striking that Du Bois

[56] Du Bois, 99.
[57] Du Bois, 97.
[58] Du Bois, 99.
[59] Du Bois, 100.

seeks to translate the masses' arguments, "though they be lacking in formal logic", to a higher philosophical register. He also distances himself from the idea that two sets of accusations between contending classes makes for an apt discussion about policy, saying that he does not believe such arguments are wholly justified. And so the fundamental dehumanisation of Black children works through the Southern planter class' belief that they are not worthy of higher things than labour. What the provision of higher education and school offers is the creation of an educated class that can speak back to institutional holders of white supremacist power, much as Du Bois does, and carefully plan a social order that is organised around friendship between racialised groups and a more efficient allocation of labour according to skill and talent rather than the effects of racialisation.

And so Du Bois' pedagogical project is best understood as putting forth the institutional and the individual ethical conditions under which the white-supremacist resurgence of the 1890s, the imperialist contact and economic growth of the 1890s and 1900s, and the healthy self-development of racialised minorities in the United States can all be thoughtfully addressed. Cultivating colleges and especially Black colleges and institutions will help develop the Talented Tenth of African-American communities who can provide careful and considered leadership and pedagogy to the rest. The alternative is continued racial conflict and economic exploitation and the exclusion of the vast majority of Black people from positions of social and economic power. This is imagined as part of a larger anti-hegemonic project of building lasting social coalitions that challenge white supremacy and the economic institutions of dispossession and wage-exploitation that sustain it. Refusing higher education to a few thousand African-Americans who seek it minimises the

possibility of a critical mass of electoral and public leadership emerging that challenges white power. As Du Bois describes the stakes:

> "The dangerously clear logic of the Negro's position will more and more loudly assert itself in that day when increasing wealth and more intricate social organization preclude the South from being, as it so clearly is, simply an armed camp for intimidating black folk."[60]

The logic of the Black person's position in the South demands that the increased economic development and complexity necessitated by new economic relations has to be accompanied by a cultural advance away from the racialised and hateful white public consciousness. And so cultivating and broadening that intermediary class of teachers, preachers, politicians, and cultural workers, who have historically been key to the advance of the Black freedom struggle will be crucial to its development in subsequent generations. The expansion of higher education and an education in the liberal arts is key because it demands that institutions are built and judged on whether they meet the criteria of civilised humaneness rather than the criteria of how much profit they can provide or whether they fit the interests of industrial or landowning ruling classes in the South. Of course, many of the projects of elite philanthropy have historically been built on claims for "civilising" society and advancing cultural progress – Du Bois' contribution to this field is to state that they need to be founded on explicitly addressing the racial political economy and racialised political culture that propagates exploitation and white elite rule in the South. The development of Black college institutions and the broadening of the Black elite is crucial to building a challenge to white elite power. But why stop at the Talented Tenth? Why not a college

[60] Du Bois, 100.

education for everyone? Is this not, as Gaines has suggested below and as Gooding-Williams argues in his book on Du Bois, a form of uplift ideology designed to favour those of Du Bois' own position? Indeed, the paternalism of Du Bois' prose in this essay is striking:

> "We shall hardly induce black men to believe that if their stomachs be full, it matters little about their brains. They already dimly perceive that the paths of peace winding between honest toil and dignified manhood call for the guidance of skilled thinkers, the loving, reverent comradeship between the black lowly and the black men emancipated by training and culture."[61]

There are those who are emancipated by training and culture that can provide guidance to the "black lowly", the unemancipated mass in need of development in Du Bois' framework. Du Bois' vision of spiritual pedagogy rests on a distinction between those who are emancipated and those who are not. In his book *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America*, Gooding-Williams insightfully describes the problem of the masses in Du Bois' political thought in *Souls*. The African-American masses in Gooding-Williams' close reading of Du Bois are unable to "comply with a broad range of behavioural and attitudinal norms, extending from sexual mores and entrepreneurial virtues (such as a disposition to industry) to law-abiding behaviour, respect for authority, and the cultivation of a catholic aesthetic sensibility".[62] The failure of the masses to meet these norms that Du Bois presupposes as necessary for civilizational advance means that all questions of political strategy and social reform need to go through the questions that we have discussed in this section: what are the white supremacist obstacles to Black self-development?

[61] Du Bois, 101.
[62] Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America*, 157.

What are the internal community obstacles to Black self-development? And finally, what are the institutions that can be built which can peacefully and carefully develop an adherence to these specific norms and virtues that characterise "high culture" and good civilised behaviour in Du Bois' view? Gooding-Williams argues that this presupposition of a normative set of values and behaviours for the African-American masses to meet precludes Du Bois from questioning those norms in the first place. This presupposition of a certain set of norms that Black people must learn to follow distances him from the politics of "revolt and revenge" that Du Bois in his earlier study of Black history in *Souls*.[63] Indeed, it is precisely in this developmentalist view of Black politics where the different commitments of Du Bois' vision in *Souls* hang together. The masses need to be ruled and led by a wise aristocracy, and the aristocracy needs to be effective and legitimate on the basis of their "racial authenticity", i.e. how they can effectively carry out the careful shepherding of their fellow people through a deep understanding of the racialised histories and experiences that they have gone through.[64] In Gooding-Williams' view, this model fails as a model of effective leadership because such a conception does not consider the possibility of conflict emerging between the demands of racial authenticity (such as demands to be more or less rebellious to white majority rule) with the demands of a politics of pedagogical leadership (the demands of careful shepherding and paternalistic education of the unenlightened).

In this section I have described how Du Bois' argument for spiritual pedagogy undertaken by the Talented Tenth is a response to the social and economic conditions underpinning white-supremacist hegemony at the time. Du Bois' vision for spiritual pedagogy is written as a response

[63] Gooding-Williams, 159.
[64] Gooding-Williams, 159.

to three specific conditions: one, the increasing global contact between nations under the aegis of imperial competition, two, the increasing white-supremacist violence being perpetrated by the US state through Jim Crow legislation and through white civil society by acts of violence, and three, the difficult conditions of organising Black communities' political resistance given the self-doubt and despair induced by the former two conditions. Du Bois' answer lies in cultivating the self-development of Black communities through expanding the provision of public schools and colleges that can over time develop an educated, enlightened Talented Tenth that can safely steer Black politics to assertively defending the right to equality while also carefully building universalist institutions that do not require excessive political antagonism to maintain. As Gooding-Williams notes, this picture of pedagogy as an answer to questions of social reform is self-consciously elitist and relies on presupposing certain norms of civilized culture and behaviour that all Black people need to learn eventually to become effective social and political actors. Du Bois' presuppositions about the kind of pedagogy needed to cultivate Black cultural practices that emphasised self-assertion, and to cultivate enough of a base amongst white people in the United States to support the struggle against white-supremacy, meant that social reform as imagined a multi-generational task led by small groups of teachers, cultural workers, religious leaders, and enlightened college professors. What would it feel like to be one of the teachers in the South engaged in this project of spiritual pedagogy? Given the high stakes of such a project, as we saw in the previous section, which was meant to protect the "very moral fibre" of a country losing itself to hatred against its own citizens, and the self-consciously narrow social base that it seeks to mobilise – would not such a task carry for its bearer a heavy sense of responsibility?

In the next section on Du Bois' *On the Meaning of Progress*, I will argue that Du Bois presents in the form of autobiography – his reflections on the practice of being a spiritual educator in the rural South. *On the Meaning of Progress* offers a picture into how Du Bois sees the kind of social transformation needed to reform American civil society on an interpersonal level. Given the deeply inequitable and abject starting point for many of the people who Du Bois hopes to educate, and given the massive power-structures in the way of such a project – a certain scepticism about the chances for success is noticeably present in these autobiographical reflections. After presenting his solutions to the historic problems of the day in the previous essay *On Booker T. Washington*, Du Bois presents how they are experienced by himself on one particular summer trip teaching Black children in Watertown, Tennessee. Gooding-Williams argues that *On The Meaning of Progress* offers a picture of the deep costs that African-Americans bore due to the failure of the Freedman's Bureau and the ascendancy of Booker T. Washington's political vision.[65] I want to add to Gooding-Williams' interpretation by focussing on how Du Bois' essay on progress sheds light on pedagogy as a practice, the experience of space and its racialised boundaries, and the expectations of a certain liberal notion of historical progress when applied to the rural South in Du Bois' time. As it draws attention to the failed promises of progress as made by Washington and his allies, *On the Meaning of Progress* also brings into view the deep mood of pessimism and challenge in the face of difficult conditions that Du Bois' own project of spiritual pedagogy in practice entails.

[65] Gooding-Williams, 94.

On the Meaning of Progress: Spiritual Pedagogy and the Impossibility of Uplift

In this chapter I have elaborated on the context for Du Bois' project of spiritual pedagogy as seen in *Souls of Black Folk*. This was a project presented within a context where many African-American political thinkers were advocating for a politics of uplift for those marginalised within their own community, and were fiercely advocating for the denial of their civil rights and basic human safety in the face of white-supremacist violence and institutional discrimination at the hands of Jim Crow. The latter posed significant challenges and the strategic responses to it were deeply contested within Black politics. In the next section of this chapter, I discussed Du Bois' critique of Booker T. Washington and the politics of strategic acquiescence to the rise of white supremacist power and how Du Bois' own proposal sought to build the base for power within African-American communities by increasing the resources and available options for cultivating public leadership in American society amongst the Talented Tenth. This presupposed a division between the educated and cultured and the uneducated and uncultured who needed careful shepherding as economic growth brought about greater social integration in the 1900s. As we concluded the last section, I considered some of the problems that an elite-driven theory of social change might have. It might take a long time to cultivate such an elite, and if the institutional power structures preventing this base-building remain persistent, it might even be a rather fruitless and despairing effort against the tides of white majority opinion. If the best one can achieve is writing moral denunciations of the brutality of white Southern plantation-owners and ask for Northern industrialists to endow elite colleges and teacher-training institutions – given their track-record and their alliance with Booker T. Washington thus far, it becomes clear that this moral project of pedagogy might also coexist with a tragic sense of the limited possibilities of reform in American

society. In this concluding section, I will discuss how this tragic sense of the impossibility of social reform is a key theme in *Souls*, and how Du Bois' presentation of his self-consciousness aids in communicating to his readers the possibly insurmountable challenges ahead for his project of spiritual pedagogy.

On the Meaning of Progress is about the trips that Du Bois undertook in the summers of 1886 and 1887 to the hills of Tennessee to teach children. This was when he was a student at Fisk University. Within the narrative arc of the text, the essay goes back in time to 1886-1887 to describe the experience of teaching and living in Watertown, Tennessee. It ends with Du Bois recounting his return to the small rural county ten years later and reflecting on what progress has meant to those who live there. Reading this essay closely allows me to elaborate on the importance of the question of travel in Du Bois' autobiographical writing. How do cities and towns make for an interdependent political economic life? How does the North and South work together to sustain the exploitation and disenfranchisement of Black people? How does economic growth come to increase social contact between groups of people and in what conditions does this contact happen? These questions of travel across boundaries were present in the previous sections of this chapter. In this section, Du Bois stages them in a narrative about a journey through time and a journey through space that demonstrates how racialised political economy can be experienced through moments of distance and closeness in everyday life.

The essay starts with Du Bois recounting his time at Fisk. At the time, "all Fisk men thought that Tennessee – beyond the Veil – was theirs alone," and so many would travel in groups to visit the

county schools.[66] Du Bois was one of them and this essay retells his own search for a county school where he taught that summer. In his later autobiographical writings, Du Bois notes how his time at Fisk was important in introducing him to Black life and culture after his childhood in the predominantly white town of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. And so already he was past a certain racial boundary as an undergraduate at Fisk. During the trips that he recounts in this essay, he goes further to assert that Black Tennessee, the area beyond the Veil – here functioning as the boundary between different racialised experiences – was "theirs alone".[67] They shared a sense of belonging to this space that was *theirs*. From this space of belonging, Du Bois sought to learn about the conditions of teaching and learning in the hills of Tennessee.

Here, Du Bois goes to some length to describe his journey to the school that he worked at. He started at the "Teacher's Institute at the county seat", where white teachers were trained in the morning, and Black teachers at night. He is tempted to recall his pleasant memories of the time, the "rough world was softened by laughter and song", and yet holds back this "wandering" of memory. Once the teachers were trained, they marched off on their own in search of schools. Du Bois was one of them. He walked "ten, eight, six miles" relentlessly under the hot July sun, the journey towards his school being exhausting and uncertain. He walked until he "had wandered beyond railways, beyond stage lines, to a land of 'varmints' and rattlesnakes, where the coming of a stranger was an event, and men lived and died in the shadow of one blue hill".[68] And so he describes a space that was "beyond railways" and "beyond stage lines", out of the circuit of regular

[66] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 73.
[67] Du Bois, 73.
[68] Du Bois, 74.

transport, a space that could only be reached by an arduous walk. Du Bois arrives at the school he is seeking through an encounter with Josie, a key person in this essay.

Jose tells him "anxiously" that her community sought a school at Watertown, that only at one time since the civil war had a teacher been there, and that "she herself longed to learn".[69] Josie is young Du Bois' first student. He visits her house, meets her parents, and siblings, and sees in her "an unconscious moral heroism that would willingly give all of life to make life broader, deeper, and fuller for her and hers".[70] Du Bois goes on to describe the schoolhouse, a log hut with little furniture. He taught thirty children. They practiced reading and writing. And when students did not appear for classes, he went out to their homes to ask their parents about their absences. This was an experience of pedagogical love: "I loved my school, and the fine faith the children had in the wisdom of their teacher was truly marvellous".[71] Du Bois describes his time there with much affection. The space that he enters forms his sense of those who he feels need education, opportunity, and a connection with the wider world – at least those among them, like Josie who might wish to do so. He speaks of the shared consciousness of this community:

> "I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and above all from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and Opportunity." [72]

[69] Du Bois, 74.
[70] Du Bois, 74.
[71] Du Bois, 76.
[72] Du Bois, 77.

Sight remains a key metaphor to describe the experience of racialised distance and further, the experience of a shared consciousness of the community's history. The community witnessed "the glory of the coming of the Lord": the moment they carried out their emancipation from slavery twenty-five years ago. The sight of this community also worked to see in present challenges or opportunities a "dark fatalism bound to bring all things right in his own good time".[73] Since their emancipation however, their world "asked little of them, and they answered with little, and yet it ridiculed their offering".[74] Du Bois' visit to this town introduces him to the post-emancipation social world of Josie and her fellow schoolchildren and their families, and he finds pervasive the operation of the colour-line in structuring their lives. It is because of this visit from Fisk, from entering the world that he believed was his to visiting and staying with families in rural Tennessee and understanding the world that is *theirs* that he understands the differences of the effects of the colour-line in different contexts. The youth of the community Du Bois observed, could not understand the disinterest of the wider world in their own lives, and their lack of connection to it. In Du Bois' reading, they either "sank into listless indifference, or shiftlessness, or reckless bravado".[75] He fondly recalls the schoolchildren he taught then, Josie, Jim and Ben, and remembers them struggling against the impositions of the colour line:

> "Ill could they be content, born without and beyond the World. And their weak wings beat against their barriers, - barriers of caste, of youth, of life; at last, in dangerous moments, against everything that opposed even a whim".[76]

[73] Du Bois, 77.
[74] Du Bois, 77.
[75] Du Bois, 77.
[76] Du Bois, 78.

Being born "without and beyond the World" describes the boundary of the colour line that Du Bois describes throughout *Souls*. What does it mean for Josie, Jim, and Ben to be without the World? And what does it mean for them to be beyond it? The former defines the process of spatial and social exclusion: the lack of opportunities and connections with Nashville or the broader world that might offer them different ways of leading life. The best they can hope for is visiting teachers from Fisk. To be beyond the World describes how their own lives, the lives they shared with their families, were quite beyond and outside what the white World itself understood and knew of Black folk, particularly those in rural areas who white-supremacists deemed to be predisposed to laziness or criminality. It was being in community with Josie and her fellows that Du Bois experienced life without and beyond the World that he had inhabited in Nashville at Fisk.

In the second half of the essay he returns to the hamlet after ten years to learn how this community has been doing. Jim was jailed briefly for stealing wheat though if he had "a cultured parentage and a social caste to uphold him, he might have made a venturesome merchant of a west Point cadet".[77] Du Bois' knowledge of those with born to cultured parents and with the benefits of a social caste that is able to support them allows him to see the disparity that Jim experienced more clearly. One might argue that this simultaneously maintains the normative standard of the higher social caste as the point of comparison for the disadvantaged Jim's life. On the contrary, it describes the structure of inequality that formed Jim's life accurately – what prevent Jim from living peacefully and successfully were not choices that he might have made differently, or that his parents might have made differently, but rather the excluding socio-economic structures

[77] Du Bois, 78.

underpinning life in Watertown itself. Josie helped her family to sell their family and they moved closer to town and worked hard to maintain her family. She was not alive with Du Bois had returned.

> "My log schoolhouse was gone. In its place stood progress; and Progress, I understand, is necessarily ugly".[78]

He remembered the family of Burkes in the town, they had owned a seventy-five-acre plot as farmland. When he returned he found that they owned a hundred acres of farmland but remained in debt, toiling day and night to maintain the farm. One of their children had gone to Nashville to work. Du Bois ends the essay recalling a conversation that he had with the Burkes about the marriages and deaths that they had experienced in the time being: "Death and marriage had stolen youth and left age and childhood there".[79] He ends his essay with this passage:

> "My journey was done, and behind me lay hill and dale, and Life and Death. How shall man measure Progress there where the dark-faced Josie lies? How many heartfuls of sorrow shall balance a bushel of wheat? How hard a thing is life to the lowly, and yet how human and real! And all this life and love and strife and failure, - is it the twilight of nightfall or the flush of some faint-fawning day?
>
> Thus sadly musing, I rode to Nashville in the Jim Crow car."[80]

[78] Du Bois, 79.
[79] Du Bois, 80–81.
[80] Du Bois, 81.

What did progress mean to the family of the Burkes and to Josie, Jim and Ben? What did travelling to Watertown and visiting again ten years later tell Du Bois about the Veil of race? Du Bois made a long journey to Watertown, walking through many miles in the sun from Fisk. He was seeking a community to teach, to staff a rural school and thus to work with children who had been denied their right to an education. Du Bois felt much affection for the children and families that he worked with, and learned of how they planned their lives and the constraints that they faced. Du Bois found that they lived "without and beyond the World", that the world of Nashville was so distant as to be completely unknown to them but for Du Bois' company introducing them to its possibilities. As a teacher, he could do little to help them beyond practicing reading and writing with them and sharing the knowledge that he had gained in his studies. Du Bois found that the families, over the course of the ten years between his visits, had by and large remained where they were, continuing to struggle to maintain a living amidst debt and a lack of opportunity.

Du Bois presents in the essay the two meanings of progress: progress as a march between places, the movement between point A and point B; and progress as a march of time, the ten years that pass between Du Bois visits. He can measure his own journey, the time it takes for him to reach, but he cannot measure whether Progress – meaning social and economic opportunities for the residents of Watertown to lead lives freely and happily has taken place there at all. The hamlet grew wheat in the interim, the children toiled for all of their lives, its production helped sustain the economy of rural Tennessee and as such was part of the story that Booker T. Washington or other political writers might tell about the growth of the South over the 1890s. And yet this growth never arrived to this town. How many heartfuls of sorrow did the families in Watertown experience for

the increase in the bushels of wheat produced by Tennessee farmers as a whole? How much do narratives of economic growth miss according to Du Bois, when his relationship with those who are excluded from them tell him that this prosperity might never arrive – both in terms of the physical and logistical connection of Watertown to Nashville which makes travel easier, and second in terms of the improvement of the social conditions of Watertown's residents. Du Bois ends the essay, "sadly musing", riding the Jim Crow car to Nashville. Perhaps a spatial connection between Nashville and Watertown had been established, and yet it was itself a form of segregated public transport: the Jim Crow car.

Conclusion: Spiritual Pedagogy and its Limits in *Souls*

In this chapter, I examined Du Bois' theory of spiritual pedagogy and how it works as a form of autobiographical presentation in *Souls of Black Folk*. In the first section, I contextualised the pedagogical argument of *Souls* with discussion of the context in which it was written: particularly drawing from Gaines' account of uplift ideology and how it often presupposed and strengthened hierarchies of race, class and gender within Black politics. Gaines' account also helped me situate the politics of Du Bois' intervention against Washington to argue that Du Bois' notion of spiritual pedagogy, while relying on a Talented Tenth, was also distinct in how it argued for a practical accountability that such an elite leadership must have and further in how the elite would be part of a larger social strategy of navigating conflicts between white Northern capital and white Southern plantocracy to build institutions of public and higher education that could expand as much as possible a Black group leadership able to assertively defend Black civil rights as well as creatively transform existing white majoritarian institutions on universalist terms. In the final section, I

closely read Du Bois' essay *On the Meaning of Progress* to bring out the importance of travel and Du Bois' sense of space to his sense of the stakes of spiritual pedagogy. Du Bois travelled from Fisk as an undergraduate to offer his experience and knowledge as a teacher to a remote hamlet in Watertown, Tennessee. He saw in the children that he worked with and in the conditions in which their families lived a failure of progress and a complete separation of worlds between the world that they inhabited and the world that he himself was visiting from. They were without and beyond the World. Du Bois' framed the challenge of spiritual pedagogy as a response to the global scale of white supremacy and imperialism, and the threat it posed to the increasing social contact brought about by the economic growth of the 1890s and 1900s. Further, the hostile environment of white supremacy meant that public schools and higher education institutions needed to be built to educate Black children on terms of self-respect, and further to build the group leadership class that would spread its own guidance outwards. Finally, spiritual pedagogy was a moral task Du Bois set to his white readers, whose very moral fibre was at stake given their lack of meaningful response to white-supremacists carrying out public lynchings across the country and the Southern plantocracy which was instituting Jim Crow.

On the Meaning of Progress spoke of the lack of progress in the years of Washington's Atlanta Compromise and the years since the counter-revolution of 1876 to the democratic reconstruction that was carried out by the emancipated Black communities under the leadership of the Freedmen's Bureau. In many ways, *Souls* is written as a eulogy to the defeat of the work of Freedmen's Bureau and its work to reorganise the social relations in the South to ensure that African-Americans would be able to lead their lives free from arbitrary white dominance, whether in the spheres of education, healthcare, housing, and land-reform such that they could live independent lives. An enormous

and powerful backlash that followed in the late 1870s to the 1890s and Du Bois' *Souls* is animated by a historical knowledge of this deeply foreclosed historical possibility.

The main social reforms suggested in *Souls* consisted in a re-evaluation of all values held by elites to critique their emphasis on profit and capital-making, to re-orient Northern elites from supporting hateful and racist Southern planters to maintain their economic relationships and a comprehensive programme of education from public schools to colleges designed for all Black Americans to ensure that a new group leadership assertive and knowledgeable about the history of emancipation can carry out the struggle in future generations. Du Bois own experience as a teacher in Watertown, and his own visits to the rural South conveyed to him the long multi-generational struggle that the work of spiritual pedagogy to address the problem of the colour-line would entail. It was perhaps the scale of the challenge, both internally, in terms of the challenges in African-American politics that he had perceived he would face in confronting Washingtonian conciliation, and externally, in terms of the difficulties of confronting white democratic politics, that made both the spiritual and the pedagogical elements particularly important to Du Bois' vision. A faith in the higher values of humanity, and in the history of the Black struggle for freedom was essential in maintaining a commitment to the rigourous institution building that Du Bois had envisioned was necessary for progress. Further, a pedagogical orientation to politics was necessary in presenting his readers with the tools to critique those social relations that were characterised by dominance, hierarchy, and violence, and build those social relationship which were characterised by civility and mutual concern.

The tensions of such a pedagogical project to social reform remained. When a politics of spiritual pedagogy is holding such a pessimistic view of the current spiritual development of its prospective students, and further, is facing such an enormous challenge in the recalcitrant power-structures of white domination that encourage economic exploitation and institutional social violence against Black people across the nation, what are the chances of its success? Gooding-Williams described the elitist aspect of Du Bois' vision in *Souls*. Even if this vision of group-leadership were to succeed in instilling higher cultural values than the desire for profit, would more public schools and institutions of higher education address the questions of land ownership, predatory finance, and outright white supremacy in the highest public institutions?

Chapter 2: **Travel and Pedagogy in Ambedkar's *Waiting for a Visa***

Introduction

Once Ambedkar returned to India after his studies in Columbia University in New York and LSE in the UK, he engaged in diverse ideological projects and in practical legislative politics. He worked to ensure that those in oppressed castes also had a say in the workers' movements that were emerging in Mumbai, and further helped to build autonomous Scheduled Caste coalitions in Mumbai and Maharashtra that staged important satyagrahas to demand access to temples, water, and public space for Dalits in the 1920s and 1930s. He tactically engaged the colonial government as a counterweight to the dominant-caste leadership of Gandhi and Nehru at the Indian national Congress, and then at the time of independence, Ambedkar committed to taking leadership in writing the Indian Constitution and a Uniform Civil Code to try to ensure that the newfound freedoms enforced by the Indian state would not remain political, but would reach down to the roots of Indian society. Ambedkar's challenges in fulfilling these projects led him to embrace Buddhism in the 1950s and organise a universalist Buddhist project that he hoped would ultimately dislodge what he saw as the Hindu common-sense in India that was so ridden by notions of caste and social distinction.

In this chapter I will closely read Ambedkar's autobiographical writings as presented in the collection *Waiting for a Visa*. This was a set of autobiographical notes that were published posthumously by the People's Education Press in 1990. It was included in the important book,

"Reminscences and Remembrances of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar" by Nanak Chand Rattu.[1] It was cited as a part of the Ambedkar Papers that Rattu had collected. Rattu, a loyal friend and the Private Secretary to Dr. Ambedkar from 1940 to 1956, did significant archival work in memorialising Ambedkar, by setting up the Ambedkar Museum in Nagpur. His putting this important book together says much about how important these particular recollections were to him and to his sense of what Dr. Ambedkar's text "Waiting for a Visa" had to offer to the world. Salim Yusufji, editor of the book "Ambedkar: The Attendant Details", calls "Waiting for a visa" the "only extend text of reminiscences" that Ambedkar wrote in his lifetime.[2] In thinking about the question of how Ambedkar's interpretation of his own life experiences informed his politics, this text is a rich source for reflection on his understanding of caste, untouchability, and the need for justice in Indian society.

Ambedkar introduces "Waiting for a visa" as an invitation to travel to India to see the condition of the so-called Untouchables. The text begins, "foreigners of course know of the existence of untouchability. But not being next door to it, so to say, they are unable to realize how oppressive it is in its actuality".[3] Ambedkar intends to express just how oppressive the practice of untouchability is "in its actuality", not as a purely philosophical question nor an abstracted anthropological or sociological reality, but about the experience of oppression as fact or actuality. He offers two options on how he can describe how those deemed untouchables are treated by those deemed caste Hindus: one a "general description" and two "a record of cases". He decides that the

[1] B. R. Ambedkar, *Reminiscences and Remembrances of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, ed. Nanak Chand Rattu (Delhi: Falcon Books, 1995).
[2] B. R. Ambedkar, *Ambedkar: The Attendant Details*, ed. Salim Yusufji (New Delhi: Navayana, 2017).
[3] Ambedkar, 158.

latter would be “more effective” in communicating this actuality, and drawing upon his own experiences and those of others, he decides to begin.

Ambedkar recounts six experiences of caste-oppression in “Waiting for a visa”. The first four are from Ambedkar’s own life. The final two experiences are those he has heard from others. It is worth discussing each of these memories in detail for they quite vividly and systematically register the ever-present fear of cruelty from the caste-Hindu mob and the sheer terror and isolation of being recognised as a so-called untouchable. How Rattu organises these reminiscences is also worth attending to. Given that they were not published and were only revised later by Rattu and later editors of Ambedkar’s papers, how they are then organised and presented provides a great perspective on how they have been read and understood by Ambedkar’s friends and comrades. The first recollection within “Waiting for a visa” is from Ambedkar’s childhood, which Rattu titles as “Untouchables and Hindus”. The second is titled “Untouchables and Parsis”, the third, “Untouchables and Mohammedans”, and the last two, which are cases of caste-contempt that Ambedkar reports, are titled under the subsection “Symbols of the Filthy, Carriers of Evils and Unfit for Human Association”.[4] When these editorial titles are together, they suggest that Rattu reads these reminiscences as describing the relationships of the different dominant religions to Dalits. The title of the reminiscences describes the terms and conditions by which Dalits enter and are refused entry into public spaces – which are functionally religious spaces when inhabited and known to be inhabited by one or other religious communities. How is the visa stamped? On what grounds is it accepted? And on what grounds is it refused? What does it take for Ambedkar to gain a visa to enter and inhabit the spaces of travel, work, and education that make up his everyday life?

[4] Ambedkar, *Reminiscences and Remembrances of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, 1–25.

How does he stage his confrontation with these internal embassies of caste in his incomplete autobiography? To pursue these questions, I shall now turn to the first reminiscence.

Untouchability and Ambedkar's Childhood: The Beginning of the Confrontation with Hinduism

Ambedkar's father and his forefathers had left their hereditary occupation to serve in the army of the East India Company. In "Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement", Eleanor Zelliot offers valuable context on the history of the Mahar caste in Maharashtra and how this informed Ambedkar's upbringing. Mahars were the most populous Dalit caste in Maharashtra, comprising 9% of the population.[5] They greatly outnumbered the other important Dalit castes: the Chambhars (traditionally leather-workers) and the Mangs (traditionally basket and rope-makers and village musicians). The Mahars' role in caste-village society was to be a *balutedar*, a village servant who served the village and was paid by the village in grain or gifts in kind (*baluta*).[6] Mahars were also entitled to a certain fixed portion of land called the *watan*, out of which they could grow their own produce to supplement their village-income. The duties of a Mahar *balutedar* consisted largely of supporting the upkeep and governance of the village.[7] They

[5] Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*, 23.
[6] Zelliot, 25–26. For further reference, the autobiography *Baluta* by Daya Pawar includes an account of how the practice of accomplishing these tasks for village dominant-castes and asking for the *baluta* consisted in the humiliation of the Mahars who were made to do this work and made to act excessively deferentially to the dominant-castes who would often beat and abuse them while paying them in kind (Pawar, *Baluta*, trans. Jerry Pinto, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publishing, 2015, 65–66).
[7] Zelliot describes them in detail in the following sentence: "The Mahar *balutedar's* duties included acting as a village watchman, arbitrating in boundary disputes, serving as a guide and messenger to government servants, calling landowners to pay revenue, escorting the government treasury, tracking thieves, repairing the *chaudi* (village hall) and village wall, sweeping the village roads, carrying messages (particularly those of deaths) to other villages, removing the carcasses of dead cattle from the village, and bringing fuel to the burning ground." Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*, 27.

were also expected to carry out religious and ritual duties: services during wedding receptions, the kindling of the first Holi festival fire, and caring for the shrine of the village goddess of pestilence, Mariai.[8] Mahars' touch was considered polluting and so they were disallowed from entering the homes of caste-Hindus and from touching caste-Hindus. Public spaces such as the village school, the temple, and the village well were all prohibited for Mahars. Mahars, like all Dalit castes, were subject to constant humiliation and arbitrary violence by the dominant castes of the village.

Key social and economic changes in Maharashtra during the nineteenth century played a major role in changing the conditions of work and social reproduction of village life. Given the lack of an imposed handicraft or occupational skill, it was necessary for them to seek out multiple occupations to earn a living: many going into cities to work in textile mills at the end of the nineteenth century and going to work in the railways. Their lack of belief in pollution taboos allowed them to take up railway and dock work. While the occupational changes they experienced also enabled them to seek education Further, the British army and service in British homes allowed for upward mobility for some Mahars too.[9] In the 1860s, eastern Maharashtra experienced a boom in cotton production as cotton prices soared due to the temporary blockage of cotton production from the United States due to the Civil War. This brought about a system of payments in cash for Mahar *balutedars*, and for many offered a regular wage.[10] Finally, two streams of social reform movement in the late nineteenth century, one led by Brahmans and one led by non-Brahmans contributed greatly to educational access for some Mahars and the formation of a larger community committed to the question of the reform of the Hindu caste system.

[8] Zelliot, 27.
[9] Zelliot, 34–37.
[10] Zelliot, 38–39.

Rosalind O'Hanlon's *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India* (Cambridge:1985) documents the history of the non-Brahman movement led by Jotirao Phule in the late nineteenth century. O'Hanlon notes that missionary schools and colleges in particular offered important sites where Phule and fellow social reformers could read, discuss, and articulate new ideas about social reform together.[11] Hindu social reformers as well as protestant Christian missionaries all raised significant questions about Hindu ritual practices and how Brahmins were monopolising positions of power under British colonial administration.[12] O'Hanlon argues that one legacy of the protestant Christian missionaries' fierce polemics against caste-Hinduism was that a certain Protestant model of the relationship between "scripture, hierarchy, and the individual believer" was seen to be an ideal for a reformed form of religion. All believers had the right to understand and interpret the central scripture of their religion and what Hinduism needed was a form of scripture that could be accessible and understandable to them, so far Hinduism's many varieties of ritual and belief had allowed for brutal and oppressive practices to continue and also maintained caste segregation.[13] All later religious reformers, and indeed anti-caste social reformers such as Phule and Ambedkar were to engage with the failures of Hinduism on this established discursive terrain. Phule and other non-Brahman reformers, Hindu social reformers, and Christian missionaries opened some schools and hostels for Untouchable caste communities, yet the opportunities for education remained limited. As Zelliot notes, the proportion of Mahars who were literate did not exceed 3% until the 1930s.[14]

[11] O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology*, 106–7.
[12] O'Hanlon, 105.
[13] O'Hanlon, 86–87.
[14] Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*, 44.

The final point of context to note is the tradition of Mahars who served in the British army during colonial role. Zelliot argues that the recruitment of Mahars in the British army became an important site of "caste élan and mythology", and further that "the hundred-year period of Mahar recruitment into British armies may well have been the single most important factor, aside from economic reasons, in producing the Mahar movement".[15] The military monument in Koregaon, marking the deaths of the soldiers of the British army who died in a key battle against the Peshwa of the Maratha Empire was celebrated as a key site of Mahar memory and celebration of their history of struggle against the dominant castes Zelliot notes how the abolition of the old presidency armies led to the halt in the recruitment of Mahar soldiers to the British army as the British army moved to a martial race theory of army recruitment.[16] In response, Gopal Baba Walangkar, a pensioner and veteran of the British army, made a petition of grievances on behalf of the Mahars in 1890. This petition addressed to dominant-caste Hindus argued that the education that the Untouchables had received in the army had allowed them to "question the behaviour, ideology and origin of the Hindus".[17] It demanded that Untouchables be "recruited in army, police and civil administration, with an undertone of request that the British, where they have authority such as in the army, should force equal treatment".[18] At the time many fellow Mahars refused to sign the petition. They were ultimately fulfilled in the 1940s when Ambedkar's movement for the rights of Untouchables had built up a great amount of mass power.[19]

[15] Zelliot, 46.
[16] Zelliot, 48.
[17] Zelliot, 50.
[18] Zelliot, 50.
[19] Zelliot, 51.

And so by the time of Ambedkar's childhood, multiple historical processes were already in motion that suggested the possibility of significant changes to the oppressive caste system in Maharashtra. Mahars leaving villages and moving to cities to find work; the existence of a group of Mahar veterans of the British army; education and literacy amongst a few Mahars; the social reform movement of Brahman's that questioned Hindu traditional practices and sought a more rational form of Hindu scripture and practice; and the anti-caste movement of Mahatma Jotibai Phule and Savitribai Phule which had worked to contest long-held notions of caste-supremacy and seed a new egalitarian popular consciousness. The economic and social structures underpinning the dominant caste's practice of untouchability and the deeply hierarchical political economy of colonial rule however remained steadfastly in place. It is in this context that we read Ambedkar's first autobiographical text within *Waiting for a Visa*.

Experiencing Untouchability as a "Matter of Course": The Stigma of Travel in Caste-Society

In this section, I will discuss the first reminiscence in Ambedkar's unpublished autobiographical text, *Waiting for a* Visa. The question that I will pursue is: how does the experience of travel and the stigma around the travel of a so-called Untouchable child impact Ambedkar's own understanding of caste as presented in this text? Where are the spaces where Ambedkar feels like he belongs? And where are the spaces where he is made to feel that he does not belong? How does the danger of caste-supremacy become manifest to him over the course of his trip? And what does this tell us about the experience of untouchability in Indian society at the time? I will read this section closely to unpack how caste works as a visceral limitation to the spaces one can safely occupy and inhabit – and an individual's experience of these limitations during their movement

between caste-spaces makes the possibility of travel as a kind of escape from caste seem even more remote, necessitating a social transformation that includes both the village and the city, the annihilation of caste in all of society.[20]

Ambedkar introduces his first recollection by sharing his family's history. They came from Dapoli Taluka of the Ratnagiri District of the Bombay Presidency. Ambedkar's forebears, "from the very commencement of the rule of the East India Company", left their "hereditary occupation" to work in the army of the Company.[21] Leaving their hereditary and humiliating occupation as *balutedaars* in Dapoli Taluka would have been a risky choice given the prevalent relations of violence that held them in place. Reading closely, it was clearly an act of resistance to the prevailing caste hierarchy that Ambedkar wishes to underscore in this introduction. Ambedkar notes also with pride that his father "rose to the rank of an officer and was a Subedar when he retired".[22] Promotions in any occupation, especially above others who might be from dominant-caste backgrounds were also opportunities for violent contestation by dominant-caste individuals. And so already in the first few sentences, Ambedkar underlines his family history and how it was characterised by generations of resistance to structures that demanded obeisance and submission from his family members.

Ambedkar writes that the incident in question occurred in 1901 when his family had lived in Satara. His mother was already dead. He was nine years old at the time. His father had gone to work as a Cashier in Goregaon in Khatav Taluka in Satara District. At the time in Satara District, the

[20] Jesus Chairez-Garza, 'Touching Space: Ambedkar on the Spatial Features of Untouchability', *Contemporary South Asia* 22, no. 1 (2014): 37–50.
[21] Ambedkar, *Reminiscences and Remembrances of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, 3.
[22] Ambedkar, 3.

Government of Bombay was "excavating a Tank for giving employment to famine stricken people who were dying by thousands".[23] Ambedkar's mention of the conditions of famine at the time is notable in light of what follows. To offer context, Mike Davis' *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* – a thorough study of the policy decisions made by European colonialists which caused historic famines – notes that in the second half of the nineteenth century income in India declined by probably fifty per cent.[24] The colonial state at the time only spent 2 per cent on agriculture and education, 4 per cent on public works, and 33% on the army and police.[25] Davis also discusses how colonial forms of revenue collection at the village level were guaranteed to ensure the consolidation of land holdings with larger landholders, as the revenues demanded were exorbitant, and the smaller landholders would often go into debt and borrow from landlords and moneylenders to ensure their own survival.[26] Given how Dalits were often prohibited from owning land, the effects of the poverty of small landholders would be to create a larger unemployed working class, with those landless workers from dominant castes more liable to exercise their power over Dalit communities, and those from all castes becoming increasingly dependent on baniya or merchant castes in villages. And so to address one of the famines that the Colonial Government of Bombay's own revenue extraction and public administration had caused, it was excavating a tank to store water and offer employment to some workers amongst those who had been "dying by thousands".

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[23] Ambedkar, 3.

[24] Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*, 4th Edition (London: Verso Books, 2017), 329.

[25] Davis, 341.

[26] Davis, 342–43. It is worth noting that Davis concludes his chapter on India in *Late Victorian Holocausts* with a discussion of the "displacement of traditional warrior elites and the rapid disintegration of communitarian institutions" in the dry lands under British rule in India. O'Hanlon argues that in Maharashtra, the threat to warrior or *kshatriya* identity traditionally understood, came about due to Phule's and other Non-Brahman social movements reclaiming their stigmatized identities and demanding respect and equality in Indian society. As we see in Ambedkar's accounts in this chapter, the communitarian institutions that Davis mourns were no bastions of egalitarian social norms or indeed the minimal civic respect that is the right of every individual.

I now return to the narrative. Ambedkar then discusses the occasion of his travel. When his father had gone to Goregaon, he had left his brother and him to the care of his aunt and his neighbours. Ambedkar shares that his eldest sister was also dead. Further his aunt "had some trouble with her legs" and could not move around easily. Him and his brother had to prepare food themselves as their aunt could not cook, they did not make bread but rather lived on pulav, "the easiest dish to prepare, requiring nothing more than mixing rice and mutton" .[27] Two of his sisters had been married by then and lived with their families. Ambedkar adds these details to offer a sense of what his home was like in Satara. There had already been terrible losses in his family. The two children had to take up much of the care work of their aunt and of themselves. Travel would mean a chance Ambedkar and his brother to see their father and to also take a break from their domestic duties. In discussing the preparations for their travel, Ambedkar lists the new clothes that were ordered for the journey: "new shirts of English make, bright bejewelled caps, new shoes, new silk-bordered dhoties".[28] The two children left for the railway station to take the train "full of joy" and dressed in the "new clothing made specially for the occasion".[29] In this scene anticipating travel there is a sense of self-assertion and celebration, the hope of reunion with their father, their excitement at wearing new clothes, a bright bejewelled cap, new shoes and a new dhoti.

They caught the train at Satara to meet their father at the train station in Masur, near where their father lived in Goregaon. After reaching Masur, they found that no one arrived to pick them up. The Station Master in charge of the station was concerned for these two unattended children. Ambedkar notes how the Station Master was "quite sure that we were Brahmin children and

[27] Ambedkar, *Reminiscences and Remembrances of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, 4.
[28] Ambedkar, 4.
[29] Ambedkar, 4.

extremely touched at the plight in which he found us" because the children were well-dressed in new clothes.[30] At this moment Ambedkar writes that the Station Master asked who they were, the caste-coding of Hindu society at the time ("as is usual among the Hindus" as Ambedkar writes) implying that he was asking the caste to which the children belonged. The next few sentences are worth quoting in detail.

> "Without a moment's thought I blurted out that we were Mahars. (Mahar is one of the communities which are treated as untouchables in the Bombay Presidency.) He was stunned. His face underwent a sudden change. We could see that he was over-powered by a strange feeling of repulsion. As soon as he heard my reply he went away to his room and we stood where we were".[31]

The children were alone and abandoned at the station by the Station-Master. Ambedkar writes that they "were quite bewildered and the joy and happiness which we felt at the beginning of the journey gave way to a feeling of extreme sadness.".[32] Caste-hatred and revulsion operated in the immediate reaction of the Station-Master to the children's disclosure of their Mahar identity. Children who seemed like they belonged in a railway station and who elicited sympathy because they seemed "like Brahmins", were suddenly an alien and disgusting presence to the Station-master. Their wearing new clothes was not sufficient for the them to escape the Station Master's revulsion, the attempt at travel – from one place to another was suddenly stifled. All of a sudden, they were made to wait for a visa, to fit new requirements before continuing on their journey.

[30] Ambedkar, 5.
[31] Ambedkar, 5.
[32] Ambedkar, 5.

The knowledge that they were Mahars was soon shared with other workers at the station. They still had to travel to Goregaon from the station at Masur and they needed to hire a cart to do so, yet none of the bullock-cart-drivers "was prepared to suffer being polluted and to demean himself carrying passengers of the untouchables classes".[33] The solution that they arrived at was for the children to drive the bullock-cart themselves, and for the bullock cart-driver to walk by the children. Now the conditions of safe travel as might be experienced for those considered upper-caste were suspended for these two children who were considered untouchable.

Ambedkar then recollects his journey from the Masur train station to Goregaon. They left just as it was getting dark. Near the station they came upon a river where the cart-driver stopped them, asked for some of their payment to pay for his dinner, and left the two children alone by the river to go and eat. Another moment of isolation for the two children. Ambedkar describes how they tried to start eating and sought some water nearby, but only found a pool of water nearby which was "thick with mud and urine and excreta of the cows and buffalos and other cattle who went to the pool for drinking".[34] They had to stop eating soon after, and the cart-driver returned. They set off again and after four or five miles of the cart-driver walking next to their cart, he suddenly jumped up and took the reins of the bullock-cart. The children were both scared by this behaviour, as it seemed to go against his "fear of pollution". After the distrust of the Station-Master and after the incomplete meal near dirty water, this erratic behaviour of the cart-driver only served to terrify

[33] Ambedkar, 5.
[34] Ambedkar, 6.

the children as their journey pushed into the evening. It is worth quoting Ambedkar's next sentences in full.

> "We became fearful of the loneliness which surrounded us. Our anxiety was growing. We mustered all the courage we possessed. We had travelled far from Masur. It was more than three hours. But there was no sign of Goregaon.
>
> There arose a strange thought within us. We suspected that the cart-man intended treachery, and that he was taking us to some lonely spot to kill us. We had a lot of gold ornaments on us, and that helped to strengthen our suspicion. We started asking him how far Koregaon was, and why were we so late in reaching it. He kept on saying, "It is not very far, we shall soon reach it.' It was about 10:00 at night when, finding that there was no trace of Goregaon, we children started crying and abusing the cart-man. Our lamentations and wailings continued for a long time. The cart-man made no reply. Suddenly we saw light burning at some distance. The cart-man said: "Do you see that light? That is a light of the Toll Collector. We will rest there for the night". We felt some relief and stopped crying. The light was distant, but we could never seem to reach it".[35]

The sense of panic in the two children was palpable. At this stage of their journey they were at their most vulnerable. They were brought into a fearful state by the cart-man's indifference to their condition. This passage could be read as the description of a rather mundane moment in a child's life. A child was on a long and frightening journey, he has to constantly interact with adults who might or might not be trustworthy. As the journey drags on and on and the child and his brother grew hungry and tired, they panicked on a fairly routine trip on a bullock-cart from the railway-

[35] Ambedkar, 7.

station to the nearby town. Reading the passage closely suggests otherwise. Ambedkar and his brother had already been made aware of their estrangement from the society of the station-master and the cart-man. They were keenly aware that as Mahars, they were not owed any respect by the two men. Their gold ornaments and new clothes made them appear "as Brahmins" to the station-master, but Ambedkar had quickly disabused him of this notion and paid the price in meeting the latter's hostility. Everyone at the station now knew of their caste-location. In experiencing this turning away from the station-master and this sudden gossip about who they were, the children were right to fear that as relatively powerless and unprotected individuals, they were deeply vulnerable to the consciences of adults who had already proved themselves to be cruel and indifferent.

The children had already experienced many moments of caste-cruelty. They were left alone to eat by a pool of dirty water. They were made to lead the bullock while the cart-man walked alongside them. And now driving through the night they were crying out of a sense of panic and the cart-man neglected them to maintain his sense of caste-distance. When they reached the light at the hill, they found it to be the toll collector's hut. They were to sleep there before making it to Goregaon the next morning. They pretended to be Muslims so that they might not be recognised as Mahars by the Hindu Toll Collector. Ambedkar now spoke to the toll collector in Urdu to perform this Muslim identification, but this attempt at passing failed. When the children asked for water again, the toll collector said: "Who has kept water for you? There is water on the hill, if you want to go and get it, I have none".[36] For a second time the children were refused water. Ambedkar felt relieved and some kind of safety at this hut. His elder brother did not, fearing "anything might

[36] Ambedkar, 7.

happen" and so they took turns keeping watch all night. The next morning, the cart-man offered to take them to Goregaon at five, they did not want to risk any more trouble by leaving so early and so they waited until eight before they could leave, and they finally met their father at eleven in the morning.[37] It is clear that their sense of unease and vulnerability to the unpredictable cruelty of strangers stayed with them all night, and indeed, all morning until they reached their father. As Ambedkar concludes this reflection, he considers how this incident shaped the rest of his life.

> "That incident has a very important place in my life. I was a boy of nine when it happened. But it left an indelible impression on my mind. Before this incident occurred, I knew that I was an untouchable, and that untouchables were subjected to certain indignities and discrimination".[38]

Ambedkar names a sense of awareness about untouchability as something ordinary to his childhood before this incident. He goes on to describe how he was treated in school. He could not sit with fellow students in class but had to sit in a corner by himself. In the classroom he had to take a gunny cloth from home for him to sit on, a cloth that would not be cleaned by the servant employed to clean the school. He was not allowed to touch the tap in school when he was thirsty, it had to be opened for him by a "touchable person", and it would be the school peon who would accompany him to open that tap. If the school peon was not available, he would go without water. Ambedkar recalls that all the washing of the family was done by his sisters because none of the washermen in Satara would clean his family's clothes. No barber would cut his family's hair and so his sister would take up this work.[39] And so as a child he was familiar with the status of

[37] Ambedkar, 8.
[38] Ambedkar, 8.
[39] Ambedkar, 8–9.

untouchability that was forced on his family by the wider community around them: at school, with barbers, and with those who did the laundry. The habits his family formed to work around these series of exclusions gave them a sense of normalcy. And further, as a child, what could he say to the teachers and the peon at the school who demanded that he take their permission before drinking water from the tap? Untouchability as he says below, was a matter of course to him – an ordinary, unchanging reality about which he could do little.

> "All this I knew. But this incident gave me a shock such as I had never received before, and it made me think about untouchability – which before this incident happened, was with me as a matter of course, as it is with many touchables as well as the untouchables".[40]

This particular incident during this journey to see his father as a nine-year old child with his brother however, "gave a shock" such as he had never received before. Why was this? In his recollection of his incident, he describes the many times he tried to "pass" as someone from a touchable caste: he wore jewellery and proudly wore new clothes. In fact, the station-master initially gave him the sympathy that a Brahmin boy might have received. What Ambedkar repeatedly highlights in his recollection is his shock that the stigma of untouchability was applied to him by complete strangers outside of his home village of Satara. Caste-cruelty travelled along with Ambedkar and his brother, and made impossible the application of the basic norms of civility, respect, and care towards two unattended children. Travel that was meant to promise a reunification with his father and a sense of freedom from the drudgeries of everyday life and care work with his aunt became the space for great fear and vulnerability. Neither the station-master, nor the cart-man, nor the toll-collector

[40] Ambedkar, 9.

offered Ambedkar and his brother any food. The cart-man left Ambedkar and his brother by a dirty puddle of water. And when the two children cried, the cart-man ignored their cries. The toll-collector refused to believe that Ambedkar was Muslim and denied him and his brother as well.

The moment of travel between exposed the two children to face the cruelty of these caste-Hindus utterly alone and without any support except for their own alertness. An ordinary train-journey and a bullock-ride became anxious experiences because the separations of caste-cruelty remained. Ambedkar and his brother discovered that the practice of untouchability was not just a matter of course, a sedimented habit that becomes so ordinary as to be unremarkable – but rather a matter of grave shock and interpersonal violence. Where in Satara the caste-cruelty of untouchability was carried out by those familiar to Ambedkar and his family, on this journey untouchability was practiced by complete strangers. The moment of travel estranged Ambedkar and his brother from their own expectation of the seeming normalcy when being denied water and basic civic respect from people around them made them realise with a new shock the violence of the practice untouchability by those from touchable castes. Further, the unfamiliar space of travel forced Ambedkar and his brother to experience the social practices that constitute untouchability anew. The disrespect from Hindu strangers, the denial of food and water, the impossibility of passing as someone who is touchable once one has revealed one's caste-location, and finally the utter isolation that Ambedkar felt in a new and threatening public space. These experiences reveal not just what was made unfamiliar to Ambedkar's mind in his reflections of untouchability – but the process of how untouchability is practiced in the first place. In the next reminiscence that Ambedkar presents, he returns to the theme of travel as a site where the practice of untouchability

can be made unfamiliar to an audience for whom it is all too familiar and seemingly unchangeable due to the caste power structures that uphold it.

The next anecdote that Ambedkar shares is about a journey he undertook in 1929 as a member of a Bombay Government Committee to investigate the grievances of the untouchables there. This Committee was to travel all over the state to "investigate into the allegations of injustice, oppression and tyranny".[41] He took the train to Chalisgaon to investigate "a case of social boycott which had been declared by the caste Hindus against the untouchables of that village". Ambedkar arrived and was garlanded by Mahar community members of the village. He was made to wait for a one-horse carriage, a tonga. The tonga-driver almost ran the cart into a motor-car. On his journey to the village, as they crossed the river, the tonga flipped over as it approached a stream of water near the river. Ambedkar was severely injured and he could not walk for many days. He later learned the real story which he reveals in this account. He found that the Mahars of the village wanted him to be driven to the village in a tonga as befitting the respect that he deserved. The tonga-drivers at the station refused to drive him for they considered him an untouchable.[42] The Mahar villagers and the tongawalas found a compromise where they could rent a tonga but had to find someone else to drive it. The non-professional driver clearer was not up to the task and Ambedkar was quite exercised by this arrangement. Ambedkar writes that his fellow Mahars had forgotten that "The safety of the passenger was more important than the maintenance of his dignity".[43] The protection of his dignity had put his very life in jeopardy. While the Hindu

[41] Ambedkar, 9.
[42] Ambedkar, 9–11.
[43] Ambedkar, 10–11.

tongawalla had "a dignity by which he can look upon himself as a person who is superior to all untouchables even though he may be as high as a Barrister-at-law".[44]

This incident that Ambedkar chose to document in his autobiographical notes brought together the city and the village. As a barrister travelling from Bombay on government work to investigate a case of social boycott, he was working to collect cases of grievances to propose state policies for abolishing untouchability. What he found at Chalisgaon was that the social boycott applied to him as much as it did to the Mahar villagers who lived there. The respect and civility accorded to a government official, to a barrister-at-law, or even perhaps to an outside visitor from the city of Bombay did not exist for the tongawallahs of the village. Ambedkar's shock at this occasion of travel was about how no amount of socially guaranteed status would be enough to command civil treatment from dominant-caste fellows. The path to social reform would be long indeed.

Denied Residence at the Parsi Inn: Caste-Cruelty and the Failure of Friendship in Baroda

The next incident that Ambedkar narrates in *Waiting for a visa* occurred after his return to India from his studies at Columbia University and the London School of Economics in 1918. He returned to India without completing his studies in LSE as he needed to fulfil his obligations to the Baroda State which had funded his education up until then. He was to go to Baroda from Bombay to do this work and in Baroda he found a great deal of difficulty in finding a place to stay.[45] This recollection is about what happened in Baroda as he sought a place to stay. In this recollection too he reflected upon his travels and how they made a certain kind of self-consciousness possible. His

[44] Ambedkar, 11.
[45] Ambedkar, 12–17.

time in Europe and America had taken away his sense of consciousness that he was "an untouchable". As soon as he arrived in Baroda however he had to face the spatial restrictions of a caste society.

> "My five years of stay in Europe and America had completely wiped out of my mind any consciousness that I was an untouchable and that an untouchable wherever he went in India was a problem to himself and to others. But when I came out of the station my mind was considerably disturbed by a question "where to go? Who will take me?", I felt deeply agitated".[46]

When he was nine, untouchability as a matter of course was forced into his self-consciousness by the actions of the railway station-master, and the bullock-cart driver in his journey to see his father. Later when he was on another journey, this time to study in Europe and America, he describes how he had lost the consciousness that he was "an untouchable", and further, that an untouchable *wherever he went in India* was "a problem to himself and to others". These sentences bring out the significance of his choice of title for these recollections, *Waiting for a visa.* A visa is a necessary to ensure safe passage between national borders. For those deemed "untouchable" by the dominant castes of South Asian society, their status as autonomous citizens deserving respect and safety is constantly in question. They are endlessly waiting for a visa, seeking to secure safe passage and refuge. I will return to the significance of the metaphor of a visa in the conclusion of this chapter. For the moment I return to Ambedkar's presentation of his search for accommodation in Baroda.

Ambedkar's initial concerns were twofold: the Hindu hotels in Baroda called Vishis would not take a Mahar, and further his friends in Baroda that he met in America might not host him either.

[46] Ambedkar, *Ambedkar: The Attendant Details*, 167.

Hindu civil institutions could not take in an untouchable as a guest, and further, Hindu friends were not guaranteed to admit an untouchable into their homes. The sharp boundaries of space in both civil society and friendship were defined by the adherence to Hinduism as a social ideology. And so Ambedkar upon asking drivers at the railway station learned that there was a Parsi inn in the town which would take paying guests. He was gratified for he believed that Parsis would not refuse him lodging, for their religion of Zoroastrianism does not "recognise untouchability".[47] Ambedkar lost his fear of being "treated as an untouchable", and "with a heart glad with hope and a mind free from fear", he travelled to this inn.[48] The emotional journey of these paragraphs is worth noting. Arrival in Baroda caused a great deal of fear in Ambedkar's mind. After a freeing few years in Europe and America where he could forget that people might treat him as an untouchable, he was suddenly reminded that he was an untouchable according to his fellow Hindus and would be treated as such in Baroda. In reflecting upon the principles of Zoroastrianism and realising it did not recognise untouchability and thus justify cruelty on those deemed untouchable, he sought once more a space of civility. A space more alike to what Europe and America had been for him than to how he was treated in Chalisgaon later in his life or in Goregaon when he was nine years old.

Ambedkar arrived at the inn and took a room with a sense of relief. As he was undressing, the caretaker entered his room with a book in his hand. The caretaker noticed that Ambedkar did not have a Sadra and Kasti while undressed, "the two things which prove that one is a Parsi". Ambedkar was unaware that this inn was only reserved for use by Parsis, and so to claim the space

[47] Ambedkar, *Reminiscences and Remembrances of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, 13.
[48] Ambedkar, 13.

he said that he was a Hindu. The caretaker replied to this and said that Ambedkar would not be allowed to stay at the inn. The caretaker's book was a notebook that would maintain a register of all the guests. Ambedkar suggested that he could pay the caretaker some extra money if he was registered in the inn's book as a Parsi guest. The caretaker took him up on this offer and took an additional rupee and a half a day for registering Ambedkar as a Parsi guest.[49] Ambedkar expressed in these lines a sense of vulnerability to the caretaker's actions. He had registered under a false religion and the caretaker knew this. The caretaker took money to register Ambedkar as a Parsi. At any moment, knowing the truth that he was not a Parsi, the caretaker could have turned Ambedkar out onto the street. After these conversations the caretaker only came up with his breakfast and dinner, he never stayed to talk with Ambedkar.

Ambedkar took care to describe his surroundings at this inn. Outside the small bedroom was a big hall "filled up with all sorts of rubbish, planks, benches, broken chairs".[50] The big hall had no lighting. The caretaker would bring a small hurricane lamp for Ambedkar's use. The lamp's lighting did not "extend beyond a few inches".[51] Due to the darkness and the caretaker's aloofness, Ambedkar felt very lonely in this room.

> "I felt that I was in a dungeon and I longed for the company of some human being to talk to. But there was none. In the absence of the company of human beings I sought the company of books and read and read. Absorbed in reading I forgot my lonely condition. But the chirping and flying about of the bats, which had made the hall their home, often distracted my mind and sent cold

[49] Ambedkar, 13–14.
[50] Ambedkar, 14.
[51] Ambedkar, 14.

shivers through me reminding me of what I was endeavouring to forget, that I was in a strange place in strange conditions".[52]

Ambedkar worked to avoid his feelings of loneliness and vulnerability by reading his books. Arriving in Baroda after his travels in Europe and the US and confronting the caste-cruelty of the Hindu hotel owners, his friends from his travels who would likely not have him at home, and finally the sense of vulnerability to this Parsi caretaker who had left him alone in a dark room filled with broken furniture and chirping bats, Ambedkar could not help but feel terrified and alone. He was working to forget the fearful fact that he was in a "strange place in strange conditions". Caste-society in Baroda had once more estranged him from the sense of safety and camaraderie that he had experienced in his travels earlier. The constant disrespect of being left alone by the caretaker, and the sense of risk that at any day the Parsi inn owners might turn him out caused feelings of anger and grief in Ambedkar too. His nephew came to visit him and found his conditions so pitiable that he began to "cry loudly" and Ambedkar had to quickly send him back to Bombay.[53] Ambedkar sought a State bungalow and so wrote to the Prime Minister to arrange this. But the petition would be held up between state offices. Feeling terribly alone "and in very much unhealthy and depressing conditions", he managed to stay in the inn for only ten days. On his final day, he was confronted by a group of Parsis who arrived to turn him out of the room.

As he was preparing to carry his books to return to the local library, he heard a number of people coming up the stairs to his floor. A dozen "angry looking tall, sturdy Parsis each of them armed

[52] Ambedkar, 14–15.
[53] Ambedkar, 15.

with a stick" appeared at his door.[54] They were furious and alleged that Ambedkar had polluted the inn by taking a Parsi name. Fearing their murderous anger at a possible denial of their accusations, Ambedkar kept silent. All he had concern for was his shelter: "At the at time my shelter I prized more than my life".[55] He was asked when he would vacate the inn. Ambedkar asked to stay for a week at least until the State Bungalow was arranged for him. The group of Parsis issued an ultimatum stating that he was to leave by that evening or there would be dire consequences for him.[56] Ambedkar writes of his shock at the threat:

> "I was bewildered. My heart sank within me. I cursed all and wept bitterly. After all I was deprived of my precious possession namely my shelter. It was no better than a prison cell. But it was to me very precious".[57]

Ambedkar now considered asking two of his friends in Baroda for shelter. The first was a Hindu who offered a lot of sympathy but when Ambedkar asked to stay with him, he said "If you come to my home my servants will go".[58] Ambedkar took the hint that this was a refusal on his part. Ambedkar then went to his Christian friend who he felt guilty about approaching for he had refused staying with him earlier due to his own preference for privacy. When he asked to stay with him, his Christian friend replied that his wife would arrive the next day so he would have to wait to ask her before he could accept Ambedkar as a guest. Ambedkar learned later that his friend and his wife had been Brahmin by caste and had later converted to Christianity – his friend's wife had

[54] Ambedkar, 15.
[55] Ambedkar, 15.
[56] Ambedkar, 16.
[57] Ambedkar, 16.
[58] Ambedkar, 16.

retained her Brahmin orthodoxy and "would not have consented to harbour an untouchable in her house".[59] Ambedkar would now have to take the evening train to Bombay at 9 pm.

As he was turned out of the Parsi Inn and as neither of his two friends could take him in, he had five hours to spend somewhere in Baroda as he awaited his train to Bombay. Ambedkar sought out a public garden in the city called Kamathi Baug, which was at the time on the border of the city. He was still in shock from the events, he wrote: "I sat there partly with a vacant mind, partly with sorrow and fear and thought of what had happened to me, and thought of my father and mother as children do when they are in a forlorn condition".[60] He was 26 or 27 years old at the time that this happened. Ambedkar's forlorn thoughts extended to what it meant for him to be leaving Baroda due to the anger of the Parsi inn owners, and more broadly, due to the lack of any residential options for him in Baroda due to his status as an untouchable. He had sought to work for the Maharaja of Baroda to return the favour that the Maharaja had paid him by financing his education until then. He could have worked elsewhere in the Indian educational service. Or he could have sought jobs in London through well-connected people that he had met there. And yet he chose to come to Baroda where he was given a frightful welcome and was driven from his work in just eleven days. He was brought to a feeling of childhood vulnerability by the aggression of the Parsi inn owners and the confusion and uncertainty in which they had left him.[61]

Ambedkar closed this anecdote with a paragraph describing its significance to him. He wrote that the scene of a dozen Parsis armed with sticks and he standing before them "with a terrified look

[59] Ambedkar, 16.
[60] Ambedkar, 17.
[61] Ambedkar, 17.

imploring mercy is a scene which so long a period as 18 years has not succeeded in fading away".[62] If the recollection was roughly from 1916-18, then this sentence suggests he wrote this somewhere between 1934-1936. The mid-1930s were a significant time in Ambedkar's political development as he moved away from Hindu projects of caste-reform and started building institutions that would advance the prospect of the annihilation of caste. Even at the time of writing this recollection, this incident brought tears to his eyes.[63] Ambedkar had learned then that the difference between Hindus and Parsis on the question of untouchability was insignificant. Believers of both faiths were unlikely to offer shelter to an individual deemed untouchable, no matter his work, standing, or past experiences. After having travelled and forgotten his status as an untouchable, he returned to Baroda at the age of 26 to find that he was utterly unprotected in the face of the cruelty of Parsi inn caretakers and owners, and the caste distance of his Hindu and Christian friends that prevented them from coming to his aid wholeheartedly. Ambedkar returned to Baroda with the ambitions to serve the princely state and bring his studies of economics, law, philosophy, history, and ethics that he pursued at LSE and Columbia University to bear on the pressing civil questions of the day. Immediately upon arrival he was reminded that his status as an untouchable made him a problem to himself and others around him. The caste-cruelty of the Parsi inn caretaker and community-owners combined with his knowledge that none of his friends would protect him imprinted upon him a keen sense that in Hindu-caste society, no matter how far he travelled around the world, he would remain a "part apart".[64]

[62] Ambedkar, 17.
[63] Ambedkar, 17.
[64] Ashok Gopal, *A Part Apart: The Life and Thought of B.R. Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Navayana Press, 2023), 41.

Travel and the Right to Water: Untouchability and Islam in *Waiting for a Visa*

The next incident that Ambedkar discussed in *Waiting for a Visa* was written to demonstrate the persistence of the practices of caste and untouchability amongst Muslims in India. In this section he described what happened when he along with fellow members of the depressed classes movement visited Daulatabad in Hyderabad State in 1934. Ambedkar writes that they had informed their fellow community members ahead of time only where they would stop in their travels, as they wished to "Avoid difficulties which an untouchable tourist has to face in outlying parts of the country".[65] They had informed fellow community members in Daulatabad however, and were welcomed by them upon their arrival. Ambedkar takes care to mention that they were visiting in the month of Ramzaan, the month of fasting for Muslims.[66] Ambedkar and his delegation wanted to make sure to see the fort before sunset and so they declined the invitation from their hosts in Daulatabad to drink tea and eat before their visit. Ambedkar's delegation went ahead to the fort and as they had not had a chance to wash during their journey, they went to the water tank outside the gate of the fort and washed themselves on the pavement with water from the tank. Then were then admitted through the gates of the fort and asked the armed guards for the procedures by which visitors can enter.[67]

At that moment, an elderly Muslim man joined them and shouted that "the Dheds [meaning untouchables] have polluted the tank".[68] Similarly to how the Parsi Inn owners had surrounded

[65] Ambedkar, *Reminiscences and Remembrances of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, 20.
[66] Ambedkar, 20.
[67] Ambedkar, 20.
[68] Ambedkar, *Ambedkar: The Attendant Details*, 20.

Ambedkar in Baroda, young and old Muslims at the fort in Daulatabad surrounded Ambedkar and his delegation. Ambedkar records that they said, "The Dheds have become arrogant. The Dheds have forgotten their religion. The Dheds must be taught a lesson". At this point the local untouchable community members had appeared at the gate of the fort, and the Muslims turned on them. They asked the locals, "Why did you not tell these outsiders that this tank could not be used by untouchables?".[69] Ambedkar intervened to insist that it was really the fault of the outsiders for acting without asking anyone about the propriety of their using the water. But the Muslims maintained their anger and "kept abusing them and us".[70] As it happened in Baroda, Ambedkar feared the possibility of a riot breaking out "and possibly murders".[71] Ambedkar and his fellows did all they could do maintain peace and restrain themselves from instigating further conflict.

What brought some measure of peace to the situation was Ambedkar loudly responding to the statements of a young Muslim at the gathering who "kept on saying that everyone must conform to his religion, meaning thereby that the untouchables must not take water from a public tank".[72] Ambedkar writes in *Annihilation of Caste* about a distinction between religions of rules and religions of principles. A religion of rules only demands that certain laws be obeyed, whereas a religion of principles outlines the principles by which these rules can be measured and justified. In his response to this young Muslim, Ambedkar brings up the question of principle, asking in a "somewhat angry tone, 'Is this what your religion teaches? Would you prevent an untouchable from taking water from this tank if he became a Mohammedan?".[73] Those around him did not have

[69] Ambedkar, *Reminiscences and Remembrances of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, 20.
[70] Ambedkar, 21.
[71] Ambedkar, 21.
[72] Ambedkar, 21.
[73] Ambedkar, 21.

an answer to this question and stood silently. Ambedkar then turned to the guard and asked if he and his delegation could enter the fort. The guard asked him for his name and took it to the superintendent and came back outside. Ambedkar and his delegation were told that they could visit the fort but not touch the water anywhere in the fort, and that a guard would be dispatched to make sure that they would follow this order.[74]

Ambedkar concludes this section of his recollection by noting that "a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Mohammadan".[75] Both Parsis and Muslims continue to practice untouchability by denying those they see as untouchables rights to water and to their shared space. As soon as Ambedkar and his delegation entered the fort they were surrounded by angry men demanding obeisance to their religious customs. At the entrance of the fort they were subject to graver and graver threats to violence until Ambedkar finally responded with a question of principle which silenced them to some extent. It is also the case that Ambedkar and his delegation's restraint in the face of these assaults also helped to ensure their survival. Finally when they were allowed to enter the fort, they were given a guard who was to ensure that they would not touch any water within the space. Throughout this anecdote, Ambedkar shares the trepidation and caution untouchable travellers need to exercise to ensure their own safety. Ambedkar also takes care to note that this happened in the month of Ramzaan, suggesting that this period of fasting and spiritual reflection did not lead to ethical behaviour by the Muslims in Daulatabad but rather strict adherence to their belief in untouchability. The simple act of washing before entering a public space, a basic ritual that Muslims also practice before entering a Mosque, became a failure of the

[74] Ambedkar, 21.
[75] Ambedkar, 21.

untouchables' to follow "their own religion". The Muslim belief in untouchability denied to those they deemed untouchables the possibility of practicing a ritual that their own religion recommended for their followers. Ambedkar picked up on this hypocrisy by asking the Muslims in the fort how they would react if those who they deemed untouchable were also Muslim. The possibility of the conversion of Dalit castes to Islam was, after all, a live question in political debates at the time.

Was Islam in Daulatabad truly a universalist practice? The practice of untouchability in the Indian context carried across the boundaries of religion, with Ambedkar facing caste-cruelty from Parsis and Muslims alike. This was another incident of travel where he and his fellow delegation were made to feel "untouchable" and were told that their religion commanded their lack of access to public sources of water. Travel within India once more remaining a fraught exercise for Dalits. When he was a child, he and his brother were made to eat near a dirty pond of water and were further denied water by a Muslim host in their fearful journey from the train station at Masur to the village of Goregaon. Later in his life, Parsisin Baroda denied him lodging on the basis of his caste. In this anecdote he was not alone but he and his community-members were denied water on the same basis. As I proceed through my readings of these sections of *Waiting for a Visa*, a more comprehensive theory of the operations of caste that Ambedkar is elucidating in these autobiographical texts starts to come together. Untouchability is demonstrated by Ambedkar in how it constantly circumscribes the movement of Dalits over the course of their lives. At every juncture Ambedkar highlights the social relationships that constitute these experiences: the caste-pride of the bullock-cart driver, the caste-pride of the tonga-driver, the caste-pride of the station-master, in Baroda the caste-pride of the Parsi Inn owners and then his Christian and Hindu friends

in the city who could not take him in, and in Daulatabad the caste-pride of Muslims during Ramzaan. In every instance, untouchability as a practice functioned as an act of violence that sought to deny respect and the possibility of civil friendship to Ambedkar and his fellow community-members. Untouchability as a practice was undertaken by groups across caste and religious boundaries to show those deemed untouchable "their place".

Case Studies in Untouchability: the Denial of Medical Care and the Practice of Social Boycott

The Collected Works of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as assembled by Vasant Moon and published by the state government of Maharashtra include two more cases of caste-cruelty as assembled in the pamphlet published by People's Education Press. Before I study them, it is worth noting that Rattu's collection of Ambedkar's autobiographical writings groups these cases in a separate section titled *Symbols of the Filthy Unfit for Human Association*. Rattu includes a few other cases written up by Ambedkar that he sources from the Moon edition of the Collected Works of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in this particular section which follows *Waiting for a Visa* in his text. Finally, the text of *Waiting for a Visa* as presented in the Collected Works of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was assembled in a pamphlet put together by the People's Education Press which includes these two final sections as part of *Waiting for a Visa*. For the purposes of my discussion in this chapter, I shall include a reading of these two sections as well. Though in future work, it is worth reading closely Rattu's composition of the second section of his text of Remembrances of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and how they present particular case studies of the practice of caste-cruelty and untouchability in colonial India.

These two sections consist in case studies of two different instances of caste-cruelty that Ambedkar collected in his papers. The first was a case reported in *Young India*, a journal published by M.K. Gandhi in its issue of December 12, 1929. It includes a letter written by an untouchable schoolteacher in a village in Kathiawar, Gujarat who describes how a Hindu doctor failed to provide care for his wife and child due to their caste status. In the letter, the schoolteacher describes how his wife had fell severely ill two days after giving birth to their child. They went to request the aid of the doctor in the village who agreed to examine her only on the condition that she be brought outside the Dalit colony. After the schoolteacher took his wife outside the colony, the doctor took the temperature of his patient by passing a thermometer to a Muslim and then to the teacher who then passed it to the wife – as a way of maintaining his caste-pride. The doctor prescribed some medicine for pneumonia but refused to see the schoolteacher's wife a few hours later as her condition worsened. She died the next day. Ambedkar adds to this case his analysis that: "No explanation is necessary".[76] In Ambedkar's reading, the doctor "set aside the code of conduct" binding to his profession by refusing to touch the schoolteacher and his wife. The doctor's caste-cruelty in refusing care to a patient led to her death. Ambedkar concludes that the Hindu "would prefer to be inhuman rather than touch an untouchable".[77]

The final incident collected in this pamphlet that Ambedkar records is the story that a Bhangi boy narrated to a public meeting held in Dadar, Bombay under the Chairmanship of Mr. Indulal Yagnik. Indulal Yagnik was a significant leader within the Gujarat Congress Party who organised fiercely with peasant and workers in Gujarat and often opposed the conservative tendencies of the

[76] Ambedkar, *Ambedkar: The Attendant Details*, 181.
[77] Ambedkar, 181.

Indian National Congress.[78] Bhangis are deemed untouchable by caste status and are forced to do the cleaning in the villages, sometimes of human waste. In this case, the boy narrates how he applied for a job as a Talati (a village accountant) and was successfully appointed in that role in Borsad Taluka in the Kheda District. When he tried to work at the Mamlatdar's office (the assistant district collector) in Borsad, the clerk working there humiliated him for his caste, saying: "How dare you stand so near me! You are in office, if you were outside I would have given you six kicks.[79] At the office, the boy had to rely on the waterman (a staff member who gave water to the clerks) to get water – the waterman would try to avoid the act of pouring the boy some water and would often "manage to slip away". The boy was also to drink water from separate pots. Much like Ambedkar in Baroda, this boy had trouble finding a place to stay in Borsad. The local untouchable communities were afraid to host him because they did not want reprisals from the caste-Hindus who were furious at the boy's attempt "to live as a clerk, a station above me".[80] No place or person in Borsad served him food. He would buy small fried snacks and eat them alone outside the village. As he could not really live in Borsad, he went to live in Jentral his ancestral village and walked eleven miles every day to commute to Borsad.

Later he was sent to work with a Talati (district accountant) who made a point to not teach him anything about the job. The headman of his ancestral village in Jentral was also antagonistic towards him, saying at one point, "Your fellows, your father, your brother are sweepers who sweep the village office, and you want to sit in the office as our equal? Take care, better give up this

[78] Ajay Skaria, "Homeless in Gujarat and India: On the Curious Love of Indulal Yagnik," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, no. 3 (2001): 271-297
[79] Ambedkar, *Ambedkar: The Attendant Details*, 182.
[80] Ambedkar, 182–83.

job!".[81] This persistent hatred towards him continued when he was invited to Saijpur to compile the population table of the village alongside the district accountant, the accountant and the village headman ignored him. The boy took a seat alongside them and the two walked away from him. Soon after, the librarian of the village library led a crowd to the office and roundly abused the boy. He asked the village servant to remove the boy from his chair and made him sit on the ground. Much like Ambedkar had been surrounded at the gates of the Daulatabad fort and at the Parsi Inn, this crowd surrounded this boy threatening to cut him into pieces. He pleaded for mercy but to no avail. To save himself he decided to write a note to the Mamlatdar (the assistant district collector) of Borsad with a message about his death and how his body must be disposed of in case he was killed by this crowd. His hope was that if the crowd was aware that the assistant district collector would know of their actions, they would desist. He wrote a note to this effect informing the assistant district collector that he is dying on that day and that his parents must be informed of the same. The librarian who lead the crowd read this letter and further insulted the boy, asking: "You want us to address you as our Talati? You are a bhangi and you want to enter the office and sit on the chair?".[82] The boy continued to beg for mercy and now promised to give up the job. He was kept there until seven in the evening at which point the crowd left, his colleagues the Talati and the village headman did not arrive. Soon after, he took fifteen days of leave and moved back to live with his parents in Bombay.[83]

This case very closely echoes Ambedkar's own journey to Baroda. The aspiring accountant was denied any support at his workplace and humiliated for working "above his station", struggled to

[81] Ambedkar, 183.
[82] Ambedkar, 184.
[83] Ambedkar, 184–85.

find shelter and food at Borsad, and was surrounded and attacked for sitting in a chair as a village accountant in Saijpur. It took the accountant preparing to die and letting his attackers know that they might be held accountable by higher government officials for their actions to ensure his safety. The spaces of work, of residence, of common food and water, and of working with colleagues in a position of village authority were all violently denied to this aspiring accountant in forms of cruelty that extended over time such that by the final attack by a village crowd he had no choice but to leave his job in Saijpur and return to Bombay for safety. Much like how Ambedkar had to return from Baroda to Bombay for safety. Ambedkar documents in these cases how the Hindu practice of caste demarcates the conditions of respect and social solidarity that are accorded to individuals. In the earlier case that Ambedkar selects from Gandhi's journal *Young India*, the Hindu doctor's practice of untouchability leads to a denial of care to his patient and in the view of her husband, her death. In the case of the aspiring accountant from the Bhangi caste, all the dominant-caste individuals at his workplace, and later at his ancestral village of Jentral and then Saijpur, work to maintain the caste order by attacking the accountant and humiliating him for daring to work in a space of authority and prestige that was to be systematically denied by dominant-caste Hindus to all members of the Bhangi caste. As in Baroda for a professional Ambedkar and in the fateful bullock-cart journey from when Ambedkar was a nine-year old, the aspiring accountant was made to fear for his life as the dominant-caste crowds surrounding him made clear that they could easily kill him so without repercussions – the enforcement of the brutal caste-order resting on a broad consensus of the acceptability of violence against those deemed untouchable.

Conclusion

How did Ambedkar develop question of travel and the constitution of common space develop in his text *Waiting for Visa*? How did the editors of the text present these questions as part of their own pedagogical project of demonstrating to their readers the social process that underlies caste-cruelty and caste-violence? In this chapter, I discussed the social and political context in which Ambedkar wrote *Waiting for a Visa*. Ambedkar's childhood coincided with the rise of the Mahar movement for recognition and economic freedom in Western India. This movement, led by Jotirao and Savitribai Phule, sought the right to literacy, education, civil public spaces, and a fundamental challenge to the hegemony of the dominant Maratha castes and their defence of social hierarchy. Many social reformers, both from dominant and oppressed castes, in Maharashtra were responding to changing labour regimes in the late nineteenth century as workers from oppressed castes moved to big cities in search of work. Within the Mahar movement for equality in particular, many Mahars who had served in the Indian colonial army organised to secure pensions and their own jobs. Ambedkar's own educational opportunities in school and the scholarship for his education abroad were supported by dominant-caste elites, notably the Maharaja of Baroda, while his political consciousness was informed by the Shudra and Dalit anti-caste social movement that was circulating critiques of the Hindu order of caste in Maharashtra at the time.

In this chapter I closely read the six main sections of *Waiting for a Visa* to demonstrate how it functioned as a pedagogical text for foreign readers on how they could understand how it is even possible that the conditions of social untouchability by dominant caste-communities in India are

maintained, and how oppressive these conditions are for those deemed untouchable.[84] The first section of the text from Ambedkar's childhood was about how travel between villages was a deeply fearful and traumatising enterprise for himself and his brothers. As children they were made to feel "untouchable" – they were denied water, any modicum of respect, and were made to feel afraid for their safety on their journey amongst strangers who declined to care for them at every turn. Travel was a fraught exercise for Ambedkar and his brother as children: the hope of reunion with their father in a nearby village becoming a fight for survival. It estranged Ambedkar from experiencing untouchability as a "matter of course", as he had through his childhood, and the sheer disregard by strangers on this journey forced him to confront it as an oppressive social process demanding a challenge. The second section discussed how Ambedkar travelled to Chalisgaon in 1929 to investigate a case of social boycott. The boycott acting in the village came to be applied to him as none of the tonga-drivers deigned to drive him into the village, and so his fellow community members chose to do so. When an untrained driver caused an accident that brought Ambedkar a minor injury, Ambedkar was left to wonder how in seeking to protect his dignity, his fellow untouchables had compromised on his safety.

The third section discussed Ambedkar's return to India after his studies in London and New York and how his caste-position meant that he could secure no stable housing in Baroda. A local Parsi inn caretaker took him in on the condition that he pretend to be Parsi. Ambedkar faced isolation at the inn, and eventually the Parsi inn owners mobbed him at the inn and forced him to leave immediately. Ambedkar's friends denied him lodging and he was to return to Bombay as soon as possible. Here, untouchability as a practice of dominant-castes manifested in a city space – the

[84] Ambedkar, *Reminiscences and Remembrances of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, 2.

expectation of progress and basic sociability was denied by the actions of these dominant-caste groups. The fourth section discussed Ambedkar's trip to the Daulatabad fort along with members of the Depressed Classes Conference. While they were wary for their safety on their travels, they were startled to find that the Muslims at this fort took great offence to their washing with the water at the entrance of the fort. Ambedkar and his fellow community members were surrounded by Muslims who threatened them violence until Ambedkar reminded them of the importance of conversion in Islam and how as a principle – all Muslims treat each other with respect regardless of their caste status. The fifth section was a case study Ambedkar collected about a schoolteacher in Kathiawar whose wife was denied medical treatment by the local doctor because of her caste status. Ambedkar's choice of case studies and selection of cases in these sections suggesting the specific ways in which the exclusion of those deemed untouchable is carried out by people in authority from dominant castes. The final section was the case of an aspiring accountant from Bombay who sought to work in Borsad Taluka in Gujarat. Both in Borsad and in his ancestral village of Jentral, dominant caste individuals at his offices ignored and undermined his work to force him to quit. In Saijpur, he was surrounded by the local dominant-caste communities led by the librarian and was threatened with grave violence until he agreed to quit his job and sought to write a note to his superiors notifying them of his imminent death. He returned to his parents in Bombay soon after and presented his experiences at a meeting organised by Indulal Yagnik.

These autobiographical reflections and the assembly of this series of cases presupposes in Ambedkar's readership a moral revulsion to the practice of untouchability in India. It is worth noting that *Waiting for a visa* is written to inform foreigners of how oppressive it can be and how it is made to be possible and thinkable in Indian society. All through the cases, sociability and

minimal conditions of respect are refused to those deemed untouchable. On the other hand, these cases are also stories of survival and resistance. Ambedkar seeks to protect his brother and they both take solace in each other's company through their frightful journey. In the second journey that Ambedkar takes, his fellow community members while putting him in some danger also look after him and take great pride in his challenge to the social boycott that they have experienced and organised against. In his trip to Baroda, Ambedkar is truly alone and feels the loss of the friendship he might have had in Bombay or even in London or New York, and yet he writes this memory to emphasise to his readers the importance of the denial of housing to those deemed to be untouchable by those deemed to be in dominant castes. The fifth case study about a doctor denying healthcare to a schoolteacher's family is in Gandhi's journal *Young India* as part of the Gandhian moral reform project decrying the evil of untouchability. The sixth case study of the aspiring accountant was a testimony at a meeting organised by Indulal Yagnik where it is plausible that many others from untouchable castes also shared experiences of violence by dominant-castes and built up a collective social consciousness to organise for power. *Waiting for a Visa* does not just document the practices of untouchability and the acts of power that sustain routine caste-cruelties in Hindu society, whether in the village or the city, it can also be read as an act of solidarity with readers in oppressed castes who experience these routine acts of violence from oppressive castes as a means of showing them "their place". Caste-hierarchy and caste-cruelty make seeking professional advancement, inter-village or inter-city travel, seeking healthcare, and even leisurely travel to see different monuments, exceedingly fraught for those deemed untouchable by the dominant castes. Documenting these experiences and noting the patterns of power that make them possible develops a shared vocabulary of resistance and a shared experience of survival for Ambedkar and those in untouchable communities that he writes in solidarity with. In a context where the varna system

and the practice of untouchability are shamelessly defended by religious, political, and professional authorities alike, *Waiting for a visa* functions as a counter-hegemonic text.[85] Those deemed untouchable were made to wait for visas from touchable castes to seek healthcare, to travel from one place to another, to drink water from a public well, to occupy professional jobs. Ambedkar's political projects, as I will discuss in the next chapter, worked to annihilate the conditions of possibility for these visa-granting authorities altogether.

[85] Akshaya Mukul's *Gita Press and the Making of Hindu India* is a powerful history of one influential Hindu nationalist publishing house and its key journals which defended the caste hierarchy, the subordination of women, the ghettoization of Muslims, and the supremacy of an imagined Hindu tradition (Noida: HarperCollins, 2017).

Chapter 3 – Ambedkar and Du Bois on Caste and Education

Introduction

For both W. E. B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar, how institutions of primary and higher education produced social consciousness in their respective states became a key question in their discussion of caste. There were two key questions around which their writings on education can be best framed. First, given the historic denial of the right to literacy, primary education, and higher education to racially and caste-oppressed communities – African-Americans in the US, and Dalits and Backward Castes in India – what kinds of institutions and state-provisions might be necessary to address this historic injustice and develop self-respecting, egalitarian subjects able to assert their dignity and newfound freedom? Second, what were the existing, extremely limited educational institutions accomplishing in maintaining and deepening the ideological basis for racial and caste-hierarchies in their respective contexts?[1] The first question spoke to practices of fugitive pedagogy, as Jarvis R. Givens has recently called the covert practices of liberatory pedagogy that were developed over decades of having to survive and develop knowledge in dire conditions of routine violence and the suppression of literacy within African-American by white state officials, white supremacist citizens, and white plantation owners.[2] In the Indian context, the legacies of truly

[1] A caste-theoretical approach to Du Bois, informed by Afropessimism, is Clayton Pierce, "W.E.B. Du Bois and Caste Education: Racial Capitalist Schooling from Reconstruction to Jim Crow", *American Educational Research Journal,* Vo.54, No.1S (April 2017), 23-47. For a more detailed approach to Du Bois on education, see Derrick P. Alridge, *The Educational Thought of W.E.B. Du Bois: An Intellectual History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008). Two interesting briefer statements are Lauren A Wendling, "Higher Education as a Means of Communal Uplift: The Educational Philosophy of W.E.B. Du Bois", *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol.87, No.3 (Summer 2018), 285-93, and Reiland Rabaka, "W.E.B. Du Bois's Evolving Africana Philosophy of Education", *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol.33, No.4 (March 2003), 399-449.

[2] Jarvis R. Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021).

egalitarian educational institutions, where caste-hierarchies were questioned and students of oppressed caste-communities were invited to learn beyond their so-called station, were alive in Ambedkar's practice and imagination as he navigated the difficult context of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s for the annihilation of caste-hierarchy. The second question demanded rigorous research on existing educational institutions and the development of a social philosophy of education that could name the processes and ideological presuppositions by which students then were being taught about race or caste in ways that perpetuated and deepened racially hierarchical social consciousness and socially hierarchical caste-consciousness.

And so for both Du Bois and Ambedkar, education functioned at the intermediate scale of their caste-annihilation and racial liberation projects. Having gained access to and made thorough use of their own knowledge gained at elite educational institutions, they worked to deeply research and politically advocate for egalitarian educational institutions that would help challenge and transform the barriers that they themselves experienced and reflected on – and more fundamentally, would work to destroy the barriers of caste and race that they observed across their respective countries: Du Bois in the rural South, and Ambedkar in both the cities and villages across India that he visited over the course of his life. The question "what makes for a good education in a deeply hierarchical, violent society?" forced the two thinkers to confront how caste-socialisation and racialised regimes of hierarchy were maintained due to an underlying belief in disparate intellectual capacities and differentiated rights to elite educational and cultural status in their societies. Further, the first part of the question, "what makes for a good education", forced the two thinkers to imagine and construct decade-long plans and build educational institutions that would help to undo these inheritances of domination and an ideological belief in the rightness of

hierarchy, by making use of existing frameworks of knowledge about the ideal forms of schooling and higher education both for members of the marginalised sections of society, and for those from the dominating sections.

In this chapter, I will first examine Du Bois's speeches in *The Education of Black People* to present his philosophy of education as it pertains to Black colleges and universities. Du Bois's speech 1906 *The Hampton Idea* early in his teaching career made a strong case for higher education to be made accessible and regarded as necessary to as many people as possible, as a *singular ideal*.[3] Du Bois argued that "the ideal would be to train every man in this way," and that despite the necessary constraints in this process in terms of the time it takes to build adequate institutions and train teachers, his philosophy of education aimed at this "ideal" (p. 30, *Education of Black People*). This singular ideal was counter-posed to the debates that were taking place at the Hampton Institute and amongst Black educators about the value of a liberal arts education as opposed to the Tuskegee model of a vocational or industrial education.[4] Three decades later, in his speech *On the Revelation of St. Orgne the Damned*, Du Bois in 1938 developed how this singular ideal of a universal right to a comprehensive education was the basis for "racial democracy", in both the United States and across the world.[5] In this speech, originally a commencement address at Fisk, Du Bois told the story of a fictional Black graduating senior, St. Orgne, and the seven heights that he must cross to arrive at the plateau of democracy. They consisted in Birth and Family; School and Learning; Work; Freedom and Beauty. In his discussion of the value of freedom, Du Bois presented the soul-

[3] See W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Education of Black People, 1906-1960,* ed. Herbert Aptheker [1973] (New York, Monthly Review Press, 2001), 21-31.
[4] On Hampton's history, see Robert Francis Eng, *Educating the Disfranchised and Disinherited: Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Hampton Institute, 1839–1893* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).
[5] *The Education of Black People*, page #s. See also Reiland Rabaka, *Against Epistemic Apartheid: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Disciplinary Decadence of Sociology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 265-92.

crushing calculus of American business where the market and capital were free to exploit labour while those who had to work for a living had to live increasingly narrow lives to make ends meet. A truly free society, according to Du Bois, enjoined the democratic participation of all workers in having a meaningful say in how goods and services are produced and distributed, how industry is run, how their own lives can be most meaningfully led, and such a society might have sharper limits on the free agency of business, in contrast to the classic European liberal ideal that was most often taught in North American schools and universities. Given the "damnation" of colour, Black people had to act in concert to protect themselves and build lasting institutions to challenge white supremacy. Further, Black higher education institutions needed to integrate these efforts at racial unity with the international labour movement, for their racialisation and social exclusion was premised upon white elites' treatment of Black Americans as super-exploited workers.

In the next section of this chapter, I will present how Du Bois and Ambedkar both made use of the concept of "caste" to anchor their philosophy of higher education. In his speeches in *On the Education of Black People*, Du Bois often characterised the condition of exclusion and social contempt experienced by Black people as the violent experience of a people being treated like a racial-caste. Ambedkar's own writings on education in *Annihilation of Caste* and other speeches and articles he wrote in *Janata* and *Bahishkrit Bharat* (the latter of which have been translated and discussed by Shailaja Paik), described how caste was produced by a certain hierarchical view of those who were deemed worthy of elite education and those who were to be deprived of it completely.[6] This differential valuation of humanity, practiced by white elites in the United States, and Brahmin elites and the vast majority of Hindu society in India, created powerful social

[6] Shailaja Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination* (London: Routledge, 2014).

punishments for those Black and Dalit communities that fought to access primary and secondary education for themselves. To understand the social pressures that Ambedkar and Du Bois were responding to in theorising the role of education in maintaining and challenging caste, I rely on contemporary historians of education in India and the United States, notably Shailaja Paik and James Anderson. Paik's history describes how Brahmin dominance in social and urban politics in Western India ensured that British colonial governments failed to live up to their promises for building educational institutions for the Untouchables at the time. Anderson's history of the Tuskegee Institute (later changed ot University in 1985) system and African-American primary and secondary universities in the South describes a similar social struggle, where white philanthropists self-consciously designed models of universal and higher education that would create disciplined workers who would acquiesce and submit to white bosses and plantation owners who were wary of free Black human beings. The scarcity of resources and regular caste and racial violence enacted upon Black people and Untouchables to limit their access to education and movement more bring into sharp relief the significance of Ambedkar's and Du Bois's particular interventions in political and educational debates, both in their own time and as educational access, affirmative action, and the very value of liberal versus technical education continue to sharply divide citizens and theorists in the United States and other societies.

Du Bois's *On the Education of Black People*: How Education Addresses the "Damnation of Color"

In 1940, W.E.B. Du Bois had submitted to the University of North Carolina Press in Chapel hill a manuscript of a book entitled "Seven Critiques of Negro education, 1908-1938". Due to concerns about the published book making its money back, the UNC press director, William T. Couch, wrote to Du Bois suggesting that that the war situation might delay the plans for its publishing. Du Bois wrote back to say that he desired no royalties from the manuscript. Despite this selfless gesture, the manuscript itself was left unpublished in the subsequent decades. Herbert Aptheker, a close friend and comrade of W.E.B Du Bois, who also edited and published many of his other papers, then took over the work of publishing this manuscript. With the encouragement of Shirley Graham Du Bois, Du Bois's wife and comrade, Aptheker put together a new text for publication, consisting now of ten essays spanning an additional two decades, and entitled "The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906-1960". In his introduction, Aptheker describes the essays collected in this volume as representing the "fullest expression" of Du Bois's views on education "as they developed in the last quarter century of his life".[7] These essays consist largely of speeches that Du Bois gave to predominantly Black educational institutions: Hampton, Howard, and Fisk University. One of the lectures was given to a wealthy audience in Brookline, Massachusetts ("The College-Bred Community", 1910). The final three essays in the collection were addresses to Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri ("On the future of the Negro State University"), a commencement speech to Knoxville College in Tennessee ("The Future and Function of the

[7] *The Education of Black People*, xii.

Private Negro College"), and finally his critical speech "Whither Now and Why" that he gave in 1960 to address the twenty-fifth Conference of the Association of [Black] Social Science Teachers.

The audiences for these lectures were largely Black undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, community members, and administrators of the many academic institutions that Du Bois visited and worked at. Atlanta University and Fisk were both universities where Du Bois had taught and researched over the course of his career. Developing institutional resources and a scholarly community that could study the problem of racialisation as a historian and social scientist was a key aim of Du Bois's intellectual and political activity. Further, thinking about how educational institutions could develop in their students a democratic sensibility, knowledge of Black history and culture, and cultivate an organised and rational approach to social and political problems in the country were all recurring questions for Du Bois and aims that he set out for Black educational institutions.[8] In this section, I will explore some of the key ideas that Du Bois presents in his speeches to construct his larger argument about how to imagine higher education the key site of liberatory pedagogy.

Du Bois's ideas about the importance of a college education for African-Americans were self-consciously developed in contrast to the Hampton model that had been developed by Booker T. Washington and Samuel C. Armstrong.[9] In 1906, Du Bois gave a lecture to what was then still

[8] Given the contradictory ideological climate, Du Bois often had to adopt conflicting positions, e.g., advocating for segregated Black higher education institutions while fighting (school) segregation. On this 'dialectical' aspect of Du Bois's struggles, see Derrick P. Alridge, "On the Education of Black Folk: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Paradox of Segregation", *The Journal of African American History*, Vol.100, No.3 (Summer 2015), 473-93.

[9] Armstrong founded the Hampton Agricultural and Industrial School, in 1868; Washington studied and taught at Hampton prior to being hired, in 1881, to head the Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers in Tuskegee, Alabama. James D. Anderson's book *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), contains vital archival material on how Armstrong and several powerful white philanthropists, including Dale Carnegie, constructed Hampton as a response to the powerful demand from

called the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (in 1930 this was shortened to Hampton Institute, in 1984 Hampton became a university) on the "Hampton Idea". As in all of his essays and lectures, he framed his political proposal within an understanding of its historical context. The context for this speech is Du Bois's observation of a certain hesitation among Black educators, linked to a "Great Fear" (p. 24, Du Bois, The Education of Black People) amongst the American people generally.[10] Du Bois read this as a fear that was "voicing itself more or less articulately against all the darker races, but more particularly against those of Negro descent" (p. 24, ibid.), as those in the dominant-class came to realise that the social position of African-Americans would come to change post-Emancipation. This fear of Black self-assertion led white elites and the Black leaders seeking their support develop a "soothing syrup" attitude to the problem of racialization: Black people were encouraged to keep ideas about their rights "in the background" and always remember "their duties", and to "ward against the first appearance of arrogance or self-assertion or consciousness of great power" (p. 25). This "policy of harsh repression and gentle discouragement toward you and me and the children we teach" made impossible the full self-development of Black students (ibid.). There was what the white world wants Black people to be, and there was what Black people could be in their fullest realization of their possibilities for development (p. 26). Education at the Hampton Institute, and at Black educational institutions more broadly, needed to respond to this Great Fear that Du Bois had identified with a courage and

emancipated Black southerners for their right to a quality education and democratic equality. The Hampton model, in Anderson's persuasive interpretation, was a way for Southern plantation owners and Northern philanthropists to diffuse the self-assertion of Black communities' who were organising their own schooling system in the event of emancipation, and discipline them into their role in the racial-caste hierarchy as subservient to white elites. The genesis of this critique goes back to Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1933), on which see Givens's study cited above.

[10] In excised passages adduced by Aptheker, the canvas is even broader, with Du Bois noting Luther's initial support and eventual betrayal of the peasant revolts in sixteenth-century Germany (*Education of Black People,* 206, note 3). Perhaps it was wise of Du Bois, given his audience, to focus on early twentieth-century America, though his global view of class struggle and oppression was tellingly at work both in the passages he cut.

defiant resolve of staking out its own course. Black educational institutions would have to ground themselves in Black history and educate their students on the stakes of the global struggle against white empire.

Against the Hampton Idea: Rejecting Caste and Servitude as an Aim for Black Education

The course of Black self-development that Du Bois came to recommend at Hampton was directly in contrast to what he saw as the received "Hampton idea" of only providing a training that enables people to "earn a living" (Ibid., p. 27-28). This "Hampton idea" consisted in making "the earning of a living the center and norm of human training". That meant the exclusive promotion of agricultural and technical schools, to the exclusion of liberal arts colleges, on the assumption that vocational education was the best form of education suited to Black students' needs in the 1900s. Du Bois disagreed with this idea for its implicit presupposition that Black students were to be trained to become service workers, vocational workers, and industrial workers for white property-owners, factory-owners, and large business owners. His lines on why he cautioned his audience about the immense wrongness of the Hampton idea are worth quoting at length:

> "Of course I know that this characterization of the Hampton philosophy is largely a matter of personal interpretation, and yet, in an institution where the President of the United States can with applause tell young men not to hitch their wagons to a star, but to a mule; where the sincere old man who spoke on this platform three days ago, can say amid laughter that the great duty of a minister is to teach his flock to raise a good dinner; and where all and in all, there is an insistence on the practical in a manner and tone that would make Socrates an idiot

and Jesus Christ a crank – in such a place it seems to me no infringement of the rights of hospitality to say that I believe this doctrine is so fundamentally false as to call for a word of warning." (p. 28)

In Du Bois's reading, the Hampton philosophy created racial distinction by teaching its students to seek to be workers and not free, imaginative human beings. Referencing Theodore Roosevelt, perhaps the most prominent white politician to have commented on the school's approach (he was after all the sitting US President) was a dramatic way to show how the Hampton philosophy had become the favoured philosophy of racial reconciliation amongst powerful politicians and philanthropists. This also helped Du Bois to anchor his critique of this pedagogy in a political context. Not only were Black students told, more or less literally, to aim to work with mules rather than develop their whole selves, they were told to do so by the leading white politicians of the time. Raising sheep and growing food for "a good dinner" was all that a good minister ought to do according to the spokesmen of the Hampton Philosophy.[11] Finally, Du Bois brings up the irony of white philanthropists and politicians holding Socrates and Jesus Christ as racialised cultural ideals while denying them to Black students.[12] The deeper irony still is that some of these white philanthropists and Black ministers might have experienced liberal arts educations themselves, which they were now decrying as useless to African-Americans.

[11] Du Bois's essay on Alexander Crummell as well as his many reflections on Black ministers in the rural South in *Souls of Black Folk* offers his vision of what a good minister ought to have done. Their work in Du Bois's telling was a slow, patient cultivation of the aspirations of their ministry against the forceful and humiliating depredations of white power-brokers in their towns. Their work was thankless, and often tragic, given how many of Du Bois's heroes struggled with little harvests in their own lifetime, as he tells it in *Souls*.

[12] In Du Bois*'*s *Darkwater*, there is a short story titled "Jesus Christ in Texas", where he describes an incarnation of Jesus Christ in segregated Texas. This Jesus is Black, and lynched by the white community for his efforts. The deep irony and lack of a meaningful ethic of love and grace within the white-supremacist Churches in the United States was a long-running theme in Du Bois's writings and public speeches.

The emphasis on practical needs within the Hampton philosophy then went far beyond a debate between whether vocational and job-training was necessary for the first generations of Black students with access to higher education after emancipation, or whether liberal arts education (alone) would give them the tools for equal citizenship. As Anderson described it, the Hampton philosophy was a political ideology that aimed to pacify Black communities' aspirations for political and economic equality in the South by offering a form of universal education that reinforced racial hierarchy in novel terms. These novel terms of legitimizing racial hierarchy – once the enforced denial of the right to education during slavery was made politically untenable by emancipation – consisted in an exaggerated distinction between the practical needs of Black people and what a liberal arts education might provide to them. In *The Hampton Idea*, Du Bois was at pains to convince his Hampton audience of the falsity of this distinction. Both a college training and an industrial education incidentally offered their students skills and knowledge that Hampton advocates said they denied: a college education did teach students some industrial skills, while industrial training did educate its students in culture to some extent (p. 29-30).[13] From the incidental coincidences of these counter-posed forms of education, Du Bois then described in strong terms the ideal towards which higher education must tend.

> "But the attitude that we as Negroes must take toward these two kinds of training is this: just as far as the race can afford it we must give to our youth a training designed above all to make

[13] More emphatically, Du Bois regarded it as a misunderstanding of his argument to do away with all technical training. This is stated outright in his retrospective "Envoy", probably written for the 1941 manuscript: "When I went back to Hampton in 1936, behold, Hampton had become a college and was wondering what to do with her industrial equipment! Indeed so complete was the transformation, that in after years I again took Hampton to task for surrendering the Hampton idea so entirely." (*The Education of Black People*, 31). In the talk, this theme comes in as a warning that the liberal arts shouldn't be regarded as divorced from the practical problems of society, or of the livelihoods of the students (29-30). On Du Bois's critique of this tendency of Black colleges in the '30s, see Carol D. Lee, "From Du Bois to Obama: The Education of Peoples of African Descent in the United States in the 21st Century", *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol.78, No.4 (Fall 2009), 367-384.

> them men of power, of thought, of trained and cultivated taste; men who know whither civilization is tending and what it means. The ideal would be to train every man in this way, and toward this ideal we tend. But today only a few can have such training because the time and labor of most men is needed for providing for the world's physical wants." (Ibid., p. 29-30).

Du Bois responded to the dichotomy set up by the Hampton philosophy by offering a singular ideal for students of higher education. This Black student was to be trained on cultivating her "power", her "thought", her "taste", her knowledge of "civilization" and its future. The opposition of vocational training and liberal arts was resolved into the categories of power, thought, taste, and civilization that were meant for all youth. The racialising distinction between those who were to learn to work and provide service and physical labour to maintain society and earn a living and those were to learn to think and direct the course of civilization, and in effect, be its leaders, was rejected by Du Bois in favour of a democratic ideal. Every student ought to have been trained to develop their power, their thought, their taste, and their understanding of human civilization as a whole – only then would the kind of work they came to do become meaningful to themselves and all of society. The constraint which Du Bois named at the end of this speech was that of what could be afforded, whether as a function of the wealth that might be necessary to secure for higher education for all youth, or as a function of the physical division of labour in society at the time. Power, thought, taste, and a knowledge of civilization were meant for all people, and as many students as possible until those limits changed.

In his later speeches on the ideals of higher education for Black students, Du Bois came to contest the very framing of these limits of access that he had accepted, however unwillingly, in *The Hampton Idea* speech of 1906. Building on the idea, already present therein, that Black students were to learn about world civilization as a whole to be able to participate in it as history-making agents, Du Bois went on to argue that higher education institutions had a special responsibility to study the causes of racial segregation and racial hierarchy, to teach students how to research and challenge them, and thus play a significant role in democratising society. In his 1938 speech at Fisk University, *The Revelation of St. Orgne the Damned*, Du Bois developed his idea of how democracy is at the center of the project of expanding the right to education. By 1938, Du Bois had researched and published *Black Reconstruction*. He had also travelled to Europe and the Soviet Union (an experience he wrote about in *Dusk of Dawn*, published in 1940). He was coming to disagree strongly with the NAACP's focus on individual civil rights and his fellow comrades' disinterest in building Black power through co-operative institutions and other forms of social organization, a gradual disenchantment he analyzes in his *Autobiography* of 1960. All of these ideas came together in a programmatic way in his speech *The Revelation of St. Orgne the Damned*.

Education as a Practice of Expanding the Possibilities of Human Life

Du Bois gave this speech at Fisk University on the fiftieth anniversary of his graduation. He wrote in his preface to this speech that he sought to express to "the intelligent colored citizens of 1938" a certain philosophy of life. He remembered that only three of his graduating class had survived to attend this speech. The occasion reminded him of the fragility of Black life, of the rarity of surviving fifty years past one's college graduation as a Black person. And finally, Du Bois

mentions wrily in the retrospective preface that many professors searched their encyclopedias to learn about the "St. Orgne" of the speech, only to have him tell them that it was a "familiar anagram of a well-known word: Negro" (p. 135). Thus, St. Orgne was a neologism invented to make fresh the problem that students, teachers, and Du Bois himself had struggled with through their work and education: what were the conditions of possibility for Black survival and community in a white, imperialist society? Du Bois ended his preface with the declaration that he was "at the entrance of the valley of the shadow of death and the view was splendid." (p. 135) At the age of 70, Du Bois gave this commencement address to the graduating class of students at Fisk University.

Dramatically, the speech was organised around an existential crisis that Saint Orgne faced in the morning of his mythic day, and the Revelation that he received in his "Mount of Transfiguration" (p. 135-136).The questions that Du Bois had Saint Orgne ask are worth quoting at length:

> "What is this life I see? Is the dark damnation of color, real? Or simply mine own imagining? Cant it be true that souls wrapped in black velvet have a destiny different from those swathed in white satin or yellow silk, when all these coverings are fruit of the same worm, and threaded by the same hands? Or must I, ignoring all seeming difference, rise to some upper realm where there is no color nor race, sex, wealth nor age, but all men stand equal in the sun?" (p. 135-136).

Reminiscent of the cadences and imagery of the preface and introduction of *Souls of Black Folk* (published in 1903), in this speech Du Bois introduced to his audience to the veil of race. The

graduating Black student of Fisk University in 1938, already named by Du Bois's anagram, was dramatised in the exemplary character of St. Orgne. A saint is someone pure of heart, potentially a martyr. Du Bois, who was agnostic, might also have chosen the figure of a saint as a representation of someone experiencing intense spiritual doubt and seeking faith and a righteous path forward. For a Black student, was the "dark damnation of color" that they experienced and would continue to experience after college real? Was there an upper realm to rise to where neither "color, nor race, sex, wealth nor age" would determine men's standing with one another? Was racialisation an individual's choice to participate in? Or was racialisation an irreversible experience of "damnation"? Of the "damnation of color" that specifically impacted those with Black skin uniquely and positioned them apart from those who were white or yellow?[14]

Du Bois answered St. Orgne's question with a basic fact that he often turned to in his writings and speeches: racism as the construction of human hierarchy and a social system of contempt for Black people in the world was a social fact and whatever one's ideas about humanity, it was a fact to be confronted directly. Du Bois named this idea the Revelation that Life gave to Saint Orgne. Life spoke thusly: "In very truth, thou art damned, and may not escape by vain imagining nor fruitless repining. When a man faces evil, he does not call it good, nor evade it; he meets it breast-forward, with no whimper of regret nor fear of foe. (p. 136). Du Bois had already pointedly discussed the importance of facing and working to change difficult truths in his famous essay on Booker T.

[14] Nahum Dimitri Chandler's book on Du Bois's early writings thinks through this specific position of being African-American in Du Bois's social thought: how the hyphen and this naming of this specific racial genealogy points to the experience of a group of people who built their self-understandings from the experience of being African, being forcibly enslaved by white colonists and settlers, being free from white supremacy during slavery, and emancipating themselves and yet struggling against this defined position. See Chandler, *X—The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), and *"Beyond this Narrow Now", Or, Delimitations, of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

Washington in *Souls*. The "damnation" of colour could be neither escaped nor avoided, and the truth he wanted to convey was that the graduating student at Fisk University in 1938 had to face her predicament with courage.[15]

For courage would prove necessary. Over the course of the speech, Du Bois described the "Seven Heights of Hell" that Orgne would have to cross to see the "Seven Stars of Heaven". These heights which Orgne was to climb were the heights of "Birth and Family; School and Learning; the great snow-capped peak of Work; the naked crag of Right and Wrong; the rolling hills of the Freedom of Art and Beauty" and finally, "the plateau that is the Democracy of Race" (136-137). At every key stage of their life, where they were born, the family that they grew up with, what they learned in school, how prepared they were for work and how committed and disciplined they were to it, their experiences of freedom in art and the beauty around them, in Du Bois's view, Black students ought to have been working towards the moral horizon that was the "democracy of race".[16] The project of building a democratic society required a complete reconstruction of the key sites of social reproduction: how families formed and raised their children, how children came to learn basic skills and gain knowledge, how they found work and whether that work sustained them, their capacity to be free and experience beauty all contributed to the conditions of possibility for a "democracy of race".

[16] I take the term "moral horizon" from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 27-28, and passim. Taylor uses the term to describe the larger constellation of values within which individual ethical choices can be understood to have meaning. To put it another way, it can be seen as the canvas within which a person or community's moral and political can best be contextualized.

In light of this untapped potential, Du Bois then charted the life cycle of the Black child who had to face the "damnation" of colour. The elementary school was the starting point for thinking about educational reform: elementary schools in the South for Black children were minimally equipped for providing a comprehensive education. As important as the fight against lynching, Du Bois urged his audience "not [to] pause nor think of pausing until every Negro child between five and fifteen is getting at least nine months a year, five hours a day, five days a week, in a modern school room, with the best trained teachers, under principals selected for training and executive ability, and serving with their teachers efficiency and good behavior; and with the school under the control of those whose children are educated there." (p. 141). Without these fundamental social structures in place, high school and university level instruction would largely be in vain. The cause of these massive failures in elementary education for Black children was ultimately a political choice by a nation that did not "thoroughly believe in the education of Negroes, and of the South which still to a large extent does not believe in any training for black folk which is not of direct commercial profit to those who dominate the state" (p. 141). By underestimating and deliberately withholding educational resources from Black folk in the country, white ruling elites in Du Bois's reading chose to bring about and perpetuate the damnation of colour that St. Orgne would have to face in his life. Reforming and expanding access to primary education would only be an initial step in rectifying this injustice. This would only become possible if Black people's racialised subordination, and all people's subordination to the rule of profits and what was commercially viable came into question.

After finishing school in Du Bois's narration, St. Orgne came to college and asked "Why should I know and what, and what is the end of knowing?" (p. 142). This was the beginning of wisdom, the heights of School and Learning. In response, Du Bois meditated on how the vast amount of

knowledge in the world was concentrated in "so few men, that a comparatively small death toll would mean the end of human culture" (p. 142). The significance of this, as "The Hampton Idea" had already insisted, was that such learning was profoundly valuable, but not to be hoarded like wealth: rather, multiplied and shared with others, with an attendant rise in its value and effect on society. After seven further years, St. Orgne came to an allegorical swamp and revolted against the "toil of labor" (p. 143). This was the journey through Work, which touches like a nerve center on all aspects of community life. St. Orgne cried out: "How can we marry and support a family without money? How can we control our schools without economic resource? How can we turn our churches from centers of superstition into intelligent building of character; and beyond this how shall we have time for real knowledge; and freedom of art; and effort toward world-wide democracy until we have the opportunity to work decently and the resources to spend, which shall enable us to be civilized human beings?" (p. 143). Then somewhat startlingly perhaps as sociology, but we have to take into account that Du Bois's hero is a composite figure experiencing a plurality of Black (male) lives – St.Orgne learned learns the bitter facts of widespread impoverishment and the impossibility of raising wealth as Black tenant-farmer. He worked as a tenant farmer for seven years and found his fellow tenant-farmers betrayed by a preacher who mortgaged their land and ran away with the wealth. This caustic reference, is in fact reminiscent of Du Bois's introspective essay *The Meaning of Progress* in *Souls of Black Folk,* where the children that Du Bois himself taught find themselves in the same economic and social position many years later when he returns, for their families' livelihoods have not improved and they have nowhere else to go but work for them. But the experience is not without fruit. Learning the reality and painful necessity of work, and the kind of work that Black people had to do taught St. Orgne about the stakes of Freedom and Beauty.

In his paragraphs on Freedom and Beauty, Du Bois briefly described his mature political philosophy, at the center of which lies the contradiction between the joy of life and the dictates of the exploitation of business. It is worth quoting his lines in full.

> "Life is more than meat, even though life without food dies. Living is not for earning, learning is for living. The man that spends his life earning a living, has never lived. The education that trains men simply for earning a living is not education.
>
> What then is Life for – What is it for – What is its great End? Manifestly in the light of all knowledge, and according to the testimony of all men who have lived, life is the fullest, most complete enjoyment of the possibilities of human existence." (p. 150).

Here too there is a distinct echo of *The Hampton Idea*, which had concisely declared that "life is more than living – that necessary as it is to earn a living, it is more necessary and important to earn a life…so much that the world will not always continue to ask if life is worth living." (p. 30) The poetic inversions and intensity of these remarks have flowered in *St. Orgne* into a more forthright idiom. Life is for "the free enjoyment of every normal appetite", it is about "giving rein to the creative impulse, in thought and imagination". These are the roots of the "Joy of living", from which come "literature with romance, poetry and essay", from which arise "love, friendship, emulation, and ambition, and ambition, and the ever widening realms of thought, in increasing circles of apprehended and interpreted Truth" (p. 150). Du Bois sees the main challenge to this philosophy of joyful, free life, which is to be lived only to expand the human possibilities for

thought, imagination, and playful action, in the economic and social dogma of the time: the business classes' defense of their putative right to exploit and make profits off the misery of other human beings.

> "It is the contradiction and paradox of this day that those who seek to choke and conventionalize art, restrict and censor thought and repress imagination *are demanding for their shriveled selves, freedom in precisely those lines of human activity where control and regimentation are necessary*; and necessary because upon this foundation is to be built the widest conceivable freedom in a realm infinitely larger and more meaningful than the realm of economic production and distribution of wealth. The less freedom we leave for business exploitation the greater freedom we shall have for expression in art." (p. 150-151, emphasis added).

The restrictions in art, thought, and imagination came from exactly those who are shriveled in their human selves, diminished in their imagination so that their only feeling of freedom is experienced when they can act freely on the market to increase their own wealth. Within a capitalist system, in Du Bois's framework, wealth was only increased at the expense of the workers whose wages are garnished or lowered to the point of extracting maximum surplus value. A society organised around the creation of wealth then was a society that created and reproduced class hierarchy. It expanded the possibilities of life, of every appetite, of friendship, love, and the widening possibilities of thought for those who could afford them – while at the same time, those who had the wealth to enjoy these possibilities diminished these values for themselves and others by demanding freedom only to increase their wealth. This meant that they themselves limited the

kinds of interactions they could have had with others, and those workers who were to furnish them the conditions of this wealth were also deprived of exactly these freedoms that Du Bois extolled.

In contrast to these possibilities of Freedom and Beauty, and the possibility of meaningful work, the prevailing models for the socialization of Black children consisted largely in preparing them to physically labour and earn what money that they could in a hierarchical and exploitative labour market. Denying children educational infrastructure, deeming those racialised as Black as unfit to learn freely, only investing in those private schools and colleges that encouraged children to imagine a life of thrift and hard work and not a life of beauty and freedom – the latter which was to be taught to rich, white children who could attend liberal arts colleges (who paradoxically would in turn be expected to use it primarily to accumulate wealth at the expense of those working for them) – helped to create the damnation of colour which to Du Bois constituted the prevailing social and economic hierarchy that a Black educational system was to reconstruct to make possible economic and social democracy. By this stage in his thinking, educational reconstruction was impossible without economic reconstruction.[17] To get to the heights of Freedom and Beauty, the Black child would have to find work. And in order for it to be possible for a Black child to find dignified, meaningful work, racial democracy at the mass scale would have to be achieved to erase the racialised-class distinctions that forcefully "damned" Black people over the course of their lives.

[17] The thesis of Du Bois's Marxism cannot be fully treated here: but see the classic arguments in favour of it, in Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* [1986], rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), and Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* [1983] (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), and for a critique, Patrick Anderson, "Pan-Africanism and Economic Nationalism: W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and the Failings of the 'Black Marxism' Thesis", *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol.48, No.8 (November 2017), 732-57. For an interesting rejoinder to the debate, see Andrew J. Douglas, *W.E.B. Du Bois and the Critique of Competitive Society* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), esp. ch.4, "The Black College as Locus of Critique."

Racial Democracy and Economic Democracy as Presuppositions for a Free Social Life

The democratization of education would need to be accompanied by the democratization of industry and the economy more broadly. In Du Bois's argument, white elites' super-exploitation of Black people reproduced class and racial hierarchy. Du Bois concluded his speech on the Revelation of St. Orgne the damned with, first, a plea for racial unity and concerted action on the part of Black people in the United States, and secondly, an urgent call for integrating the Black movement for racial democracy with the labour movement for economic democracy. Black higher education institutions were to help make both aims possible by focusing their research and teaching on the problem allegorized as the "Damnation of St. Orgne", and secondly, by educating their students on the history and present and possibilities for the labour movement in the country at the time. The aim of Black racial unity was to be achieved by teaching Black history and the kind of knowledge that would be directly relevant and informed by the cultural context of the African diaspora. The aim of combining Black racial unity with the international labour movement would be achieved by teaching the history of labour movements, and further, about the existence of labour movements and alternative modes of social organization around the world that could be counter-posed to the worship of wealth in the United States.

> "Today finally we have entered the period of propaganda, when people to be sure may vote but cannot think freely nor clearly because of falsehood forced on their eyes and ears; or equally by the deliberate suppression of the whole truth. It is thus that there has arisen in our day, on an astonishing scale, the fascism of despair; the acquiescence of great masses of men

in irresponsible tyranny, not because they want it but because they see no other escape from greater disaster." (p. 153).

The diminishment of possibility for racialised minorities in the US, and for the vast majority of the colonised people around the globe – the ideological justification for this global system of hierarchy, and within countries and societies, the internal system of economic exploitation that generated small ruling elites and vast majorities of relatively powerless workers – all fostered a "fascism of despair". The educational mission of Black institutions, and indeed of Black studies and Black politics more broadly, was to expand the possibilities of human life. This expansion of possibility, the only true meaning of Freedom, could only happen with the realization of the democratic ideal. In its absence, questions of how people made a living, what was the shared interest of all, how goods were produced and services rendered, how they could be shared by all, were all determined without democratic deliberation (p. 155). Arguments for democratic control over these domains of human life were largely in vain. Du Bois argued that this was because of higher education institutions in North America which taught their best students "dominant economic patterns and European culture" to such an extent that they prevailed "almost to the exclusion of everything else" (p. 155). Countering the fascism of despair with a broad-based education about other patterns of economic control and production also involved moving away from European models of cultural and political thought.

This was how confronting the material reality of racialisation for Black people in America and connecting this reality to the international labour movement combined as political goals in Du Bois's speech to St. Orgne. Race was not a biological fact to Du Bois. The whole world was

"reluctantly" approaching an acceptance of the truth that there are "no biological races" (p. 156). This might seem a striking claim on the eve of the Second World War, but again, Du Bois was *not* denying the social hierarchies massed under the guise of 'race', merely signaling their reduction to what they were always manifestly about: power and domination. This is why, at the same time, he and his listeners were immersed in the "surrounding facts of race": "the Jim Crow seats on the street cars every day, the Jim Crow coaches on the railroads, the separate sections of the city where the races dwell; the discrimination in occupations and opportunities and in law; and beyond that the widespread division of the world by custom into white, yellow, and black, ruler and eternally ruled." (p. 157). Racialisation then, the experience of being socially excluded, exploited, and ruled by another group on the basis of the ascription of a racial essence by the ruling group, was very real and needed to change. Du Bois's expansive view of the process of racialisation connected the racialisation of Black Americans with the experiences of those who were yellow and black across the world, again not understood as a handful, much less a trio, of *real* essential races, but rather as a set of subdivisions of those who were ruler and those who were "eternally ruled".

The educational project that Du Bois recommended at the end of the speech would be one of challenging the terms of this rule and transforming the social order which sustained it. Black Americans formed "an integral group" due to their shared experience of racialisation and super-exploitation as service workers, tenant-farmers, and industrial workers. Black workers were abandoned by white workers, so that amidst the hostile anti-labour environment of the Depression, the latter survived by joining capital in "sharing the loot from exploited colored labor" (p. 158). Bringing forward to white people the possibility of radical social change, any challenge to their "throttling of democracy, their exploitation of labor, their industrial imperialism and their color

hate", was to bring upon "one's devoted head the most tremendous astonishment and contempt" (p. 158-159). This failure of solidarity from white workers made Black unity even more necessary in Du Bois's view. At the same time, Black industrial schools had failed in not teaching their students about the labour movement (p. 158). Du Bois retained a hope that at the time the white labour movement, despite staggering "drunkenly" for two hundred years, offered the world a "vision of real democracy, of universal education and of a living wage" (p. 160). And it was this movement that Black people, "we who are primarily laborers", would eventually have to join (p. 160).

By collectively transforming the relationship between capital and labour and so bringing about an economy where freedom in life is prioritised over the freedom to exploit other's work and hoard wealth, the final plateau of racial democracy could be achieved. The problem of "damnation" could only come to be solved by addressing the problem of exploitation. In turn, the problem of exploitation could only be addressed by connecting the united efforts of Black people's movements with those of the international labour movement. And finally, the imagination and kinds of knowledge to sustain these efforts could only come into being if historically Black universities such as Fisk came to prioritise the right of all Black children to learn all of the disciplines of human knowledge freely and without regard to how useful they might be to their future employers.

Du Bois on the Question of Education

By challenging the Hampton Idea and proposing the end of human life as the expansion of the possibilities of experience, Du Bois's philosophy of education offered a very distinctive

framework for imagining and practicing the teaching of young people in the United States. Institutions following Du Bois's model would offer a comprehensive curriculum of all of the liberal arts, as well as a practical curriculum of skills that students might need to cultivate in their everyday lives. These institutions would also extensively research the systemic causes of racialisation and racialised hierarchies in the United States and the world. They would tie this research into building and sharing knowledge about the political and economic functioning of the world, so that their students, and as many of their community members could come together and make informed decisions about their ways of life – and through engaging with the international labour movement, push super-powerful capitalists and their political and cultural spokespersons to concede important privileges to the common good. Du Bois's Black schools and universities would be hubs for building community, preserving and teaching Black culture and history, and challenging fundamentally the dearth of dignity and value accorded to a Black working-class individual's life and aspirations by imagining their moral horizon around the experiences and needs of the latter. This project of building purposive primary and secondary educational institutions was anchored around the question of democracy. Racial hierarchy, class exploitation, and the exclusions of racial-caste that African-Americans had to experience in their lifetimes all made the questions of Freedom, Art, and Beauty concerns of existential importance for Du Bois, and by extension, to his fellow educators and his students. To better understand the context in which Du Bois constructed his philosophy of education, we will turn now to the concept of caste, which came up at key moments in his lectures on education, and which Ambedkar theorized as central to understanding the lack of democracy and the enforced hierarchy and regular violence of Indian society.

Caste and the Question of Education in Du Bois and Ambedkar: The Context of the Social Struggle Against Racialisation and Untouchability

How does caste operate to create, at one extreme, enclosed elites with little capacity to imagine a democratic society, and at another extreme, construct vast enclosures of oppressed minorities who are treated with contempt, violence, and dehumanisation in their spiritual worlds? For both Du Bois and Ambedkar, caste as a phenomenon is not a static part of the human landscape, but an accelerating causal factor in social hierarchy. It generates distance between groups of people, and "naturalises" vast inequalities in wealth and privilege as instances of merit and hard work. Caste works both as an ideology and as a socioeconomic institution in their writings. Where ideas and social forces combine most intimately to construct caste is in elite institutions of education. I will examine their exploration of these ideas in two important speeches that they gave in the 1930s. In 1933, Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois gave a speech at Fisk University to welcome the incoming president of the college and the students and faculty starting a new academic year. This speech was titled "The Field and the Function of the Negro College". In 1936, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar published a speech he was to give in person to the Jat-Pat Todak Mondal. This speech was undelivered because the society of reformist Hindus found Ambedkar's critiques of the ideology of caste and hierarchy in Hindu ideology and the need for its annihilation unacceptable. The speech was titled *The Annihilation of Caste*. Since this joint analysis is in a sense the culminating part of this study, and requires care in how the concepts are deployed, my discussion will have three steps: I will first discuss three important criticisms of the caste-race comparison made by recent Black leftist thinkers, I will then discuss the key elements of the two speeches that describe Du Bois and Ambedkar's vision of higher education institutions that can challenge caste, and finally I will

discuss two works of history that help contextualise my framing of their shared struggle against caste through liberatory education.

Du Bois and Ambedkar were confronting vastly different social hierarchies in deeply different contexts. In 1948, Oliver Cromwell Cox published a detailed examination of the systems of race, class and caste, and took great exception to the idea that race and caste were comparable.[18] Cox held that the rigidity of caste in Hindu scriptures and practice is concretely distinct from the phenotypical form of discrimination exercised by white supremacists in the United States. According to Cox, the caste system in South Asia constituted such a complete acceptance of distinction and hierarchy across society that barriers between castes were not challenged, they were "sacred to caste and caste alike" (p. 498). Cox wrote that nowhere outside of Brahmanic India could caste as a social system be said to "properly exist" (p. 539). In my reading, Cox's book was a sociological treatise by a Black Marxist deeply frustrated with the lack of class power that was being exercised by Black workers and white workers alike in the United States.[19] Well-meaning white liberals and conservative and reformist wings of Black leadership used the term "caste" with good intentions to describe the conditions of segregation and hierarchy that Black people experienced. Yet their effect to Cox was to make difficult the conditions of possibility for class consciousness.

[18] Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Doubleday, 1948).
[19] Cox is a recurring if not central figure in Robinson's *Black Marxism*: it is telling that his 2000 preface to the revised edition begins with a pessimistic epigraph from Cox's *Capitalism as a System*. Cox's allegiances are, unsurprisingly, as intricate and controversial as Du Bois's: cf. Cedric Robinson, "Oliver Cromwell Cox and the Historiography of the West", *Cultural Critique*, No.17 (Winter 1990-91), 5-19, and Antol L. Allahar, "Marxist or not? Oliver Cromwell Cox on capitalism and class versus 'race'", *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, Vol.39, No.3, Special Issue: Situating Cromwell Cox (November 2014), 420-44.

In her review article "Caste Does Not Explain Race", Charisse Burden-Stelly draws on Cox's critiques of the "caste school of race relations" to bring the evident discontinuity between the two social experiences of hierarchy into contemporary focus.[20] Her object of critique is the most extensive and articulate contemporary statement of the race-caste parallel, Isabel Wilkerson's bestselling *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*.[21] For Burden-Stelly, Wilkerson's lack of specificity in accounting for how caste in the US actually worked led to her presenting a "jumble of historical vignettes that confuse structure, experience, ideology, and sentiment" which left readers with a "conflation of the political, economic and social". Interestingly, Wilkerson, in chapter 3 of *Caste*, draws specifically on Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste,* a source that Burden-Stelly argues is not properly historicized, doing which would reveal no tension with Cox's contrast of race and caste.[22] Hazel Carby also made an important and in many ways related critique of Wilkerson's book in her article in the *London Review of Books*. Carby found that Wilkerson chose to write about those "black people whose higher socioeconomic status offered them no protection against the stress and heart disease associated with high levels of discrimination."[23] Finally, Carby argued that thinking in national units of the United States and India meant that the history of the entanglement between caste and race as hierarchies in the Caribbean and across the Americas were ignored.

From Cox's 1948 book to Carby, who was born that year to Jamaican and Welsh parents in Britain, and Burden-Stelly, who represents a twenty-first century wave of Black radical and Du Bois

[20] Charisse Burden-Stelly, "Caste Does Not Explain Race", *Boston Review*, December 15, 2020, online at https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/charisse-burden-stelly-tk/, accessed March 29, 2023.
[21] Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020).
[22] Wilkerson, 25-32, and passim.
[23] Hazel Vivian Carby, "The Limits of Caste", *The London Review of Books*, Vol.43, No.2 (21 January 2021), online at https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n02/hazel-v.-carby/the-limits-of-caste, accessed March 29, 2023.

scholarship, we can then see a consensus in the critiques of the caste-race comparison by Anglo-American Black intellectuals in the Marxist tradition. In India, new English-language scholarship and writing on the history, present, and future of the deep connections between the anti-caste struggle and the Black freedom struggle is rapidly emerging. Amongst Ambedkarite writers and intellectuals in Maharashtra, discussions of the Black struggle for emancipation and the conditions of African-Americans in the twentieth century and how they might relate to the Dalit struggle for the annihilation of caste are deeply familiar, and there is an extensive debate in Marathi on this question. Soumya Shailendra at Northwestern University is beginning to investigate it in her research, and when I visited Nagpur, the late editor of Asmitadarsh Gangadhar Pantawane told me about the vast archives that he had assembled of this material. Within the US context, due to the victories of the anti-racist struggle in redefining the norms of cultural propriety in elite spaces (though these victories are fragile and deeply contradictory in their affective dimensions), right-wing and left-wing thinkers both argue that "diversity" initiatives have become another form of corporate control over workers, an excuse to avoid structural economic change. Within the Indian context, I would argue that, given the complete erasure and silencing of the ability to name caste-hierarchy and violence in workplaces, hospitals, schools, colleges, and in the provision of public goods like housing and clean water, if corporates were to start affirmative action initiatives for those from oppressed castes, that would be a massive change for the better! And where there is a practical political benefit, there accrues, as Du Bois has so tirelessly shown us in the speeches analysed earlier in this chapter, a theoretical benefit in discussing and incorporating the framework within a liberal education. Within the Indian context, then, the race-caste comparison becomes crucial as a pedagogical tool. The comparison is an attempt to a raise an extremely weak and contradictory consciousness of caste-injustice: if Indian dominant-caste elites and dominant-caste

diasporas can see racial and class injustice so clearly in the West, why can they not name the form of exploitation that sustains their own power and status? But just because a comparison is rhetorically useful, does it mean that it is intellectually sound?

For the purposes of my argument, I will focus on three points that Ambedkar raised in this famous 1936 speech that pertain to his theory of caste as a justificatory ideology for social hierarchy. First, the Brahmin caste was seen to be the "intellectual" class, leading to the consequence that those given the opportunity to be teachers themselves by and large had an interest in maintaining and perpetuating a hierarchy of caste in how they taught their students.[24] Second, not only did the rules of untouchability and endogamy create secluded caste groups, but the graded order of inequality meant that "each caste takes its pride and its consolation in the fact that in the scale of castes it is above some other caste".[25] Hindu spiritual education only trained those in this system to follow hierarchies of human value written in *Manu Smriti* and liberally interpreted by contemporary Brahmin communities into every sphere of life. Ambedkar's concern was that rationalism as a method of interpretation and social practice was precluded by this form of graded inequality – any scepticism about the Vedas' claims to universal truth and the injustice of a caste-order was dismissed outright by Brahmins.[26] Such an ideological posture on the part of *teachers* is hardly fertile ground for scientific inquiry and humanistic research and education. In short, caste is inimical to the search for truth.

[24] Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 294
[25] Ibid. 294.
[26] Ibid. p. 299-304

Du Bois, in his 1933 speech "The Field and Function of the Negro College", argued that building institutions of higher education suited to the needs of Black people is central to the process of democratising American society. Du Bois's models were the systems of education he witnessed in West Africa, where children learned from their parents how to take care of themselves, attended village councils and learned the cultural practices of the tribe: "their education was completely integrated with life" (p. 112). When groups became divided and significant social differentiation occurred in urbanized Western societies, the "education of youth becomes a preparation not for a common national life, but for the life of a particular class or group". The small educated group then comes to represent itself as emblematic of the whole nation, despite the fact that it is a small minority (p. 113). Du Bois names Eton and Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge as pre-eminent examples of this style of education. This form of education forces the suppressed groups to despise life, for they have not been educated into an ideal of equal social relationships, and "makes the university a system of culture for the cultured" (p. 114). This eventually leads to emptiness and endless airy abstraction in elite culture, as self-segregating elites lose the ability to engage or even understand the groups of people outside their bubbles.[27] Healthy democratic societies must build universities informed by the ideal of the bush school where the children of a nation are "trained for life" and for "making a living" (p. 117).

Strikingly, when he brought up the situation of the Negro at that juncture in history, Du Bois turned to the language of caste:

[27] From "The Talented Tenth", in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of To-day*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: James Pott, 1903), 33-75, Du Bois quickly developed, from *The Hampton Idea* of 1906, through *Dusk of Dawn* and the later lectures, a far more egalitarian vision of racial progress. On Du Bois's evolving view of elites, it is still worth consulting Rutledge M. Dennis, "Du Bois and the Role of the Educated Elite", *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol.46, No.4 (Autumn 1977, 388-402).

> "It is not ours to argue whether we will be segregated or whether we ought to be a caste. We are segregated; we are a caste. This is our given and at present unalterable fact. Our problem is: How far and in what way can we consciously and scientifically guide our future so as to ensure our physical survival, our spiritual freedom and our social growth? Either we do this or we die." (p. 131-132).

Note that there is no claim here that American racialisation is in any way equivalent to South Asian traditional hierarchies: what Du Bois is saying is that the debate is futile, insofar as "to be segregated" and "to be a caste" are functionally equivalent for the Black American. And so the field and function of the new Negro university is to ensure that institutions and cadres of educators and students are built up who are deeply knowledgeable about the causes of caste-segregation and racial violence, and can work out reasonable social, scientific, and economic solutions to these problems. Building these institutions is a question of survival. Du Bois is proposing that the new Black university, that Black studies as a democratic, mass project of remaking the world needs to proceed to rationally plan and build expertise in every discipline and field of knowledge – so that the necessary adjustments to social, economic, scientific, and infrastructural planning can be made with cadres of educated young men and women. Racialisation and the making of Black people into a functional "caste" visible most dramatically in the limits set on education and resulting self-actualization, has made the basic functioning of democratic norms elusive and difficult to maintain. These are the stakes of establishing a democratic system of higher education.

For both Du Bois and Ambedkar, caste determined the allocation of scarce social resources towards the education and self-development of dominant-caste minorities, and the emptying out and denial of social resources to the education and self-development of the vast majority of the oppressed. This is an insight, and a shared one between them, that is not vulnerable to any specialist reservation about the similarities and differences between race oppression in the North America and caste oppression in South Asia (or, for that matter, their overlap in South Africa). Approaches as a common project in the philosophy of education, the reflection on race and caste as joint objects of critique, then, requires neither conflating them nor separating them rigidly, but rather the patient comparison of the ways they structure domination and are to be combatted by a liberatory practice of education. As I conclude, I would like to make this main thesis of my dissertation plausible by reflecting on two key pieces of evidence from the meticulous work of historians of education of the period.

In his book with which I began this chapter, *The Education Of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, James D. Anderson studied the records left by Black American schoolteachers, community members, college administrators and white philanthropists of the period in question. Emancipation brought a widespread enthusiasm amongst freedpeople for literacy and education. White plantation owners and industrialists of the North and the South were deeply concerned at the prospect of this democratic uprising. Teacher training institutions were key in the struggle for ideological hegemony. Many African-American community members demanded that their teachers be educated to the highest level possible, so that students in public schools would be afforded the education that they so deeply cherished. In response, Samuel Armstrong, a former Union general leading Black units in the American Civil War, developed the Hampton model, where

"elementary" and intellectually unambitious instruction would be given, a manual labour system was constructed for teachers-in-training, and finally a strict social discipline was in place that would encourage the participants to understand that the place of the African-American individual in post-Emancipation society was in humble hard work, self-discipline, and an affective forbearance of unjust disciplinary power. Looking into the archives of Armstrong's writing and correspondences, and those of other key white philanthropists, including George Peabody, Armstrong found that they carried out a vicious campaign to control and reshape Black educational institutions according to the Hampton model: one that, in the parlance of "The Field and Function of the Negro College", imposed caste and took away from community-led and Du Boisian ideals of liberal arts and quality higher education preparing young Black Americans for all aspects of their existence, practical as well as intellectual. *This* was the context of Du Bois's struggle against caste.

Across the Pacific, caste worked in much the same way to limit educational opportunity. In her book, *Dalit Women's education in Modern India: Double discrimination*, Shailaja Paik offers a rich and textured history on how dominant-caste and colonial institutions worked hand in hand to exclude Dalits from education, and further how Jyotirao Phule, Ambedkar, and their communities struggled to raise consciousness and reinterpret education and self-respect as fundamental rights belonging to all human beings.[28] In Paik's reading, for Ambedkar and Phule, education was a technology by which the community could refashion a modern Dalit self – self-respecting and self-

[28] Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double discrimination* (London: Routledge, 2014), esp. ch.2 on "technologies of education". On Dalit women's political organizing, see also the collection *Dalit Women: Vanguard of an Alternative Politics in India*, ed. S. Anandhi and Karin Kapadia (London: Routledge, 2017).

disciplined, democratic and egalitarian. Paik cites a translation of Ambedkar's writing in the periodical *Janata,* for 15 and 22 September 1951:

> "The problem of the lower order is to remove from them that *nuangand* [inferiority complex] which has stunted their growth and made them slaves to others, to create in them the *jaaniv* [understanding] of the significance of their lives for themselves and for the country, of which they have been cruelly robbed by the existing social order. Nothing can achieve this except the spread of higher education."[29]

Regardless of their intentions, good or otherwise, white philanthropists in the United States, and Brahmin and colonial authorities in India both attempted to challenge and undermine Black people' and Dalits' aspirations towards literacy and self-education by imposing rigid norms of caste hierarchy. White philanthropists turned to the Hampton model to teach Black teachers the importance of manual labour and externally imposed social discipline. Brahmin and colonial authorities devolved power to local school boards which refused the admittance of Dalit students, and worked to limit the funding and building of educational institutions in predominantly Dalit neighbourhoods. In response, Dalit communities self-organised and built the People's Education Society, they built their own schools, hostels and libraries, and with the work of Ambedkar and other advocates, set up funds, scholarships and books that communicated the sacred quality of the pursuit of knowledge. In the US, Du Bois continued to organise with Black communities to expand institutions of higher education where they could find funding, and in his writings, to firmly argue for the most ambitious horizon for Black study as the only meaningful democratic investment in

[29] Ibid., 93.

American society. The fight against caste, for both Du Bois and Ambedkar, was a fight for the right to learn freely for all human beings.

Conclusion – Du Bois's and Ambedkar's Pedagogy of Freedom: A Global Perspective

The practice and philosophy of education were central questions in both W.E.B. Du Bois's and B.R. Ambedkar's lives as they worked with their comrades towards building democracy and egalitarian social relationships in their respective societies. Du Bois believed that Black schools and colleges needed to reject the Hampton idea in its radical form, according to which Black students were to learn to be subservient service workers to white business and property owners in the South, and that instead they had to seize the right to learn the full range of knowledge that was useful to humanity at the time. Over the course of his lectures at Black educational institutions, Du Bois reflected on his experiences in social movement spaces and educational spaces and came to believe by the 1940s that Black educational institutions and the teachers and students who made them run were at the centre of the project of building racial democracy in the United States and the world over. The moral horizon of Black educational institutions could militate against the instrumentalising and hierarchising tendencies of contemporary racial capitalism and Euro-American imperialism.[30] Black higher education institutions could help strengthen the bonds of unity and self-respect amongst Black students and communities. Further, in teaching Black students about the labour movement and the stultifying tendencies of contemporary capitalism to limit the possibilities for art, beauty, and free human action amongst those who needed to work to

[30] My use of the word "hierachising" to denote how the social institution of caste produces and constructs hierarchies that are repeated in space and time to make manifest relations of unequal power between people is taken from Shailaja Paik's most recent book, *Vulgarity of Caste: Dalits, Sexuality and Humanity in Modern India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022).

make a living, Black colleges and universities could connect their communities with the oppressed across the colour-line and around the world. In this mission, Du Bois's Black universities could in time come to connect with the mission Ambedkar's colleges and universities for Dalits that would help to establish social democratic relationships in South Asia. That is a project that remains to come to fruition, but one that follows logically from both thinkers' explicit statements and the world-encompassing reasoning behind them.

In reflecting upon and putting side by side Ambedkar's and Du Bois's lives and philosophical reflections on the kinds of pedagogy that can adequately address the challenges of oppressive and hierarchical contemporary society, one can be tempted to read their two projects and their two respective group identities as discrete and completely distinct. Charles Tilly's ambitious work on historical sociology can help us begin to slowly unpick this reading of their movements' discreteness from one another. In his 1984 book *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, Tilly states that that society being a thing apart that can be readily understood and referenced and further that the world divides into cleanly distinct and "societies with their own autonomous culture, government, economy and solidarity" is a "pernicious postulate" which too readily assumes what must be proved by careful sociological enquiry.[31] Applied directly to the problem of caste, Aniket Jaaware's *Practicing Caste: On Touching and Note Touching* (Fordham University Press: 2018) helpfully builds on this insight and Ambedkar's argument in *Annihilation of Caste* to suggest that there was and *is* no such thing as Indian society. What we perceive is the work of anthropologists, sociologists, and economists discursively measuring and labelling the interactions of groups of people with one another, but insofar as they divide themselves by caste

[31] Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (Russel Sage: 1984), 11-14.

and the dominant-caste individuals practice untouchability with those they see as Untouchable, they do not form a coherent social whole. That in many ways mirrors the race divisions in the field of sociology encountered by the young Du Bois around 1900.[32] How does this confounding of the problem studied and the people doing the research relate to Du Bois's and Ambedkar's projects of building higher education institutions that challenged caste and built the foundations for true social democracy?

My argument throughout this study, and here in particular, is that Du Bois and Ambedkar, in fighting to imagine and practice large-scale interpersonal relationships of reciprocity, care, and non-instrumental human agency, were engaged in the *same project* of bringing into being humane society in their time – albeit in different spaces and in different ways. Nico Slate's extensive historical work on the shared freedom struggles of African-Americans and Indians from the 1930s to the 1960s documents how closely intertwined the two "societies" were.[33] Finally, Isabel Wilkerson's recent book *Caste*, much-celebrated by the mainstream and maligned by specialists, thinks through this relationship idiosyncratically, sharing among other pieces of evidence a moving anecdote about Martin Luther King visiting a Dalit school in Kerala and being introduced by the school principal as a "fellow Untouchable", and then later accepting the title saying, "Yes I am an untouchable, and every Negro in the United States of America is an untouchable."[34] Du Bois's own correspondence with Ambedkar shared his deep interest in the cause and fate of the

[32] Cf. Rabaka, *Against Epistemic Apartheid*, and the philosophical basis for this kind of critique, Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[33] See both his *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), and *Lord Cornwallis is Dead: The Struggle for Democracy in the United States and India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2019).
[34] See Durgesh Solanki's insightful review of Wilkerson's book in the *White Review*, October 2020: https://www.thewhitereview.org/reviews/isabel-wilkersons-caste-the-origin-of-our-discontents/, accessed April 15, 2023.

Untouchables in India. While Ambedkar too thought deeply about the African-American struggle for equality and respect in formulating his own philosophical and political commitments. These connections were not co-incidental or purely idiosyncratic, they were part of a shared project of teaching and learning freedom and imaginatively creating a moral horizon that made possible further struggle in a context where Black people and Dalits experienced mutually recognisable kinds of social and economic exclusion, contempt and arbitrary violence from white supremacists and casteist neighbours alike.

If my study of these two multifaceted figures focuses on their views of education, that is because education was the site where the construction of racial hierarchy and caste hierarchy occurred, and free educational institutions which were supported by a fiercely courageous mass movement that demanded a transformation of the ordinary social relationships of hierarchy and disrespect would be key to the project of making *humanity* and a world fit for human beings possible. This was a theme shared in both Du Bois's and Ambedkar's writings. Paik's and Anderson's historical contextualisation of the kinds of subservience that ruling elites demanded of Black people and Dalits make urgent again the kinds of questions that Du Bois and Ambedkar were thinking about. Michael Rothberg's work on multidirectional memory is relevant here. In particular his idea that "the public sphere is a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others" allows me to suggest that Du Bois's and Ambedkar's projects of educational reconstruction in their specificity were also dialogical projects in creating a new public sphere.[35] One with dignified standards for the valuation and dignity of an individual's life and desires. The long-term project

[35] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization,* Stanford University Press: 2009), 5.

of building democratic higher education institutions, fraught with ambivalences and contradictions as it was and continues to be, became for Ambedkar and Du Bois, and for generations of educators after them, the most meaningful site of constituting and inhabiting such a humane public sphere.

Conclusion: From Abolishing Untouchability to a Pedagogy of Liberation

The first half of the twentieth century was a struggle against untouchability – as experienced by Black people and by Dalits. The many African-American thinkers who made use of the metaphor of caste to describe racial hierarchy were getting at the social phenomenon of untouchability, rather than caste hierarchy itself. Untouchability as defined by Ambedkar was a sex-gender-caste system of graded hierarchy where every group on the hierarchy maintained no respectful or friendly social contact with every other group below or above itself on the hierarchy. Untouchability was the experience of those considered as Untouchables, and the basis of the social division of caste itself. Ambedkar described this as not having to do with biological characteristics or even the colour of one's skin. In *Souls of Black Folk* and in his speeches on education Du Bois described the "damnation of color" as the utter dehumanizing contempt that white supremacists held for the democratic and spiritual aspirations of Black people. Jim Crow was a system of untouchability that attempted to redouble white domination and re-commit American society to the exclusion and exploitation of Black citizens.

In response to these widespread social experiences of untouchability both Du Bois and Ambedkar embarked on projects of constitutional citizenship, all the while knowing that these projects would have their own limitations. By the 1950s and 1960s, the world-changing social movements that they were part of had come to the threshold of making social contact between racialised and caste-socialised groups legally defensible. But post-1960s, racialisation and untouchability remained as

stubborn phenomenon that set the terms for social contact and interaction between groups. Blackness and Black liberation more generally became an iconic political project for Dalits in South Asia in the second half of the twentieth century because it figured the political possibilities of the unity of the oppressed. Black liberation movements had changed the social and political field of action in the heart of the most powerful empire in history and had thus signaled to Dalits, living in dire conditions of exploitation, domination, and subjugation, that a different political future and social arrangements were indeed possible. These would require the development of educational institutions, direct actions, and large organised movements composed of cross-racial and cross-caste coalitions as had occurred in the Civil Rights movement. Jarvis Givens' Fugitive Pedagogy makes the case for how Black teachers in the Jim Crow era laid the basis for the Black power movement in the 1960s and the emergence of Black studies fundamentally.[1]

The first two chapters of this dissertation showed through juxtaposition how Du Bois' essay *The Meaning of Progress* in the *Souls of Black Folk* can best be understood in light of Ambedkar's autobiographical text *Waiting for a Visa* as a meditation on the experience of untouchability. As motion and contact across spaces and social relationships between racialised and caste-socialised groups became more possible and imaginable due to these collective, organised movements: both Black freedom strugglers and Dalits seeking to abolish untouchability and caste came to face the limits of what touch and contact itself could accomplish. In societies organised around untouchability, touch and respectful social relationships were a deeply transformative human

[1] Jarvis R. Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021).

experience and continue to function in this way in segregated social settings.[2] Touch and a more respectful interpersonal ethics enforced by a powerful social movement would not prove enough to bring about lasting social change. An intervention at the level of ideology and the social relationships that made asymmetries of power possible was needed.

This intervention that Du Bois and Ambedkar both theorized was in the field of education. The third chapter covered how Ambedkar's writings on education and educational philosophy could best be understood in light of Du Bois' writings in *The Education of Black People* as exploring the question of what educational projects and liberatory pedagogies were necessary to eradicate untouchability and the practice of social domination and hierarchy in modern society. The question of education and educability was crucial for both thinkers because both rejected white supremacist and Brahminical ideologies which held that Black people and Dalits were not capable of intellectual work and thus should not be taught the liberal arts or be given access to any kind of higher education system beyond the bare minimum that they could be taught to function as subordinate workers. It was crucial for both thinkers that educational institutions be designed around the needs of marginalised groups as a way of transforming ideological relationships which maintained these forms of power over them. Higher education institutions which were set up to investigate the social causes behind racist and casteist ideologies and which would train teachers and professors about these social contexts so as not to reproduce them would be unique in an environment where colleges and universities most often reproduce the prejudices and harmful social relationships prevalent in society at the time. In India, Dalit professors and students continue

[2] Suryakant Waghmore's *Civility Against Caste: Dalit Politics and Citizenship in Western India* is a great ethnography of how Dalits in Western India struggle to claim public spaces on civil terms and how celebrations of Ambedkar and his legacies are often discouraged in villages.

to face extreme contempt and disrespect from fellow students and fellow faculty that sometimes leads to their deaths. This makes the stakes of a higher education system set up for the needs of oppressed castes a question of survival. Du Bois' believed that Black educational institutions could link the civil rights movement with the international labour movement in teaching students that their racial oppression also had to do with global empire and the international division of exploitative labour. This helped to bring out that an Ambedkarite philosophy of education would also teach students about how relations of caste made possible relations of labour-exploitation in South Asia, and further, how the prevalence of untouchability made Dalit workers especially exposed to the disregard and hatred of those socialised and seen to be in caste-positions above them. The work of building and sustaining these educational institutions would be pragmatic, painstaking, patient, and infinitely rewarding to the teachers and students committed to the project of making possible a more just society. Connecting the educational visions of the most marginalised across national boundaries would necessitate a new philosophy of solidarity.

Towards a new philosophy of solidarity

The problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the colour line and the practice of untouchability. Global anti-Blackness and the practice of untouchability were part of the same global social process by which modern democratic states cultivated small electoral coalitions which continued to justify war, the increased exploitation of the world's workers, and practical contempt for the lives of the majority of human beings on the planet. It was no coincidence that the struggles for Black Liberation and the struggle against Untouchability both resisted forms of nationalism and imaginations of national communities which relied on mythical enemies that the

state would need to rally to eliminate with prejudicial violence. The United States legally abolished segregation and racial discrimination with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And yet US state institutions and "free markets" continued to deny a full, dignified life to Black Americans in particular through the persistence of racist ideologies, new forms of criminalization, the encouragement of predatory and racist practices of labour and financial exploitation made possible by new technologies, and at the municipal level, segregation and economic disenfranchisement of Black Americans continued well into the twenty first century. Free India legally abolished untouchability in 1950. And yet, in 2020 it was found that 27% of Indian households continue the heinous practice.[3] The level of continued caste-segregation in Indian society can be ascertained by the fact that in the Indian Human Development Survey, an exhaustive census survey undertaken every ten years by the Indian government, it was discovered 5% of marriages in India were inter-caste – i.e. marriages where the individuals belonged to different castes.[4]

In global political economy, anti-Black ideals held by Western countries about the lack of fitness of Africans to democratically govern their newly independent states helped legitimate and continue to legitimate brutal policies of debt extraction and the destruction of emergent systems of social democratic societies through hyper-privatisation. Adom Getachew documents in *World-making after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* how Caribbean and pan-African plans of a New International Economic Order which could sustain an egalitarian form of economic

[3] Omkar Joshi and Amit Thorat, 'The Continuing Practice of Untouchability in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 January 2020.
[4] Rukmini S., 'Just 5 per Cent of Indian Marriages Are Inter-Caste', *The Hindu*, accessed 25 April 2023, https://www.thehindu.com/data/Just-5-per-cent-of-Indian-marriages-are-inter-caste/article60099878.ece#:~:text=Inter%2Dcaste%20marriages%20were%20rarest,inter%2Dcaste%20marriages%20in%20India; Lauren Michele Jackson, 'Why A New Mixed Race Generation Will Not Solve Racism', *Buzzfeed News*, 10 February 2017, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lauren-m-jackson/multiracial-families-cant-save-the-world-from-racism.

development were dashed by direct political interventions in some cases, and by indirect economic measures in other cases, by Western states.[5] On an intimate scale, the practice of anti-Black ideology helped create a sense of "white superiority" amongst many in Western states which made possible emergent fascist publics that sought to make their countries "great again". These fascist publics populated and continue to staff the law enforcement agencies in the United States for instance, and their capacity and propensity for cruelty is well-reported. This ideology was so deeply embedded in both liberal and conservative articulations of electoral politics and social policy, particularly in the US, that it went almost unnoticed for many who had not engaged with Black studies, until the election of Donald Trump in 2016 – and for those who had missed it then, the sheer injustice of this contempt and hatred of Black life became clear for the millions who marched in the summer of 2020 in response to the police killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd. In the United States, and globally, developing a respect for and an understanding of the histories of racialisation, exploitation and violence that Black people are particularly exposed to will be absolutely crucial in the creation of a truly solidaristic, democratic society.

Untouchability too is a global phenomenon. Dominant-caste diasporas from India across the world continue to exclude and treat with contempt those they see as belonging to castes "lesser" than them. Within India, the ruling party has built its electoral coalition and its ideological legitimacy on a long-standing mythos of a pure caste-Hinduism that pre-dated the Mughals and British, and now must be violently established at the expense of Dalits and Muslims, to bring about a great Hindu nation. Scholars of this party and the Hindu Nationalist movement have extensively

[5] Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

documented the inspiration that the party's founders took from Adolf Hitler and his project of racial purity in Germany.[6] Indeed contemporary ideologues within the party do not hesitate to defend Nathuram Godse, the murderer of M. K. Gandhi, and regular gather to call for a genocide of Muslims in the country. The sex-gender-caste complex which Paik identifies in *Vulgarity of Caste* operates to make the vast majority of Dalits, and the majority of OBCs (Other Backward Castes) poor and exposed to labour exploitation, regular violence at the hands of castes higher than them, patriarchal violence, and chronic unemployment and under-employment. The ruling party's siphoning of economic resources to the super-rich and mismanagement of the country, combined with its disastrous handling of the economic consequences of the pandemic have led to a brutal rise in poverty and unemployment. All of which is made possible by the mystification of the caste, and the widespread myth that securing the interests of the Brahmanical party that represents the Hindu nation means securing the interests of all who actually inhabit it.

Towards the end of their lives, confronting the scale of social violence in front of them that they both worked so hard to end, both Du Bois and Ambedkar turned to the problem of education. Struggles for equality and self-respect that played out at the national and global scale were macrocosms of the kinds of relationships and the kinds of possibilities for life and for work that existed at the scale of villages, neighbourhoods, and cities. Practices of caste-hierarchy and the denial of the right to education for Dalits were the ideological quilting point that stitched together Brahmin and dominant-caste rule in villages and cities with Brahmin and dominant-caste rule at the state and national level. For Brahmins and Indian ruling classes, public education was to be

[6] Ida Roland Birkvad, 'The Ambivalence of Aryanism: A Genealogical Reading of the India-Europe Connection', *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 49, no. 1 (September 2020): 58–79; James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

kept at a substandard level of quality to ensure that those who could afford to send their children to private schools could then maximally occupy seats in higher education institutions and safely occupy high-paying and high-status jobs in Indian society. In the United States, Du Bois noted that the public school as an idea only came to be because Black people in the South believed that quality, universal public education was a foundational step in reconstructing a society immediately after emancipation. In Chicago, where this dissertation was written over nine years of study, public schools were both the site of disinvestment and anti-Black contempt, and the site where the public school teachers' union united to bring about a new movement of hope and social solidarity and helped to elect a mayor in 2023 who was himself a middle-school teacher who fought the privatisation of the schooling system in the city.[7] And so the cultivation of the idea of a public worth its name – a true society where all felt equally implicated in the fate of each other – relied very much on the Dalit and Black movements for the right to public education.

At the higher education level, in the US and in India, higher education degrees are becoming prohibitively expensive for most, and are largely seen as means to give individuals credentials that would then enable them to get the appropriate jobs. Education itself has become a site of profit-making, labour-exploitation and the creation of small elite groups who can access and learn to speak in the closed worlds that higher education institutions often become. In this moment, it is worth remembering and expanding Du Bois' work in imagining and expanding a truly democratic form of Black study. This form of study patiently and painstakingly builds an account of how social processes can enable or disable mutual respect, can make possible or impossible a living wage for a worker, and can critically examine every field of human knowledge to expand the

[7] Eve Ewing, *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

possibilities of human life. It is also worth keeping alive Ambedkar's vision for ambitious institutes of higher education for Dalits and other caste-oppresesd people in South Asia. There are at least fifty-seven Dalit subcastes in Andhra Pradesh and Telengana who still have not had a piece of writing published by someone belonging to them.[8] This is the case in Tamil Nadu, and is likely the case in Dalit castes across India. We still have not begun to hear the voices and experiences of Dalits struggling against the boundaries of caste and untouchability, and we have not sufficiently begun to address the social and economic structures that are the root causes of their oppression. The fight against untouchability and racism will continue through the patient work of liberatory pedagogy, through the cultivation of respectful spaces of learning, through the creative deployment of financial resources to enable and protect first-generation students and educators, and finally, through engaging in strategically effective political contestation which does not have any contempt for the public that it seeks to empower.

Considering untouchability and Black liberation as part of the same global social process is key to building new forms of knowledge – both the discipline of Black studies and the discipline of critical caste studies – that can build meaningful connections across the world at a time of an intensification of the ideologies of social hierarchy and domination. The abolition of untouchability and the horizon of annihilating caste makes clear the kinds of institutional and pedagogical practices that need to expand in the American academy and the Indian academy to create the conditions of possibility for respectful and loving contact between human beings. The horizon of Black liberation and the ambitions of Black study, to make possible the conditions of Black life in the racially ordered modern world, also makes clear how entire disciplines need to be

[8] K. Purushotham, *14 April: Telugu Dalit Short Stories* (Panther's Paw Publication, 2022), 18.

re-oriented and re-thought in light of their epistemological complicities in anti-Black presuppositions. Linking the histories and conceptual problems of the two struggles, and how they actually speak to one another on commensurate terms is key to the challenging question of what it might mean to build solidarity and friendship between the oppressed across the world.

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