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W.E.B DuBois and the use of social science and fiction in the fight against American racism 1897-1911

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ABSTRACT

AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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B.A. CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
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W.E.B. DU BOIS AND THE USE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND FICTION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST AMERICAN RACISM, 1897 TO 1911

Advisor: Professor Carolyn Fowler
Thesis dated April, 1991

Between 1897 and 1911, W.E.B. Du Bois was vigorously involved in the fight against American racism. In this struggle he used both social scientific methodology and fiction. However, he decided that social science would be his primary tool. Du Bois thought racism was based on misconceptions, and he believed these could be overcome with scientific studies. This thesis will examine how Du Bois developed his scientific beliefs, and the extent to which Booker T. Washington and his supporters obstructed Du Bois's scientific plans. In this regard, the thesis will explore the special significance of his first novel, The Quest of the Silver Fleece, in his fight against racism.
W.E.B. DU BOIS AND THE USE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND FICTION
IN THE FIGHT AGAINST AMERICAN RACISM, 1897 to 1911

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN
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MASTER OF ARTS

BY
BRUCE EDWARD TWYMAN

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. DU BOIS DEVELOPS HIS BELIEF IN SCIENCE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. &quot;THE TUSKEGEE MACHINE&quot; AS A ROADBLOCK TO DU BOIS'S PLAN</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. FICTION AS A WEAPON AGAINST RACISM</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

DU BOIS DEVELOPS HIS BELIEF IN SCIENCE

In the last decade of the nineteenth century W.E.B. Du Bois was a student at the University of Berlin. While a student in Berlin Du Bois celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday in 1893. Writing in his diary on this occasion, he committed himself to the task of raising his race. To accomplish this work Du Bois pledged that he would use both science and art.

This thesis will examine the scope of Du Bois's use of science and his use of fiction between the years 1897 and 1911 for the purpose of liberating Black Americans.

Early in life W.E.B. Du Bois became convinced that refuting false information with scientifically proven facts was the best way to oppose racism in America. Du Bois was born at a time in American history when the nation was experiencing profound changes. The cataclysmic Civil War had engulfed North and South, Black and White, and affected rich and poor. The financial backbone of the South had historically been the institution of slavery; now it lay in ruins. During Reconstruction, Blacks experienced radical social-economic changes unimaginable just prior to the war. Yet, as suddenly as slavery ended, a racially oppressive period followed the Reconstruction. The years between the
Civil War and the twentieth century were full of profound change for America.

Within the context of a changing America there were changes in the nature of education. Centuries of curriculum based upon belief in Christian dogma were being affected by the challenge of scientific inquiry. Unsubstantiated beliefs and assumptions were being subjected to step by step scientific analysis to prove or disprove them.

Both the historical and educational context mentioned above would affect the life of Du Bois. Being educated during the oppressive Post-Reconstruction period, Du Bois would see his people subjected to harsh conditions. Though he was reared in New England, far away from the extremes of racism, he became familiar with the general conditions of his people. Rationalizations for the oppression were often rooted in beliefs which had a Biblical foundation. As a result, Blacks were seen as cursed sons of Ham who were condemned to slavery by Noah. Therefore, many Whites felt Blacks were naturally inferior. White Americans, too, often assumed that the wretched living conditions of Black Americans were the results of the general inferiority of the race. In this context, Du Bois would propose the use of scientific methodology as a
means of discrediting such beliefs and assumptions, and ultimately reforming racial relations.

It seems that the seeds of Du Bois's later activity in confronting racism were partially sown by the White abolitionists among whom he was reared. Du Bois was the only Black student in his high school graduating class in 1884. He commented in retrospect upon a speech he gave on Wendell Phillips during the commencement:

The great anti-slavery agitator had just died in February and I presume that some of my teachers must have suggested the subject, although it is quite possible that I chose it myself. But I was fascinated by his life and his work and took a long step toward a wider conception of what I was going to do. I spoke in June and then came face to face with the problem of my future life.¹

This quote leaves open the possibility that the New England abolitionists exposed Du Bois to a philosophy or world view which incorporated organized resistance to racism as a basic tenet. To the extent that they emphasized abolitionist traditions, they may have swayed him in the direction of an activist instead of passive response toward American racism.

Du Bois was eager to continue his education. Though he did not have the money, Harvard was his first choice.

Neither he nor his family wanted him to go South. However, he talks about how arrangements were made for him to go to Fisk.

Finally in the fall of 1885, the difficulty of my future education was solved. The whole subtlety of the plan was clear neither to me nor my relatives at the time. Merely I was offered through the Reverend C. C. Painter, once excellent Federal Indian Agent a scholarship to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee; the funds were to be furnished by four Connecticut churches which Mr. Painter had formerly pastored. Disappointed though I was at not being able to go to Harvard, I merely regarded this as a temporary change of plan.²

The abolitionist community steered Du Bois South instead of to Harvard. The comment below shows Du Bois's acceptance of this idea.

On the other hand there was the call of the Black South; teachers were needed. The crusade of the New England schoolmarm was in full swing. The freed slaves, if properly led, had a great future.... They needed trained leadership. I was sent to help furnish it.³

The New England schoolteachers had gone South to help the freedman; and it seems he was sent South to be a part of the whole process. The data suggest that somewhere between New England and Fisk Du Bois begin to think about organized resistance to racism.

As a result of such thinking, Du Bois became committed to the belief that White America could be

² Ibid., 22.
³ Ibid., 24.
convinced of its misconceptions about Blacks by being overwhelmed with scientific facts which refuted their attitude. While a student at Fisk University, Du Bois developed an idea which perhaps had some bearing on this philosophy. He decided, through the leadership of educated men like himself, that the Black race could be liberated. Concerning the struggle, he said:

... It was a battle which might conceivably call for force, but I could think of it mainly as a battle of wits; of knowledge and deed, which by sheer reason and desert must eventually overwhelm the forces of hate, ignorance and reaction.4

This belief by Du Bois perhaps can yield some insight into understanding the development of his scientific philosophy. Du Bois was one of the most outstanding students at Fisk.5 While growing up in Great Barrington, young Du Bois had hardly known a rival in his schoolwork.6 Through his academic ability, he had been able to distinguish himself among both Blacks and Whites.

Early in life, he found that scholastic achievement could overcome the effects of racism. In response to the lamentations of relatives about discrimination, Elliott


5 Ibid., 109.

Rudwick said Du Bois, "thought that hard study would grant him immunity to racial disabilities," and that it would allow him to "equal Whites." According to Francis L. Broderick, Du Bois always found acceptance among White intellectuals as a peer.

The opinions of Broderick and Rudwick appear to be accurate when considering the following statement by Du Bois:

The secret of life and the loosing of the color bar, then, lay in excellence, in accomplishment; if others of my family, of my colored kin, had stayed in school, instead of quitting early for small jobs, they could have risen to equal Whites. On this my mother quietly insisted. There was no real discrimination on account of color -- it was all a matter of ability and hard work....

The above comments indicate that Du Bois felt (as an individual) that his scholastic ability helped him overcome racism. The use of scientific methodology to challenge unsubstantiated beliefs or assumptions was also a scholastic endeavor. Having achieved some success in opposing racism as a scholar he knew it was a viable tool.

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With his scholastic ability as his weapon, Du Bois had shielded himself from the degree of racism experienced by his relatives. This seems to be why he could conceive of wielding his scholastic abilities as a tool of liberation for his people; he believed that the battle called for, "knowledge, wits and reason," to overcome "ignorance."  

Looking back upon his Fisk days Du Bois states, "I was determined to make a scientific conquest of my environment, which would render the emancipation of the Negro race easier and quicker." To facilitate this scientific conquest, Du Bois knew he would need the finest training in scientific techniques which the world had to offer, consequently he set his sights upon Harvard.

Though at Fisk he had emphasized the traditional Greek, Latin, and philosophy, at Harvard, Du Bois perfected his scientific techniques in the disciplines of the social sciences. Philosophy is not a discipline which depends on precise facts and scientific methods; it is generally more speculative and judgmental. Du Bois would credit some of his professors with turning him away from philosophy as a tool to oppose racism. Du Bois commented on their influence.

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12 Ibid., 124.
But it was James with his pragmatism and Albert Bushnell Hart with his research method, that turned me back from the lovely but sterile land of philosophic speculation, to the social sciences as the field for gathering and interpreting that body of fact which would apply to my program for the Negro.¹³

Du Bois was participating in the embryonic stages of the development of the discipline of sociology as a method of understanding human interaction. As he gained a better understanding in the use of social science methodology, he would be able to apply this tool in opposition to unsubstantiated beliefs and assumptions.

Du Bois compiled an outstanding academic record at Harvard, achieving a doctorate degree there.¹⁴ In spite of this fact he felt that he still was not prepared to carry out his scientific war for the Black race. He knew that many people in the world considered American universities to be inferior to those in Europe. He wrote to the head of the Slater Fund, former President Rutherford B. Hayes, for money to study in Europe. He said, "Properly to finish my education, careful training in a European university for at least a year is, in my mind and the minds

¹³ Ibid., 148.

of my professors, absolutely indispensable." 15 With money from the Slater Fund, Du Bois went to the University of Berlin. Here, he was further exposed to the developing social sciences by some of the world leaders in these new fields.16 In Berlin he felt that he gained valuable training in preparation for his scientific conquest over American racism. 17

W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the most successful African American scholars to emerge since the advent of slavery in America. His philosophy of transforming race relations for the good of Blacks by proving to Whites that they had no scientific justification for the mistreatment of Blacks can be in part traced to his belief that his academic success had successfully helped to shield him from racism. Du Bois had made a great impression upon a portion of White academia. To do this he no doubt had to surmount countless obstacles. Part of his task was to successfully present and scientifically prove his ideas to some of the most respected scholars in the world.18 From Fisk to Harvard to Berlin, Du Bois's belief in science as the tool

15 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, 44.
16 Du Bois, Autobiography, 162.
18 Ibid., 33.
to oppose racism and liberate his people seems to have been re-enforced by his academic success. By the time he returned from Berlin, Broderick comments that Du Bois continued to believe that the "path to reform lay in the accumulation of empirical knowledge which, dispelling ignorance and misapprehension, would guide intelligent social policy."\textsuperscript{19}

By the time he achieved his Harvard doctorate, Du Bois still believed that the scientific conquest of the American race problem was still a reasonable objective. This was his imbedded philosophical belief and he was now anxious to tactically confront his environment.\textsuperscript{20}

Between 1896 and 1910 W.E.B. Du Bois actively opposed American racism using social science as his primary tool. He would publish many articles of a social scientific nature in various publications. However his scientific studies and research which employed scientific methodology began professionally with the University of Pennsylvania. Most of these studies were conducted for the United States Department of Labor and at Atlanta University.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} Broderick, \textit{Negro Leader}, 31.

\textsuperscript{20} Du Bois, \textit{Speeches and Addresses}, 34.

The publication of his dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*, in a sense inaugurated his scientific career. This book was the first in a series of historical studies by Harvard University. Bernard C. Steiner said, "Mr. Du Bois has done a thoroughly good piece of work." A review from the *Atlantic Monthly* declared, "All this apparatus looks well, and Dr. Du Bois has laid students under obligation to him,..." Edward E. Sparks of *Dial* magazine remarked that Du Bois had written with "copious references, an exhaustive chronological conspectus of slave-trade legislation, and a very full bibliography." These critics all make reference to the fine manner in which Du Bois handles and presents the topic. But as an initial assault upon American racism in his career, he

1980), Table of Contents (details about these studies will appear later in the paper).


seems to reach back to the nation’s foundation to lay the blame for the problem he was preparing to oppose. In the following quotes he attacked religious and scientific assumptions about the conditions of Blacks. He had written:

It is neither profitable nor in accordance with scientific truth to consider that whatever the constitutional fathers did was right, or that slavery was a plague sent from God and fated to be eliminated in due time. We must face the fact that this problem arose principally from the cupidity and carelessness of our ancestors....

It behooves the United States, therefore, in the interest both of scientific truth and of future social reform, carefully to study such chapters of her history as that of the suppression of the slave-trade. The most obvious question which this study suggest is: How far in a State can a recognized moral wrong safely be compromised? And although this chapter of history can give us no definite answer suited to the ever-varying aspects of political life, yet it would seem to warn any nation from allowing, through carelessness and moral cowardice, any social evil to grow....

In these comments, we see a challenge to the moral credibility of the founding fathers; a refutation of any scientific validity, as grounds for past and current oppression of Blacks; and a starting point from which to launch his contemporary scientific campaign against racism.

The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870, examines past problems

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between Black and White Americans. In examining these past interracial relations, Du Bois raised issues which were applicable to the nation’s racial problems of the day. Therefore, even though the book was historical, its analysis of American interracial relations was relevant in the late nineteenth century.

In 1896 Du Bois was hired by the University of Pennsylvania as an Assistant in Sociology. He was not hired to do any teaching. His only job was to conduct a particular scientific study on Philadelphia’s Negro problem, for which he received a small stipend and was not even listed in the faculty catalog.26 Commenting upon his beginnings in Philadelphia, Du Bois wrote:

I began with my advent into the University of Pennsylvania a planned career which had an unusual measure of success and yet was in the end pushed partly aside by forces which, if not beyond my control, were certainly of tremendous weight. My vision was in the beginning clear. The Negro problem called for systematic investigation and intelligence. The world was thinking wrong about races because it did not know. The ultimate evil was ignorance and its child, stupidity. The cure for it was knowledge based on study. The opportunity opened at the University of Pennsylvania was exactly what I wanted.27

As a result of this research the University of Pennsylvania published Du Bois’s The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study, in 1899. The study was a systematic

26 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, 58.
27 Du Bois, Speeches and Addresses, 36.
investigation of Philadelphia's Black community which attempted to separate false conclusions, based on ignorance, from a reality based on study.

Du Bois felt the White people of Philadelphia were thinking wrong about the Negro problem because they did not know. They assumed that their city was being harmed by the crime and venality of Negroes, and they needed to prove this; Du Bois was hired by the University to formally justify this assumption about the Philadelphia Negro.\(^{28}\)

In his dissertation on Du Bois, Adolph Reed suggests that Professor Lindsay of the University of Pennsylvania hired Du Bois as part of an organized attempt to document corruption among Blacks in Philadelphia city politics.\(^{29}\)

Instead of confirming the notions held by many White Philadelphians, Du Bois blamed them primarily for certain problems in the Black community. For example, in analyzing the relationship between unemployment and negative social conditions, Du Bois comments about White Philadelphians.

... if today by shutting Black boys and girls out of most avenues of decent employment they are increasing pauperism and vice, then they must hold themselves

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 37.

largely responsible for the deplorable results; Moreover the cost of crime and pauperism, the growth of slums, and the pernicious influences of idleness and lewdness, cost the public far more than would the hurt to the feelings of a carpenter to work beside a Black man.  

This is an example of Du Bois’s attempt to show the interrelatedness between conditions in the city’s Black and White communities.

This study was well received. The response in academia was positive and encouraging. Dr. Samuel McCune Lindsay was an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University while Du Bois conducted his study. Dr. Lindsay does not appear to have changed his views due to Du Bois’s study on Blacks, but he acknowledges the quality of his work.

Both his training and personal qualifications for the projected work proved to be far greater than our highest expectations, and his signal services in the educational uplift of his people, both before and since his term of service at the University of Pennsylvania, have won for him a public recognition that renders any personal introduction of Dr. Du Bois quite unnecessary.  

Dr. Lindsay goes on to say of Du Bois’s handling of the study, "I feel sure that no one can read Chapter XVI without being impressed with the impartiality and self-  


31 Ibid., Introduction, XI.
control of the writer. Dr. Du Bois has treated the facts he obtained with the delicacy of an Artist."\textsuperscript{32}

The \textit{Yale Review} said of \textit{The Philadelphia Negro}:

The first of these works is not merely a credit to its author and to the race of which he is a member; it is a credit to American scholarship, and a distinct and valuable addition to the world's stock of knowledge concerning an important and obscure theme .... That the "negro problem" is among the gravest and most involved, and difficult, of American life, is increasingly obvious; it ought by this time to be equally obvious that we can derive no considerable help toward it's solution from the sentimental or prejudiced writings which abound, both North and South, on the subject. Here is an inquiry covering a specific field and a considerable period of time, and prosecuted with candor, thoroughness, and critical judgement, its results being interpreted with intelligence and sympathy. We have no space to report or discuss the contents of the work, we have long held that it is in monographs like this that we shall be likely to find the most trustworthy help in solving our great racial problem.\textsuperscript{33}

The above comments by Dr. Lindsay and the \textit{Yale Review} give some indication of the positive response W.E.B. Du Bois received in academic circles to \textit{The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study}. These comments justify Du Bois's concerns about obtaining the finest training possible in his quest to combat prejudice based on ignorance with scientific facts. Du Bois's initial opportunity to confront American racism with science was thus generally

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., XIV (This chapter focuses on day to day race interaction, and prejudice. Also it deals with Black and White intermarriage).

accepted in the academic community, and tended to re-
enforce his belief in the validity of scientific study as
his primary tactic. In retrospect Du Bois would say:

I made a study of the Philadelphia Negro so thorough
that it has withstood the criticism for forty years.
It was as complete a scientific answer as could have
been given under the limitations of time and money;
it showed the Negro as a symptom not a cause; ... At
the end of that study I announced with a certain
pride my general plan of studying the Negro problem
and published papers on the matter in the Annals of
the American Academy in 1898.\textsuperscript{34}

Though some people within the city of Philadelphia
sought to prove that Blacks were the cause of their own
problems, Du Bois used scientific methods to examine these
assumptions and concluded that Blacks' problems were
primarily symptoms. His efforts can be seen as an attempt
to apply his beliefs that racism based on ignorance could
be overcome with knowledge.

Some Philadelphians wanted to use the study as a
basis of reform. Such individuals and Du Bois had a common
interest. It was for this purpose that DuBois laid out a
body of facts, conducting a house to house canvass of a
part of town with a large number of Blacks, the seventh
ward of the city. Du Bois spoke of his efforts: "The
problem lay before me. Study it. I studied it personally
and not by proxy. I sent out no canvassers. I went
myself. Personally I visited and talked with 5,000

\textsuperscript{34} Du Bois, \textit{Speeches and Addresses}, 37.
persons."35 By obtaining the statistical facts, Du Bois’s data would reveal just where discrimination held Blacks back, in employment, housing and other areas. He provided the factual data so that reformers, and others of good will, would have a knowledge base from which to seek change.

Even before the study had ended, Du Bois approached the Federal Government in an attempt to interest them in studying the "Negro problem." In his second autobiography, he talks about getting started with the Government.

While I was making this study, I tried to interest the Federal Government in making some such studies in other areas. In 1897, I wrote Carroll D. Wright, head of the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, and received an encouraging reply. I then wrote in more detail.36

In attempting to interest the labor commissioner in his ideas, Du Bois was seeking to increase his ability to gather more facts which would help to dispel ignorance. He gave the commissioner two detailed plans for the study of "The Industrial Development of the Negro." Du Bois proposed to study various categories of employment. One plan called for urban research, the other one called for rural investigation.37

37 Ibid., 203.
This initial contact between Du Bois and the government resulted not only in official encouragement of his scientific study of the "Negro problem" but perhaps more importantly, it led to Government funding for several scientific studies by Du Bois. He received permission from the first U.S. Commissioner of Labor, Carroll D. Wright, to do a study which would compliment his work on the Philadelphia Negro; realizing that a large number of Blacks who immigrate to Philadelphia came from Virginia, he therefore decided to study Blacks from a region in this state. It was published by the Government under the title "The Negroes of Farmville: A Social Study." 

Du Bois conducted the study, "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study," to add to his factual data on Black America; it was done while he was in the process of completing his Philadelphia study. He examined a wide variety of data on the Blacks of the town. This included, food consumption and production by type, land ownership, personal statistics, conjugal statistics, educational statistics, and many others.

Though Du Bois decided to study Farmville because many Black Philadelphians came from Virginia, and it was

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38 Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 84.


typical of the rural districts, there seems to be no other special connections to his social study in Philadelphia.

Du Bois had recommended additional urban and rural studies to the U.S. Labor Commissioner. His social studies in Philadelphia and Farmville incorporated this same urban and rural line of thought. But it seems the Farmville study generally added to his base of knowledge and fact.

Between 1897, and 1910, Du Bois conducted five studies for the U.S. Labor Commission. Other than the Farmville Study, there was; "The Negro in the Black Belt: Some Social Sketches," [1899]; "The Negro Landholder of Georgia," [1901]; and, "The Negro Farmer," [1906]. The final study conducted for the Labor Commission was in Lowndes County Alabama.\footnote{Ibid., Table of Contents.}


I approached the United States Commissioner of Labor ... with a proposal for a study of Lowndes County, Alabama. I was going to take a single county of a
former slave state with ... large majority Negroes and make a social and economic study from the earliest times where documents were available, down to the present, supplemented by studies of official records and a house-to-house individual canvass. I plied Commissioner Neill with plans ... until at last he authorized the study.... it was the most complete study of the sort that has ever been made. -- It included maps of the chronological division of land; studies of the distribution of labor; investigations of the relations of landlord and tenant; a review of political organization -- and of family life....

Du Bois ultimately considered this to be his finest scientific study. The Government accepted, paid for, and destroyed his only copy of the study; they told him it "touched on political matters."

Through the positive responses of academia and the U.S. Commissioner of Labor Du Bois had positive reinforcement for the continuance of his philosophical and tactical pursuit of scientific study. Government backing for his study of Virginia Blacks migrating to Philadelphia seems to have played some part in encouraging Du Bois to call for and plan a nationwide study of the Negro problem.

Though positive responses were received from the academic community, this same community ignored the call

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for support which he issued in a meeting of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. But this was not an insurmountable obstacle. With some support for his work from the academic community as well as the United States Labor Commission, Du Bois proposed his national plan in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* under the title, "The Study of Negro Problems."  

Du Bois's proposal "The Study of Negro Problems," called for national and state governments to work in concert with the nation's universities. He felt that government had the resources and capacity to gather the necessary facts around the nation. The universities (he thought) had the best trained minds and methods to work with the data collected.

This plan incorporated Du Bois's previously mentioned strategy of combating racism based on ignorance with knowledge based on scientific research. "The Study of Negro Problems" called for a comprehensive nationwide gathering of data by government agencies and careful

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50 Ibid, 21-22.
analysis of the data by the universities. The strategy of challenging unsubstantiated beliefs and assumptions with scientifically researched facts is the same one he mentioned while at Fisk. This was also the basis of a challenge to the assumptions of many Philadelphians. In the work, "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study," a body of scientifically researched facts was gathered. Even though no specific purpose was mentioned, a knowledge base was founded on Farmville which could be the object of future study, or a challenge to assumptions. In "The Study of Negro Problems," Du Bois was seeking to broaden a process, which he was already practicing, of gathering facts.

Du Bois devised a plan for the nation which, though published after his research in Philadelphia was completed, still categorized this research as but a part of the national study.\textsuperscript{51} In spite of limited support for the plan, he attempted to bring together the institutions he felt were essential for success.

This plan was ambitious. It called for the continued use of scientific methods to gather the facts about the conditions of Black America. The specific methods were 1) Historical study, 2) Statistical investigation, 3) Anthropological measurement, and 4)

Sociological interpretation. In a sense it expanded the scope of his studies in Philadelphia and Farmville to include the whole nation. This is true in a dual sense because not only did these studies incorporate urban and rural regions but also because one was sponsored by a university and the other by the Federal Government.

Du Bois's call for a nationwide study sponsored by a government and university partnership may have been based on his successful working relationship with the two entities in Philadelphia and Farmville. He directed the Atlanta University Studies, and occasionally he received funds from the U.S. Labor Commission to conduct research. This was in accord with his proposed strategy in "The Study of Negro Problems." By such actions it seems Du Bois was attempting to follow the strategy which he advocated in this paper.

The Atlanta University Conferences were inaugurated by President Bumstead in response to a need for systematic organization and analysis of data the University received from alumni in urban centers around the nation. President Bumstead was going to hold the initial conference at the same time as the 1895 Atlanta Exposition; but he later decided that the 1896 May Commencement would provide the best opportunity. Initially the conferences were intended

to provide urban data on Blacks, from the research of an urban institution.\textsuperscript{53} This would be a counterpoint to conferences at Hampton and Tuskegee, which focused on rural Blacks. The conferences at Atlanta University, Tuskegee and Hampton were all intended to focus on the economic development of Blacks. This explains why so many of the Atlanta University Conferences dealt with urban and agrarian workers. Also, this would help to account for Du Bois's continued preoccupation with both urban and rural workers. In 1897 Du Bois arrived in Atlanta after completing his research in Farmville, Virginia. He later describes his initial perspective on the conferences.

When I took charge of the Atlanta Conference, I did not pause to consider how far my developed plans agreed or disagreed with the ideas of the already launched project. It made little essential difference, since only one conference had been held and a second planned. These followed the Hampton and Tuskegee model of being primarily meetings of inspiration, directed toward social uplift in certain preconceived lines. This program at Atlanta, I sought to swing as on a pivot to one of scientific investigation into social conditions, primarily for scientific ends.\textsuperscript{54}

These comments show that Du Bois went into Atlanta University to conduct research in a manner which was

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\textsuperscript{54} Du Bois, \textit{Autobiography}, 214.
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consistent with his proposed strategy in "The Study of Negro Problems." He was consistent with the called-for strategy by working through University sponsorship.

Broderick commented on Du Bois's general plan.

Looking toward a "Program of a Hundred Years," he proposed to investigate various categories of Negro life -- artisans, businessmen, college alumni, and criminals; churches and schools -- at the rate of one a year for ten years. When this ten-year cycle had been repeated ten times, the accumulated material was to serve as an unerring guide to scholars, philanthropist, and statesmen. Under Du Bois's direction, this program continued for sixteen years...\textsuperscript{55}

Outside of his teaching duties, Du Bois supervised research, publication, and annual conferences for his Atlanta program on a budget of $5,000 yearly.\textsuperscript{56}

After the initial Virginia study Du Bois did four additional studies for the U.S. Government.\textsuperscript{57} All of these studies were conducted while he was teaching and editing the Atlanta University Publications. The Atlanta University Conferences were held to increase research on the "Negro Problem." Between 1898 and 1913, W.E.B. Du Bois directed these studies. He edited the publications even after leaving Atlanta University and moving to New York.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} Broderick, Negro Leader, 41.

\textsuperscript{56} Du Bois, Autobiography, 215.

\textsuperscript{57} Du Bois, Government Publications, Table of Contents.

\textsuperscript{58} Du Bois, Autobiography, 255.
In total, Du Bois directed sixteen of the Atlanta University Studies.59

This chapter has attempted to determine how Du Bois came to believe that scientific investigation of the problem and causes of American racism -- and presentation of solutions based on such investigation -- constituted the best method for opposing the problem. In doing so I have examined Du Bois's thinking and scholarly activity from his beginnings in New England to Harvard, Berlin, and finally, Atlanta. Du Bois seems to have maintained his belief in the use of scientific investigation as his method of first priority in opposition to racism, from Fisk to Atlanta.

Du Bois continued the use of social science to oppose racism (as he had planned), until he no longer found it feasible to do so. The circumstances which made his efforts unfeasible will be discussed in the next chapter.

59 Du Bois, Against Racism, 65.
Chapter II
THE TUSKEGEE MACHINE AS A ROADBLOCK TO DU BOIS’S PLAN

After the Civil War, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution were passed. These new laws officially brought about the end of slavery and promised citizenship and equal rights for Blacks, including the right to vote. The efforts by the Federal Government, friendly Whites and the freed slaves themselves to enforce these new laws became a major part of the Reconstruction. During Reconstruction, Blacks were elected to political offices throughout the South. These elected officials and their Northern allies formed a vanguard which continued to advocate for the full enforcement of the new amendments.

Gradually, many of the White Northerners grew weary of the struggle to enforce the laws. A fatal blow to the cause of the freed slaves occurred in 1877, when Rutherford B. Hayes became President of the United States. Though Hayes received more electoral votes, he did not receive a majority. Samuel J. Tilden received the most popular votes. After intense negotiations and compromises, Hayes became president. This negotiated settlement became known
as the Compromise of 1877. In a sense this was the beginning of the end of the Reconstruction era.

Reconstruction had brought about great changes for the Freedmen, and advocates such as Frederick Douglass pushed for continued reform in spite of the end of Reconstruction. The North and the South were tired of intersectional strife and of the seemingly endless "Negro Problem." Northerners who had been aligned with Blacks were beginning to desire peace and economic partnerships with the South. Southerners resented the new activities of their former slaves during Reconstruction. After the Hayes-Tilden compromise, there was a general erosion of the gains made by Blacks during Reconstruction but to a great extent the spirit of Reconstruction was still alive. Into this state of national affairs stepped Booker T. Washington. In 1895, he delivered a speech at the Atlanta Exposition, in which he made a general bargain with businessmen and politicians of the North and South. The speech became known as the "Atlanta Compromise."

Before the advent of Booker T. Washington, Black leaders of the South were elected officials and others who derived their positions from the Reconstruction. The maintenance of their positions required the enforcement of the new constitutional amendments. Enforcement of the amendments could only be sustained with the support of
Northern Whites. Though their White support was declining, many Black leaders still advocated for the equal enforcement of the new laws. However, Booker T. Washington's speech at the Atlanta Exposition implied that the civil, political and social advances of Blacks during Reconstruction could be ignored, by both the North and South. In the eyes of White power brokers, Washington eclipsed the other Black leaders. His philosophy became the defacto law for Southern Blacks, to some degree eclipsing the new amendments. Du Bois's philosophy, however, was akin to the values of the Reconstruction era. His demands for equal citizenship and voting rights concurred with the Black vanguard of the Reconstruction. Also, of course, the philosophy of Du Bois implied the enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Section one of the Fourteenth Amendment states:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person within its jurisdictions of equal protection of the laws.

Du Bois's strategy to fight racism using science in an academic context can be viewed as merely exercising the rights guaranteed in the Fourteenth Amendment. However, executing his strategy conflicts with Washington's defacto
public policy in two significant ways. In his "Atlanta Compromise," Washington tacitly agrees to waive both the equal rights of the Amendment and the rights to higher education which are therefore implied. This conflict with Washington would ultimately be a major factor which prevented the execution of Du Bois's scientific strategy. The efforts of Du Bois to execute his planned assault upon racism must be seen within this context. Washington became extremely powerful and controlled millions of dollars as a result of his conciliatory stance. This led to an inevitable conflict with Du Bois's philosophy; and ultimately, it would be the primary reason why Du Bois would abandon his belief that science was the best method for fighting racism at that particular time.

Though his conflict with Washington was the overwhelming obstacle to his scientific plans, Du Bois was also troubled by the acts of overt violence which Blacks were subjected to in the South. Early in the Twentieth Century, while in the midst of his teaching duties and directing the Atlanta University Studies, one such incident occurred. Later, in a speech he delivered on his seventieth birthday, Du Bois recalled the incident.

A poor Negro in central Georgia, Sam Hose, had killed his landlord in a wage dispute. He could not be found for days; then at last a new cry was raised that he had raped the landlord's wife. It was obviously and clearly a trumped-up charge to arouse the worst passions of the countryside, and the mob
roared. I wrote out a careful and reasoned statement concerning the evident facts and started down to The Constitution, carrying in my pockets a letter of introduction to Joel Chandler Harris.... On the way the news meets me: Sam Hose had been lynched ... his knuckles were on exhibition at a grocery store on Mitchell Street.... I suddenly saw that complete scientific detachment in the midst of such a South was impossible.¹

In spite of such violence, Du Bois says, "I tried to keep my mounting indignation within bounds. I went on with my studies".²

Du Bois did not permit this type of violence to stop his work. He was not personally affected. Even the Atlanta Riot of 1906, which resulted in numerous deaths and injuries, could not hinder his studies.

The vast power and resources available to Washington from his headquarters at Tuskegee Institute effectively prevented Du Bois from executing his scientific strategy.³ Du Bois would later give the following analysis of this "Tuskegee Machine."

Moreover, it must not be forgotten that this Tuskegee Machine was not solely the idea and activity of Black folk at Tuskegee. It was largely encouraged and given financial aid through certain white groups and individuals in the North. This Northern group had clear objectives. They were capitalists and employers ... sons ... of abolitionists who ... believed that the Negro problems could not remain a matter of philanthropy. It must be a matter of

¹ Du Bois, Speeches and Addresses, 39.
² Ibid.
³ Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, 68.
business.... They could become a strong labor force and properly guided they would restrain the unbridled demands of White labor, born of Northern labor unions and now spreading South.\textsuperscript{4}

Du Bois felt that these Northern Whites had a clear agenda which called for maintaining a mass group of Southern Blacks who would consent to, or at least not complain about, being denied their constitutional rights. To this group of Whites, Booker T. Washington was a perfect partner.\textsuperscript{5}

Lerone Bennett, Jr. comments on how Washington worked with American power brokers from his Tuskegee office:

From this office, for some twenty years, Washington practically ruled Black America. Like a reigning monarch, he issued an annual message "To My People." He was the court of last appeal on Black political appointments in America and White political appointments in the South. No Negro institution ... could get a substantial amount of money without his approval. He made and broke men and institutions with a word or nod of his head and his silence, in the face of a request for "information," could ruin a career. He corrected messages of Presidents and said the word which made Confederates and sons of Confederates postmasters and federal judges....\textsuperscript{6}

Bennett's comments tend to concur with Du Bois's estimation of Washington's influence. It seems that

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 74.
Washington did possess the power to be a barrier to the plans of Du Bois. Du Bois felt the main goal of Northern Whites was to build up Booker T. Washington so that he would have enough power and resources to control the Black South.7

John Blassingame and Mary Francis Berry comment upon the power of Washington. They also perceive Washington as extremely powerful.

Washington’s reputation grew until he became the power broker between Blacks and Whites.... Washington was, however, ensconced solidly as the Black patronage dispenser. Any Black who wanted a federal appointment had to obtain his stamp of approval.8


Easily the most striking thing in the history of the American Negro since 1876 is the ascendancy of Mr. Booker T. Washington. It began at the time when war memories and ideals were rapidly passing; a day of astonishing commercial development was dawning; a sense of doubt and hesitation overtook the freedmen’s sons, -- then it was that his leading began. Mr. Washington came, with a single definite programme, at the psychological moment when the nation was a little ashamed of having bestowed so much sentiment on Negroes, and was concentrating its energies on dollars. His programme of industrial education, conciliation of the South, and submission and silence as to civil and political rights, was not wholly original;... But Mr. Washington first indissolubly

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7 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, 74.

8 Mary Frances Berry, and John W. Blassingame, Long Memory: The Black Experience in America (New York, Oxford University Press 1982), 162.
linked these things; he put enthusiasm, unlimited energy, and perfect faith into his programme, and changed it from a by-path into a veritable way of life.\(^9\)

Du Bois implies that Whites were tired of sympathizing with Blacks, and therefore granted Washington tremendous power and favor because he facilitated a smooth defacto relinquishment of Black political rights. He did it while promoting Blacks as laborers and farmers.

August Meier describes Washington's outlook in a manner consistent with Du Bois's view. He said that Washington, "criticized the airing of Negro grievances, opposed social equality, accepted segregation... favored property and educational qualifications for the franchise, largely blamed Negroes themselves for their unfortunate condition."\(^{10}\)

Like Du Bois, Meier points to aspects of Washington's stated philosophy. This philosophy led to Washington's complicity in establishing a new public policy for Blacks.

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Du Bois and Washington had a general conflict of ideas. However, Du Bois does mention what is perhaps the one issue that would inevitably lead to his abandoning his scientific efforts at Atlanta University. Washington strongly advocated industrial education for Blacks because it did not threaten Southern White sensibilities. Even though Blacks could prosper with it (as Washington said), it tended to prepare better laborers, servants, and farm workers. Washington secured money for Black schools if they followed this educational philosophy. Du Bois's scientific work was rooted in higher education. He used methodologies in the Social Sciences which asked questions and sought answers which took him far beyond Industrial Education. The concept of scientific study in itself breached the compromise Washington had secured with the nation's power brokers.

In Souls of Black Folk Du Bois talks about the response of Blacks and the nation to Washington's policies.

It startled the nation to hear a Negro advocating such a programme after many decades of bitter complaint; it startled and won the applause of the South, it interested and won the admiration of the North; and after a confused murmur of protest, it silenced if it did not convert the Negroes themselves.  

Washington's power grew from his philosophical proximity to the ideas of America's power brokers.

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11 Du Bois, Souls, 80.
Washington's speech at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition clearly articulated his philosophy on the social, economic, and political relations which Blacks and Whites should have in the South. The words of this speech earned him both friends and enemies. In response to the Reconstruction goal of securing equal citizenship for Blacks, Washington made the following statement to the Nation: "Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom."\textsuperscript{12} This statement concurs with those Americans who sought to keep Blacks unequal to Whites. Washington made two other statements in the speech which could sound appealing to power brokers of the North and South. First he said, "It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top." Secondly, Washington stated: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."\textsuperscript{13}

The first of these statements plainly reinforced the desires of many Whites to keep Blacks in a subordinate position. The second can be interpreted as a tacit


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 135-36.
endorsement of the Post-Reconstruction shift in the
direction of separate but equal legislation.

To the Blacks who sought to continue the struggle
for equality, Washington’s words were discouraging. To
Whites who sought assistance in prohibiting the equality of
former slaves, Washington’s words were encouraging. In
addition to the statements quoted above, Washington said:

There is no escape through law of man or God from the
inevitable: -- The laws of changeless justice bind
Oppressor with oppressed; And close as sin and
suffering joined we march to fate abreast.14

In this statement, Blacks cannot be viewed as
oppressors. Therefore Washington seems to advocate a
working relationship between Blacks and Whites which calls
for Black acquiescence to oppression. Additionally,
Washington pledged:

As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past,
nursing your children, watching by the sick bed of
your mothers and fathers,... we shall stand by you
with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready
to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of
yours,...15

Here Washington further encourages some Americans
while discouraging others. This excerpt from his speech
tacitly links slavery conditions to the situation of Blacks
at the time of his speech.

14 Ibid., 136.
15 Ibid.
In response to business interests which may have feared that organized labor would spread into the South, Washington said: "Cast down your bucket among these people who have without strikes and labour wars, tilled your fields." Though this may have sounded good to certain businessmen, Black workers may have felt apprehensive about such a pledge.

Washington’s speech came at a time when the nation was grappling with the fate of the Freedmen. After being granted unprecedented rights, liberties, and freedoms during Reconstruction, Blacks saw these things taken away. As rapidly as attempts to bring in social, political, and economic equality began, they suddenly ended. There was grumbling among Blacks and some Whites and some apprehension among politicians about how to treat Blacks. It was a national problem in the North and South.

Washington’s speech sought to eliminate the problem by giving up demands for social, economic, and political rights. Big business worried about organized labor, so Washington said for them to depend on ex-slaves. In the speech, Washington pledged that Blacks would fatefuly accept oppression, be as devoted to Whites as were the slaves, and accept being on life’s bottom level. By assuming a mantle of leadership under this platform,

16 Ibid., 135.
Washington relieved Northern and Southern Whites from the necessity of contending with the issue of rights for Black Americans. They could now work with a Black leader who embodied a new public policy for racial relations in the South.

Clark Howell, the editor of the Atlanta Constitution, said of the speech "The Whole speech is a platform upon which Blacks and Whites can stand with full justice to each other."\(^{17}\) James Creelman of the New York World declared, "I have heard the great orators of many countries, but not even Gladstone himself could have pleaded a cause with more consummate power...."\(^{18}\) Washington said that U.S. President Grover Cleveland, while visiting the Exposition after hearing about his speech, "consented to do anything I have asked of him for our school.... Whether it was to make a personal donation or to use his influence in securing the donations of others."\(^{19}\)

These comments and responses after Washington's speech help show that his power resulted from the philosophy stated in the speech. Big business of the North and South were overjoyed by his words. William Ferris, of

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 138.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 145.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 140.
The Negro Society for Historical Research, thought that Washington’s philosophy brought him the allegiance of “the men who represented the financial bone and sinew of the country and were the molders of public thought and ... opinions.” Ferris also told of a Providence merchant who declared that Washington was greater than Douglass because Washington didn’t advocate social equality.

The responses to Washington’s speech help establish a strong relationship between his philosophy (which was partially stated in his speech), its embrace and support by powerful Whites, and, as a consequence, Washington’s resulting power. Though he was powerful and believed the same things before the speech, it served as a focal point, because it drew immediate and direct responses to a specific policy which he articulated.

A great deal of Washington’s power came through Whites who wanted to further his philosophy on industrial education and social relations. Du Bois wanted to oppose racism by using scientific methods to challenge unsubstantiated beliefs and assumptions. Even if Washington didn’t personally believe Blacks were inferior


21 Ibid., 372.
and only worthy of society’s lowest levels, he tended to
give support to the White racism that Du Bois was opposing.
He could not tell Whites his philosophy was only for
political gain. His policies tended to justify the
continued racism which Du Bois pledged to oppose.

Ferris, in noticing the effect Washington was having
on Blacks, said:

The poor, hoodwinked, deluded Negro swung into line
and jumped upon the band wagon. He saw the White man
clapping his hands and he clapped too. He didn’t
know that he was applauding his own social, civil,
and political damnation.22

The comments of Ferris show that Blacks were confused about
the unprecedented power and acclaim given to Washington.
However Du Bois sought to eliminate confusion, and bring
reform.

The scientific studies conducted by Du Bois attacked
traditional beliefs of Black inferiority which were rooted
in unsubstantiated beliefs and assumptions. Also, his
studies, such as The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study,
used science to prove that Whites were to blame for the
"Negro Problem." In Souls of Black Folk, Du Bois quotes
Washington as follows: "the South is justified in its
present attitude toward the Negro because of the Negro’s
degradation ... his future rise depends primarily on his

22 Ibid., 373.
own efforts." Du Bois further criticizes this view: "His doctrine has tended to make the Whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders and stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators; when in fact the burden belongs to the nation."24

To some extent Washington had relieved Whites of the problems of the Freedman and placed it squarely on the shoulders of the ex-slaves themselves. Du Bois, in his Philadelphia study and in his comments in The Souls of Black Folk, threw the problem right back at White America. He repudiated Washington's assertions just as he used his accumulated data to repudiate the foundations of racism.

The strategy of Du Bois in opposing racism was to refute myth, lies, and misconception with truth based upon scientific investigation. With a goal of bringing about changes in America by presenting new facts, Dubois's program openly contradicted the plans of the Tuskegee machine. Washington could justify White Southerners' treatment of Blacks; however, Du Bois's studies tended to remove justification and to attack common assumptions held by Whites and endorsed by Washington to maintain their

23 Du Bois, Souls, 93.
24 Ibid., 94.
support. Elliott Rudwick gives examples of how Du Bois’s studies contradicted common assumptions:

For example, it was ordinarily agreed the Negroes were lynched because of well founded accusations of rape or attempted rape. Du Bois reported, however, that in less than one-quarter of a long series of lynchings the victim had been charged with sexual assault. Through comparative statistics, Du Bois also demonstrated effectively that Southern Negro children received an inferior education when one considered such indices as length of school term, the amount of school appropriations, the salaries of teachers, the value of school property, etc. Furthermore, he tried to disprove the accepted assumption that Whites were the benefactors of Negro education in the South and he estimated the Negroes paid a prominent proportion of the property taxes and indirect taxes...25

Though Washington may have personally desired more equality and justice for Blacks, the Whites who empowered him held him to his compromise. According to Washington biographer Louis Harlan, his words at the Atlanta Exposition sealed a compromise between the Black man, the Southern White man, and the Northern financier:26

"Whenever Washington sought to move beyond the Atlanta formula toward more equal justice for his race," he states, "White criticism forced him to retreat to the old line."27

Even if Washington agreed with Du Bois that there was a

25 Rudwick, Propagandist, 50.


27 Ibid.
need for reform, he could not speak up for Blacks without threatening his source of power.

The two were on a course of inevitable conflict. The scope and strategies of both men envisioned a nationwide solution for the "Negro Problem." Du Bois had said in his "The Study of Negro Problems" that an individual working alone could not accomplish his national objective; only a partnership between the government and the universities could accomplish the feat.28 His concept of using this partnership to conduct non-industrial academic work violated the already established Atlanta Compromise. Certainly the use of a Black university to conduct non-industrial research, which in effect would undermine the foundations of the Atlanta Compromise, was going to bring about conflict.

In 1902, some of the leading financiers of Tuskegee, men such as Jacob Schiff, the president of the Long Island Railroad, William H. Baldwin, Jr., Robert C. Ogden, J.G. Phelps-Stokes and George Foster Peabody, urged Du Bois to leave Atlanta University and go to Tuskegee.29 By urging Du Bois to leave Atlanta, these Tuskegee supporters


probably hoped to eliminate, or control, a prominent opponent of their policies.

Du Bois was reluctant to go to Tuskegee; in the following comment he speaks about his apprehension.

... I wanted to continue what I had begun and if my work was worth support, it was worth support at Atlanta University. Moreover, I was unable to be assured that my studies would be continued at Tuskegee, and that I would not sink to the level of a 'ghost writer.'

Du Bois met with Washington twice in 1902, but was never assured that he would be allowed to conduct his scientific studies. He was invited to assume a position subordinate to men who advocated a philosophy diametrically opposed to his own. Considering the fact that he could not secure any positive assurance about this major point of disagreement, it is logical to fear that the "Tuskegee Machine" would not have promoted his scientific studies.

By the end of 1902, Washington could not persuade Du Bois to accept his offer. That same year, Washington proposed a conference to "see in what way we understand or misunderstand each other and correct mistakes as far as possible." The conference was to be held in 1904. In a

30 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, 78.
31 Du Bois, Correspondence, 52.
32 Du Bois, Correspondence, 53.
letter to Kelly Miller discussing the upcoming conference,

Du Bois says:

I was asked to go to Tuskegee some time ago and at that time the conference you have been invited [to] was cooked up.... I think this will be a chance for a heart to heart talk with Mr. Washington. I propose to stand on the following platform: 1. Full political rights on the same terms as other Americans; 2. Higher education of selected Negro youth; 3. Industrial education for the masses; 4. Common school training for every Negro child; 5. A stoppage to the campaign of self depreciation; 6. A careful study of the real condition of the Negro; 7. A national Negro Periodical; 8. A thorough and efficient federation of Negro societies and activities; 9. The raising of a defense fund; 10. A judicious fight in the courts for Civil Rights.

Finally, the general watch word must be, not to put further dependence on the help of the Whites but to organize for self help, encouraging "manliness without defiance, conciliation without servility...."33

This letter demonstrates Du Bois’s determination to continue with the plan for the scientific study of the condition of Blacks in the country. Also Du Bois’s call for higher education, an end to self depreciation, full political rights, a defense fund, and court battles, would seem to go against the general wishes of Booker T. Washington and the "Tuskegee Machine." Everything Du Bois proposed here violated the "Atlanta Compromise."

Washington’s attempt to bring Du Bois to Tuskegee, and then to meet with him, must be viewed with their conflicting positions in mind. Du Bois’s philosophy was

33 Ibid.
consistent with the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Washington was a key member of a movement which had come into place by denouncing the principles of those same Amendments. The Washington group had effectively subordinated those who advocated the same philosophy as Du Bois. It is therefore logical to suspect that Washington would attempt to suppress the opinions of Du Bois, which blatantly conflicted with his, whether by seeking to bring him to Tuskegee or by calling for a meeting to eliminate conflicting ideas. In regards to Du Bois’s meeting with Washington, Rudwick comments:

> It appears that the Washingtonians wanted only to use the New York conference... for the purpose of bringing the Du Bois group into line. On the other hand, Du Bois’s role in this whole affair reflected a naivete in attempting "to understand and cooperate with Mr. Washington."³⁴

³⁴ Rudwick, Propagandist, 86.

³⁵ Du Bois, Correspondence, 54.
Washington may be implying that Du Bois and others don't know Southern realities as he does. This would help justify his methods. The "untried schemes," and "theory," of "Northern people," could also reflect Washington's estimation of Du Bois and others. Du Bois responded in a letter to Washington:

I do not think it will be profitable for me to give further advice which will not be followed. The conference is yours and you will naturally constitute it as you choose. I must of course reserve the right to see the final list of those invited and to decide then whether my own presence is worth while.\(^{36}\)

This correspondence between Du Bois and Washington shows signs of strain, but the conference was held as planned and nothing happened at the conference to end the misunderstanding between them.\(^{37}\) Du Bois found himself surrounded by powerful Washington supporters who tried to get him to endorse Washington's philosophy. Du Bois thought the meeting was unfair, but he joined a Committee of Twelve, which was to be a steering committee for all of Black America. The Committee of Twelve was financed by Andrew Carnnegie, a wealthy Tuskegee supporter. Du Bois later left the committee because of its pro-Washington

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 54.

bias. Washington, Carnegie and others were dismayed because of this.\textsuperscript{38}

Before the conference was finally held, Du Bois had \textit{The Souls of Black Folk} published, and this book increased the strain between the two men. According to Du Bois, "My book settled pretty definitely any further question of my going to Tuskegee as an employee. But it also drew pretty hard and fast lines about my future career."\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{The Souls of Black Folk} is a book which surveys and makes some judgement about the condition of the Black race since slavery. In the book Du Bois criticizes Booker T. Washington's policies. In consideration of Du Bois's refusal to join Washington at Tuskegee, their inability to reach an understanding about their disagreements at the conference, and Du Bois's criticism of Washington and others in \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}, it would not be unexpected that Washington or some elements of the "Tuskegee Machine" would attempt to prohibit the work of Du Bois. Du Bois would credit Washington and the "Tuskegee Machine" as being the ultimate cause of his abandonment of his goal of using science to study the "Negro Problem."\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38} Du Bois, \textit{Autobiography}, 247.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{40} Du Bois, \textit{Dusk of Dawn}, 68.
By 1910 Du Bois felt that the "Tuskegee Machine" had made it impractical to continue using science to fight racism. He believed that he could no longer execute the strategy he proposed in "The Study of Negro Problems.".

Though he never got the national support called for in that paper from government agencies and major universities, Du Bois still worked, to a degree, in accordance with this strategy. But when he could no longer practically conduct studies for the government or Atlanta University, he altered his program for opposing racism. In "The Study of Negro Problems" he wrote:

There will, without doubt, always be room for the individual working alone as he wills; if, however, we wish to cover the field systematically, and in a reasonable time, only organized and concerted efforts will avail;...

He obviously felt it was more practical to alter his program than to work alone.

Regarding Du Bois's use of science, Broderick thought, "in the Negro world Du Bois's role might not evoke respect and gratitude but hostility. All these dangers were very real, and they eventually crippled his whole program."
Washington was the most influential leader in the Black community while Du Bois was conducting his research. Any Black community in step with the Tuskegee philosophy would likely be hostile to the philosophy of Du Bois.

Du Bois's work at Atlanta University was adversely influenced by the following circumstances: he did not join Washington at Tuskegee; he was unable to compromise with Washington in the conference; he had written critically of Washington in *The Souls of Black Folk*. In the Fall of 1904 after the conference with Washington, Du Bois said he began to have problems raising money for his studies. He commented:

> Meantime, the task of raising money for Atlanta University and my work became increasingly difficult. In the fall of 1904 the printing of our conference report was postponed by the [Atlanta University] trustees until special funds could be secured. I did not at the time see the handwriting on the wall. I did not realize how strong the forces were back of Tuskegee and how they might interfere with my scientific study of the Negro.44

Du Bois felt that he needed a publication which would help him get public support for his scientific work.45 He said, "I published in the *Guardian* a statement concerning the venality of certain Negro papers which I charged had sold out to Mr. Washington."46

44 Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 82.
With many of the country's Black newspapers aligned with Washington, Du Bois felt he was suffering from bad press reports about his work in Atlanta. He felt that he needed a news journal to get his position to the public in order for his scientific work to be accepted. To this end he founded the Moon in December, 1905, and the Horizon in January of 1907. Both of these journals were dedicated to giving the public information about Black higher achievement and some information which countered the Tuskegee philosophy.

At a time when he was having problems maintaining economic support for his studies and coming to recognize the impact of the "Tuskegee Machine", Du Bois founded a protest organization called the Niagara Movement. This movement was designed, in part, to oppose the philosophy of Washington, though generally it fought American racism. It was founded in January, 1906. However, one key event which can be seen as the catalyst for its founding is a confrontation between Washington and Monroe Trotter. Du Bois describes it in these terms:

Mr. Washington went to Boston and arranged to speak in a colored church...Trotter and Forbes, editors of The Guardian, determined to heckle him and make him answer publicly certain questions with regard to his

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attitude toward voting and education.... The result was a disturbance magnified by the newspapers into a riot, which resulted in the arrest of Mr. Trotter. Eventually he served a term in jail.

With this incident I had no direct connection whatsoever. I did not know beforehand of the meeting in Boston, nor of the projected plan to heckle Mr. Washington. But when Trotter went to jail, my indignation overflowed....

The imprisonment of Monroe Trotter may have served as the catalyst for Du Bois's call for the organized action which became the Niagara Movement. However, The Souls of Black Folk, according to James Weldon Johnson, "brought about a coalescence of the more radical elements and made them articulate, thereby creating a split of the race into two contending camps." The Cleveland Gazette said, "Negro college graduates especially considered him the representative of the race's aspirations." William Ferris believed the following:

That Du Bois's "Souls of Black Folk" has become the political bible of the Negro race, that he is regarded by the colored people as the long-looked-for political Messiah, the Moses that will lead them out of the Egypt of peonage, across the Red Sea of Jim

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48 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, 87, (Here Du Bois says that he organized the Niagara movement in response to Trotter's jailing).


Crow legislation, through the wilderness of disfranchisement and restricted opportunity and into the promised land of liberty of opportunity and equality of rights, is shown by the recent Niagara movement which has crowned Du Bois as the Joshua before whom it is hoped the Jericho of American caste prejudice will fall down....

Ferris’s critique of The Souls of Black Folk emphasizes Du Bois’s advocacy of the rights granted to Blacks in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Ferris goes on to contrast Du Bois to other men whose leadership was based on military or political genius.

But Du Bois is one of the few men in history who was hurled on the throne of leadership by dynamic force of the written word. He is one of the few writers who leaped to the front as a leader and became the head of a popular movement through impressing his personality upon men by means of a book. He had no aspiration of becoming a race leader when he wrote his Souls of Black Folk. But that book has launched him upon a brilliant career.

The Souls of Black Folk extended the clashing philosophies of Du Bois and Washington onto the national stage. Du Bois’s criticism of Washington amounted to an examination of the validity of the Nation’s new policy toward Blacks, and of Washington’s leadership. Previously Du Bois’s philosophy and work had contradicted the goals of the "Atlanta Compromise," however, The Souls of Black Folk directly attacked the national policy. The founding of the Niagara Movement initiated "open sustained warfare" in the

51 Ferris, The African Abroad, 276-77.
52 Ibid.
form of organized resistance to Washington, the Atlanta Compromise, and racism.

Even before Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk*, he was being viewed as a possible alternative to Washington. With the book’s publication, opponents acquired a tangible foundation, which articulated the sensibilities of many Blacks. But it seemed to have been the actual jailing of Trotter which inspired Du Bois to collect and lead a force crystallizing around him. Du Bois was later to recall:

I sent out from Atlanta in June 1905 a call to a few selected persons 'for organized determination and aggressive action on the part of men who believe in Negro Freedom and growth.' I proposed a conference during the summer 'to oppose firmly present methods of strangling honest criticism; to organize intelligent and honest Negroes; and to support organs of news and public opinion.'

Fifty-nine colored men from 17 different states eventually signed a call for a meeting near Buffalo,...I went to Buffalo and hired a little hotel on the Canadian side of the river at Fort Erie, and waited for the men to attend the meeting. If sufficient men had not come to pay for the hotel, I should certainly have been in bankruptcy and perhaps in jail; but as a matter of fact, 29 men, representing 14 states, came. The "Niagara Movement" was incorporated January 31, 1906, in the District of Columbia.53

Du Bois’s organizing principles defy the "Atlanta Compromise." Also the attendance of people from many

states indicates an emerging nationwide resistance to the "Tuskegee Machine."

Critics of the Niagara Movement accused Du Bois of attacking Washington out of envy and being ashamed of his race. Du Bois found himself reluctantly moving away from his strategy of science toward a new role of propagandist. He explains this in a speech at the 1938 Atlanta University Convocation;

Now the fat was in the fire and my career as a scientist was beginning to be swallowed up in my role as propagandist. This was not all to my liking....

While now I was being swept on in this current to a new and different mode of expression, I continued to cling to my scientific world....

Du Bois was being uncontrollably pushed toward a change of priorities for opposing racism. Though he often exercised other methods, scientific study was emphasized as his top priority to oppose racism. Now, attacks upon his scientific studies required him to use agitation with the Niagara Movement and propaganda with the **Moon** to defend his philosophy.

Du Bois clung to his strategy of science in spite of the opposition of Washington and his supporters because he felt that his years of successfully executing his strategy so justified financial support that eventually he was bound

54 Du Bois, *Speeches and Addresses*, 47.

55 Ibid., 213.
to get it. As he reflected upon his work, he couldn’t believe that something so worthy of support would never receive it.

As the director of the Atlanta University Studies and Publications, Du Bois pioneered in the work of compiling facts about American Blacks. His insistence on scientific methods to back up logical calls for a change in America’s racial policies resulted in a vast collection of information about Blacks for the fields of sociology, history, economics, politics and others. Broderick tends to support this view in his comments upon the Atlanta University Publications:

Finally, whatever their limitations, the 2,172 pages of the series provided the best information on the Negro then available. In that era most writing about the Negro was done by untrained observers who, looking out of a pullman window, saw pretty much what they expected to see; by writers who, in the solace of their libraries, had only their theories to guide them; or by Southerners who, knowing Sam and Auntie from the old days, spoke authoritatively about the whole race.... Du Bois’s significance is that he was probably the first sociologist in the South and certainly the first in the field of Negro studies to make empirical evidence the fulcrum of his work....

In the following statement, Du Bois implied that his work was unique:

It must be remembered that the significance of these studies lay...in the fact that at the time of their

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57 Broderick, *Negro Leader*, 42.
publication Atlanta University was the only institution in the world carrying on a systematic study of the Negro...and putting the result in a form available for the scholars of the world....

In 1900, came...The great World’s Fair at Paris ... I thought I might put my findings into plans, charts and figures ... and went over and installed the work. It was an immediate success. The American press, White and colored, was full of commendation ... the exhibit received a Grand Prize, and I, as its author, a Gold Medal.

I was pleased and satisfied. I sat back quietly to hear the commendation and it came not only for this particular exhibit but for the work of the Atlanta conferences in general. I was sure the work I had planned was certain of support and growth. But it was not. Within less than ten years it had to be abandoned because $5,000 a year could not be found in this rich land for its support.58

Within ten years after receiving praise at the Paris World’s Fair for his efforts in Atlanta, Du Bois would abandon his work. He would do scientific research periodically after 1910; certainly he was involved scientifically again as Chair of the Sociology Department at Atlanta University from 1934-44. However, the scientific plans he envisioned in "The Study of Negro Problems," were to be discarded by 1910. With his national scope for opposing racism in mind, Du Bois would not attempt to forge ahead alone. Less than one year after Du Bois’s exhibit won him accolades at the Paris World’s Fair, he was invited to relocate in Tuskegee.

Some of Washington's correspondence reflects his preoccupation with Du Bois, and seems to justify Du Bois's feelings about the "Tuskegee Machine." Washington reflects this attitude as he gathers information about the Niagara meeting.

My dear Professor Greener: I have just received your telegram.... You will find, in the last analysis, that the whole objective of the Niagara Movement is to defeat and oppose everything I do. I have done all I could to work in harmony with Du Bois, but he has permitted Trotter and others to fool him into the idea that he was some sort of a leader, consequently he has frittered away his time in agitation when he could succeed as a scientist or sociologist. I hope that you will spare no pains to get on the inside of everything....

Here, Washington seems to be conducting surveillance on the Niagara Movement. Also, he appears on the surface to be endorsing Du Bois's scientific work. Washington's attempts to bring Du Bois to Tuskegee as a professor in 1893, as well as in the years between 1901-1903, reflect his appreciation of Du Bois's ability. However, Washington's comment must be considered in the context of the two men's philosophical differences. Therefore it seems likely that Washington may have had another type of scientific work in mind.

In a letter to the publisher of the Outlook, Washington criticizes Du Bois:

In the last issue of the Outlook I fear you gave too much serious attention to Dr. Du Bois and his movement. I have watched it closely from the beginning. All told I do not believe there are more than two or three hundred colored people of any prominence or influence who are inclined to follow such folly as he is the leader of....

Washington’s comments tend to justify Du Bois’s suspicions that the "Tuskegee Machine" was causing problems for his scientific work. Washington’s letters reflect anxiety about Niagara and certainly indicate covert surveillance of the movement. Harlan verifies this view: "His spies infiltrated all of the organizations of his Black opponents, the New England Suffrage League, the Niagara Movement, and the NAACP." 


I am doing all I can to discredit this affair. I think I have succeeded in defeating the dinner project to Du Bois, by asking all of my friends and yours not to subscribe to it....I feel confident that a big public testimonial, such as was planned, cannot be pulled off.

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60 Ibid., 67.
61 Harlan, Washington, Preface.
62 Washington, Papers, V. 10, 127.
Correspondence from Anderson the following day indicates the extent to which Washington monitored Du Bois's activities just before he left Atlanta University.

Du Bois, Waldron, Walters, Sinclair, Max Barber, Wibecan, Dr. Mossel, Buckley, Milholland, Ida Wells, and the entire cosmopolitan dinner crowd met in secret conference today. Public meeting to-night have had newspapers cover it. Another secret session tomorrow. Think Villard is with them.63

This letter from Anderson seems to indicate that Washington was very concerned about the movements of Du Bois and his associates. It could indicate that he was applying pressure in various ways to block the activities of Du Bois. Washington had gone from initially attempting to get Du Bois to join him at Tuskegee to seeking to control him in conferences. With both of these attempts to eliminate a possible barrier to the "Tuskegee Machine" failing, he monitored Du Bois as part of a campaign to stop his activities. The following letter reflects Washington's dismay with Atlanta University as much as with Du Bois.

I do not know why it is that Dr. Du Bois and Atlanta University take the attitude that they do. I never abuse Dr. Du Bois, never refer to him in public except in some complimentary manner. -- Whenever I speak, in nine cases out of ten I refer in a complimentary way to Atlanta University....64

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 322.
This statement shows that Washington links Du Bois and Atlanta University together as a source of criticism against Tuskegee.

It is possible that Washington placed direct pressure on Atlanta University to get rid of Du Bois. Du Bois was conscious of the controversial nature of his presence on campus and began to contemplate leaving.65 Washington continued to speak in opposition to Du Bois:

I think it is too bad that an institution like Atlanta University has permitted Dr. Du Bois to go on from year to year stirring up racial strife in the heart of the South. While Du Bois, as I understand it, has left Atlanta for New York, he is to come back to Atlanta in the spring and summer and conduct some kind of racial conference.66

The first of the above letters by Washington was written immediately before Du Bois left Atlanta University; the second, immediately after. In his papers, it seems that Washington may not have directly mentioned bringing an end to Du Bois's scientific work. However, the sustained conflict between them was caused by their philosophical differences.

Washington and the Tuskegee Machine represented a policy for the management of Blacks, within the context of the policy of the Federal Government and big business. With access to far greater resources, Washington could

65 Broderick, Negro Leader, 87.
66 Washington, Papers, V. 10, 484.
effect Du Bois's ability to carry out scientific opposition to American racism. It is the use of these superior resources which Du Bois felt ended his work at Atlanta University. Du Bois reflected upon his leaving Atlanta University:

Gradually I began to realize that the difficulty about support for my work in Atlanta University was personal; that on account of my attitude toward Mr. Washington I had become persona non grata to powerful interests, and that Atlanta University would not be able to get support for its general work -- or for its study of the Negro problem so long as I remained at the institution. No one ever said this to me openly, but I sensed it in the worries which encompassed the new young President Ware who had succeeded Dr. Bumstead. I began to realize I would better look out for work elsewhere.67

By this time Du Bois felt certain that his conflict with the "Tuskegee Machine," would put an end to his scientific work in Atlanta. His following statement shows his fatal realization that he had to sacrifice his goals for the good of the school.

Young President Ware had received almost categorical promise that under certain circumstances increased contributions from the General Education Board and other sources might be expected, which would make the university secure, ... I was sure that I was at least one of these "circumstances," and so my work in Atlanta and my dream of the settlement of the Negro problem by science faded. I began to be acutely conscious of the difficulty which my attitudes and beliefs were making for Atlanta University.68

67 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, 93.
68 Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn, 93.
The General Education Board was founded in 1902 by John D. Rockefeller, Sr. The Board donated money to schools which they felt were worthy. The bulk of money donated initially toward Black schools was designated, as one observer put it, for "the sort that would make him a better servant or laborer, not that which would train him to rise out of his place."69 Du Bois was critical of the policy of the Board; and the Board was supportive of Washington. With the Government, major businessmen and Washington all voicing the same educational and social policy in the South for Blacks, Du Bois felt pressured to conform or leave. Though the philosophies of Du Bois and Washington conflicted on many issues, Du Bois's studies contradicted the nation's general preference for industrial education. He did not possess the resources to fight the "Tuskegee Machine" at that time.

Also by 1910, Du Bois's final government sponsored study in Lowndes County, Alabama was destroyed. United States Labor Commissioner Neills informed him that a study so critical of conditions in Lowndes County would

jeopardize the security of the Calhoun School, which was Du Bois's headquarters during the study.  

Du Bois had sought to execute a solution to America's race problem based upon a partnership between the universities and government. His open clash with Booker T. Washington and the "Tuskegee Machine" severely hampered his ability to execute the university phase of that solution. The destruction of his Lowndes County study ended his last government sponsored study.

At this point in Du Bois's life, it seems that his only option for the scientific study of Black America was to go on alone. However, the national scope of his plan precluded an individual effort.

For W.E.B. Du Bois, the destruction of his logistical strategy proved to be fatal to his scientific work at that time. It is perhaps ironic that the force he blames for his undoing in science, "The Tuskegee Machine," is itself constructed somewhat of the key elements, government and the university, mentioned by Du Bois as vital for scientific success. Though Washington utilized the government from a university base, just as Du Bois did, Du Bois's blaming of Washington for the demise of his

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scientific work indicates a belief that Washington power base was stronger. In one of Du Bois's last issues of the Horizon, shortly before leaving Atlanta University, he says, "Booker Washington under two administrations, has been made the political dictator of the Negro race with the distribution of all patronage." 71

Du Bois had conducted solid pioneering scientific studies. He was praised for his work at home and abroad. But the "Negro problem" was not solved. By 1910 he could no longer conduct scientific research professionally and he concluded that such a strategy would not solve the "Negro Problem." His opposition to Booker T. Washington made it difficult to find employment beyond Atlanta University. 72

While his belief in the present utility of science, and his ability to conduct the work faded, Du Bois continued his leadership of the Niagara Movement, and he went on publishing The Horizon. He accepted an offer from the budding National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to merge the Niagara Movement into their organization; he accepted the position of editing the new


organization's publication, The Crisis. After thirteen years of attempting to oppose American racism with scientific methodology, Du Bois changed his priorities in the struggle, but continued to work on the problem. He became, as he put it, a "master of propaganda" and used this technique as part of his strategy to oppose American Racism.

One important aspect of Du Bois's use of propaganda would be his use of fiction. Chapter three will examine his use of fiction for propaganda purposes in the battle against racism.

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73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 253.
Chapter III

FICTION AS A WEAPON AGAINST RACISM

By 1911, W.E.B. Du Bois had departed from Atlanta University and his scientific study in Lowndes County had been destroyed. Both of these incidents had a very significant impact on his decision to no longer make science his primary method for fighting racism in America. At that time Du Bois decided that his primary means for fighting racism would be propaganda. One important aspect of propaganda, which Du Bois would use, was fiction. Du Bois's use of fiction actually predates his scientific work. The manner in which Du Bois used fiction to fight racism will be examined. Special attention will be given to the similarities between his first novel, The Quest of the Silver Fleece and his suppressed Lowndes County study.

Du Bois gives some indication of his feelings on the purpose of fiction as an art form, and of its use as a means to oppose racism. In a 1921 Crisis article Du Bois insisted that Black art must creatively present the truth.¹ In an article from The Crisis in 1926 Du Bois reviews Alain Locke's The New Negro. In the review Du Bois

is critical of Locke's suggestion that beauty, not propaganda, be the goal of Black literature.²

In October of the same year Du Bois states his general thoughts on the purpose of Black art.³ He seems to imply that the artist is a creator of beauty, that truth and beauty are "unseparated and unseparable," and that the artist must project the general truth in his work. He then goes on to state this concept more directly.

The apostle of Beauty thus becomes the apostle of Truth and Right not by choice but by inner and outer compulsion. Free he is but his freedom is ever bounded by Truth and Justice; and slavery only dogs him when he is denied the right to tell the Truth or recognize an ideal of Justice.

Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purist. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of Black folk to love and enjoy.⁴

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this quote: As an artist Du Bois is compelled by 1) truth and reality, 2) right instead of wrong, 3) justice rather than injustice, and 4) freedom instead of slavery.

In a general sense, Du Bois's "Criteria of Negro Art" proposed some tactics for fighting racism. This

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⁴ Ibid., 296.
corresponds to tactical proposals articulated by Du Bois for The Niagara Movement,⁵ and in "The Study of Negro Problems."⁶ Tactics mentioned in "The Study of Negro Problems" focus on a scientific battle against racism. Those of the Niagara Movement focus on using organized agitation to fight racism. To the extent that artistic tactics for fighting racism can be discerned in "The Criteria of Negro Art," a correlation exists between it and the other two cases. It can be therefore deduced that Du Bois intends likewise to use fiction to fight racism.

Even more convincing than such parallels, Du Bois states in the article, "whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy...." This statement directly implies that Du Bois has always exercised his artistic writing talent in the cause of opposing racism, which seeks to deny Blacks the right to love and enjoy.

Writing in American Literature, Arnold Rampersad also sees Du Bois's use of fiction as a tool to oppose racism.

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Du Bois's turn toward art was empowered by perhaps the central factor of his overall career -- his perception of the need for action, not subservience or contemplation, in the face of American racism.\(^7\)

Rampersad comments that Du Bois's life was devoted to fighting American racism. He implies that any activities of Du Bois would be made to serve this cause. Du Bois in fact states in "Criteria of Negro Art" that all of his fiction can be assessed within the context of the fight against racism. As a graduate student in Berlin, Du Bois had dedicated himself to similar goals and objectives. On his twenty-fifth birthday he wrote in his diary:

> Be the truth what it may I will seek it on the pure assumption that it is worth seeking -- and Heaven nor Hell, God nor Devil shall turn me from my purpose till I die.... I therefore take the world that the unknown lay in my hands and work for the rise of the Negro people,...\(^8\)

In this diary entry Du Bois specifically commits himself to work for the elevation of Black America. The use of any means, including fiction, to achieve this goal can be seen in the article.

Rampersad quotes Du Bois from his diary as follows:

> "These are my plans: to make a name in science, to make a

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8. W.E.B. Du Bois, Autobiography 170, (The complete diary entry was not in his autobiographies or his papers).
name in art and thus to raise my race."⁹ Herbert Aptheker
and Arnold Rampersad both quote Du Bois from this same
diary entry. Aptheker says: "Du Bois pledged to devote
all his energies and talents to the liberation of his
people; this was to include his work in science and in
art."¹⁰

The diary entry helps to establish a consistency of
purpose for Du Bois spanning the period from 1899 to the
1926 Crisis article. As a young man Du Bois stated that he
would use his artistic talents to fight racism. Therefore,
any fiction written by Du Bois in the years from 1897 to
1911 must be considered in the context of his pledge to
fight racism. Even though Du Bois declared in "Criteria of
Negro Art" that he had always used his art to fight for
Blacks, the diary entry 33 years before re-enforces the
statement. Additionally, it justifies searching his
fiction to find just where and how he strikes blows in
opposition to American racism.

Du Bois's first fictional writing was the short
story "Tom Brown at Fisk" which was published in the Fisk

⁹ Rampersad, American Literature, 51.

¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, Creative Writings by W.E.B. Du
Bois: A Pageant, Poems, Short Stories, and
Playlets, ed. Herbert Aptheker (White Plains, New
York: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1985),
Introduction, x.
This is the story of a young Fisk woman who earns money teaching school in the Tennessee countryside. The young woman meets a young man, Tom Brown, and convince him to enroll at Fisk. In the end, the two get married and become prosperous Kansas farmers.

The story occurs almost entirely within the context of the Fisk student environment. Du Bois wrote the story while he was editing the Fisk Herald. He details the ups, downs, and adventures of dormitory life. At first glance, the story has little to do with race relations in America. The story refers to Whites only once. In this scene, a judge's wife is riding through the countryside with a Northern journalist. They pass the young Fisk teacher sitting at the roadside. She is resting after searching for a teaching job. The two White observers assume she is lazy and the journalist records this as her observation of ex-slaves.12

Here Du Bois displays his White characters as being all too eager to assume the worst about Blacks. This scene cautions White America against being too quick to judge Blacks before a careful gathering of facts. Du Bois would later make general comments on this type of incident. "We receive the testimony of men without asking whether they

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11 Du Bois, Creative, 56.

12 Ibid., 56.
were trained or ignorant, careful or careless, truthful or given to exaggeration, and above all, whether they are giving facts or opinions."\textsuperscript{13}

Though the above statement was made ten years after Du Bois wrote "Tom Brown at Fisk," it is a clue to understanding why Du Bois created such a scene. In the same paper Du Bois commented:

Nearly a hundred years ago Thomas Jefferson complained that the nation had never studied the real condition of the slaves and that, therefore, all general conclusions about them were extremely hazardous. We of another age can scarcely say that we have made material progress in this study.\textsuperscript{14}

By showing the two White women drawing such obviously false conclusions about such a hard working, striving Black woman, Du Bois cautions White readers against the same error.

This scene is the only real encounter between Blacks and Whites in "Tom Brown at Fisk." However, the story achieves a goal mentioned by Du Bois in "The Criteria of Negro Art." Du Bois says, "artists have used goodness -- goodness in all its aspects of justice, honor and right --


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 9.
not for the sake of an ethical sanction but as the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest."\textsuperscript{15}

Here lies the key purpose and value of this story. Du Bois wrote a human interest story. Though he generally omits White characters, he shows the Black students rising out of slavery, and succeeding. His portrayal of Fisk shows the black colleges as useful institutions. The racist of the North and South could see such things as dangerous or threatening, but other Whites will sympathize with Black schools and students.

Du Bois believed that an educated Talented Tenth of the Black population would lead the entire race. Because the Black masses were agrarian, this leadership would be among them. The theme of an educated agrarian Black leadership would occur in Du Bois's fiction throughout 1911. "Tom Brown at Fisk" is a good example of this. In this story Du Bois shows the potential of educated leadership emerging from the agrarian masses, then returning to lead. "Tom Brown at Fisk" is full of positive role models for the masses of Blacks living in the South.

Du Bois said in "The Criteria of Negro Art" that his talent for writing was always used to help oppose racism, and that by gaining a sympathetic ear or human interest,

\textsuperscript{15} Du Bois, "Criteria", 296.
this goal could be furthered. "Tom Brown at Fisk" can be interpreted as a story which seeks to achieve such goals.

In 1903 Du Bois published The Souls of Black Folk. In this book he included a short story, "Of the Coming of John."16 This is the story of two young men named John, one Black and one White. The two had been boyhood playmates. Both went away to college followed by the high hopes and well wishes of family and friends. Black John left behind a typically racist, rural Southern upbringing, made palatable only by his ignorance and naivety. He returned educated and aware of the injustice. He lectures family and friends about their religious practices. His education shows him flaws in his environment, and it strains relations with family and friends. Whites of the town see him as uppity and "a dangerous nigger." He reopens the Black school, but it's closed because his ideas are perceived as too dangerous. He is dejected.

Afterwards, on his way home, he spots White John (also recently returned from college) attempting to rape his sister; he kills him. The story ends with John fleeing from a lynch mob.

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"Of The Coming of John" contains several scenes which oppose American racism. The scenes I will examine include: 1) John's defiance of White Southerners' advice (which parallels Booker T. Washington's philosophy for Blacks); 2) How John gains understanding for the dilemma of Blacks who seek to educate themselves; 3) John's rebellion against traditional White male exploitation of Black females; and 4) how John's opposition to racism, by self-sacrifice, corresponds to Jesus Christ.

The Whites considered Black John to be a good boy before he went to college. This opinion was based upon him being a good field hand and respecting the Whites. They told his parents that college would ruin him.17 This philosophy expressed by the Whites follows the guidelines for cultivating good racial relations as expressed by Booker T. Washington.18

Du Bois considered Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Machine to be the key obstacle of Black progress. Both Washington and the Whites of his story believe that

17 Du Bois, Souls, 246.
being a good field hand is an essential element in preserving good race relations.\textsuperscript{19}

John, the story's protagonist, forsakes his status among the Whites and goes on to college. John's activities are parallel to the philosophy of Du Bois, and therefore confronts the defacto public policy of the Whites and Booker T. Washington.

Upon returning to his home, John's education does not allow him to be satisfied with the relationships between Blacks and Whites. According to Rampersad:

The principal theme of the story is the dilemma of the educated Black aspirant to culture, whose strivings are frustrated and betrayed by injustice . . . . he discovers "the Veil that lay between him and the White world. A tinge of sarcasm crept into his speech, and a vague bitterness into his life . . . . his homecoming is a disaster. He offends the Blacks ... and provokes the Whites . . . . Driven from the classroom and alienated from his race, he is psychologically and spiritually paralyzed, ready for exile or death when he kills White John.\textsuperscript{20}

Here, Rampersad describes the tragic ending of the story. He implies that John commits suicide rather than face the White mob.\textsuperscript{21} Though Du Bois doesn't specifically say this, he does hint at a tragedy earlier in the story.


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
The two Johns cross paths when White John has Black John removed from a concert hall in New York. Angrily accepting his fate, Black John says:

Perhaps ... I am to blame myself in struggling against my manifest destiny ... Here is my duty to Altamaha ... perhaps they'll let me help settle the Negro problems there, -- perhaps they won't. I will go in to the King, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.22

Du Bois portrays a young man who ultimately does perish as a result of his pursuit of higher education. John's pursuit of higher education and his pledge to settle Altamaha's Negro problem is parallel to Du Bois's pledge to fight racism. In pursuit of his goals, John conflicts with the advice of the local Whites. The advice of the Whites is similar to Booker T. Washington's philosophy. John can therefore be seen as a symbol of Du Bois's conflict with Washington. He feels rejected by the Whites of the North, and by the Blacks and Whites of the South. Whether he kills himself or not it is tragic to educate one's self, attempt to educate others, and then to die while trying to defend someone. From this perspective it seems that Du Bois's "The Coming of John" is a human interest story which may evoke sympathy from the reader.

Du Bois evokes sympathy for John and, by implication, all Blacks who are threatened as a result of

22 Du Bois, Souls, 254.
acting contrary to the advice of Southern Whites or of Booker T. Washington. As he states in "Criteria of Negro Art," "Artists have used goodness ... in all its aspects of justice, honor and right ... as the ... method of gaining sympathy and human interest." Du Bois has John accept his "manifest destiny" by going back home to Altamaha to settle the "Negro Problem," whether he lives or dies. Here Du Bois portrays the seeker of knowledge as good, just, honorable and right. Whether one believes John was murdered, or committed suicide or lived, his intent was good.

In "Of the Coming of John," Rampersad says John Jones strikes a blow at White America,23 and, besides noting his tragic fate, he seems to view John as misguided. He says:

Black John returns a brooding figure, Du Bois' "would-be Black savant" caught in a dilemma between two worlds. He loses his position as a teacher in the Black village school. Wandering in a daze he comes upon White John playfully attempting to kiss his sister who works as a maid for the family, and kills him. The lynch mob finds him sitting quietly on a cliff near the scene of the deed; he turns from them and leaps to his death into the sea.24

In analyzing this scene, Rampersad may not have considered Du Bois's rebellion against traditional racism. His fight against racism would include fighting the

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23 Rampersad, American Literature, 53.
24 Ibid., 75.
traditional sexual exploitation of Black women by White men.

Joseph Rhodes Jr. comments that "The true self John discovered learned to love beauty, but he asserts himself most when he strikes down a White man who attempts to claim from a Black woman what his have always considered their natural due."\(^{25}\)

Historical records can allow John's advances toward Jenny to be perceived as not only an attempt to assault her, but the manhood of her brother also. Rampersad says that John "strikes a blow" at White America. If John does interpret the sight of his struggling sister as a rape in progress, then he may be viewed as one who strikes a blow for the dignity of Black women, his manhood, and his race. From such a perspective, John's death, whether by suicide or lynching, can be elevated from that of a murderer (tragically trapped between two worlds) to one of a self sacrificing man (who strikes a blow for all those Black men and women who couldn't).

"Of the Coming of John" must also be viewed for what it shows of Du Bois's use of literary Ethiopianism. Ethiopianism refers to a religious tradition which was popularized by English speaking Blacks in Africa, America

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and the Caribbean during the late eighteenth and the early
nineteenth centuries. Its tenets were based in the
interpretation of Psalms 68:31, which states "Princes shall
come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her
hands to God." The Black race was viewed as Ethiopia,
reaching to God, or rising from slavery and oppression. It
was generally believed that the rise of the Blacks would
rescue the entire world from White oppression; Black
America was believed to be in the vanguard of this rise.
The tradition was known among free Blacks; and it was
especially popular with the African Methodists Episcopal
Church.

A.M.E. minister Alexander Crummell often
incorporated the Ethiopian theme into his lectures between
the years from 1846 to 1897. In 1897, Crummell and Du
Bois were members of the American Negro Academy. This
organization was founded to promote Black achievement in
literature, art, and science. In 1897, Du Bois delivered a
paper to the Academy entitled "The Conservation of

26 Wilson J. Moses, "The Poetics of Ethiopianism:
W.E.B. Du Bois and Literary Black Nationalism,"

27 Ibid, 412.

28 Ibid, 413.
Races." His words in the paper echo the Ethiopian theme. His fiction between 1897 and 1911 would reflect this literary Ethiopian theme. Apparently, the theme was useful in his fight against racism.

In "Of the Coming of John," Black John is a symbol of the rising Ethiopians. He personifies the savior or messiah role for Black Americans. As the title suggests, he is the prophesized messiah coming to end oppression. Viewed in this context, John is a symbolic Black Christ. Additionally, John can ultimately be seen to sacrifice himself for the good of his people. In this sense also, he is a symbolic Black Christ. Du Bois would continue to use the Black Christ image, especially in his novel *The Dark Princess* and in the collection, *Dark Water*.

It is doubtful that most readers would initially perceive a Black Christ symbol in "Of the Coming of John." But to the degree that John's life may be similar to Christ's, readers may perceive him as just, right and good. In this context, readers may be sympathetic to Du Bois's general philosophy and his fight against racism. John may also be perceived in a somewhat heroic nature as an "apostle" of beauty, truth right, and justice. All of

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these are attributes and goals which Du Bois speaks highly of as means by which artists can gain for Black folk the right to love and enjoy.\textsuperscript{31}

In 1911, Du Bois published \textit{The Quest of the Silver Fleece}. In his autobiography, \textit{Dusk of Dawn}, Du Bois says, "In 1911, I tried my hand at fiction and published \textit{The Quest of the Silver Fleece} which was really an economic study of some merit."\textsuperscript{32} In the context of Northern and Southern attempts to control the cotton industry, Du Bois sets the scene in the heart of the Alabama Black belt. The two central characters are Zora, and Bles Alwyn. Their lives evolve around the Smith School, which is run by a New England woman, Miss Smith. Zora and Bles are romantically involved students who live in the shadow of the big plantation of the Cresswell family. The Cresswells employ most of the local Blacks as sharecroppers. Through the lives of Zora and Bles, Du Bois exposes the evils of the cotton industry, and the oppressive nature of sharecropping which produces the cotton. After both go out into the world, they return to the Alabama Black belt to help begin a cooperative land ownership program, which is a remedy to the oppressive sharecropping system.

\textsuperscript{31} Du Bois, "Criteria", 296.

Additionally, Du Bois uses Zora to project the Black woman as the potential saviour of the Black race. She exhibits the strength to unify the people. Also through Bles and Zora, Du Bois projects the utility of an educated leadership for the agrarian masses. They are positive role models for Blacks.

The Quest of the Silver Fleece is important in Du Bois's use of fiction to oppose American racism. First, it bears some similarity to a specific situation he had studied, and second, the specific situation that he knew was applicable to many Blacks in America. Therefore, here he could use fiction to oppose both specific and general aspects of certain problems of racism in the country.

In 1906 Du Bois began intensive research in Lowndes County, Alabama. Apthekar comments:

At intervals, for over fifty years, Dr. Du Bois testified before, or made studies for, various government agencies. In almost all cases the results appeared in print ... There is one exception: in 1906 Dr. Du Bois made a careful study of the sharecropping system in Lowndes County, Alabama -- at considerable personal risk .... This study was never published, however, despite the persistent questioning and prodding of Du Bois; finally, he discovered that the manuscript had been destroyed. He has always believed that this was due to the radical nature of its findings and its condemnation of the then dominant system under which the vast majority of Black people -- and many Whites -- lived in the South.... It was Lowndes County, Alabama, that
served as the main locale of his novel, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911).  

Aptheker's comments help to establish a connection between the Lowndes County research and *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. Though Du Bois does not seem to mention any particular connection between the book and the research, I will point out some of these similarities.

This will help to provide a foundation for validating my belief that Du Bois's experience in Lowndes County was the basis of *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. Also, by establishing corresponding counterparts between *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* and Du Bois's research in Lowndes County, Alabama, I hope to provide a vehicle for discovering why or how he used his first novel to oppose American racism.

On the last page of the book, Du Bois says, "Lay not these words aside for a moment's phantasy."  

This implies that the words of the book are reality instead of phantasy. Still more notable, at the beginning of the book, Du Bois says in the "Note,"

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He who would tell a tale must look toward three ideals: to tell it well, to tell it beautifully, and to tell the truth.... In The Quest of the Silver Fleece there is little, I ween divinely ingenious; but at least, I have been honest. In no fact or picture have I consciously set down aught the counterpart of which I have not seen or known....

In this statement preceding his story, Du Bois directly implies that the book is true or based in truth. He also implies that somewhere there does exist a county, town, school, and some people, which are the basis for those discovered in the pages which follow.

Within Du Bois’s Loundes County research, I will focus on finding Quest of the Silver Fleece counterparts for the following: 1) The Smith School and the New England women who founded it; 2) the land cooperative, which was founded with money from another New England woman; 3) the Cresswells, owning 50,000 acres, and dominating the region, and 4) Colonel Cresswell’s sale of land for the cooperative and his prevention of his neighbor’s attempt to sell land.

In The Quest of the Silver Fleece, the Smith School is named for its New England founder, Miss Smith. In regards to his work in Lowndes County, Du Bois says, "I settled at the Calhoun school and began the study."

Mary White Ovington was a White New England woman who

35 Ibid., "Note," (directly before the first chapter).
36 Du Bois, Quest, 21.
37 Du Bois, Speeches, 49.
taught at Atlanta University with Du Bois. She also visited the Calhoun School while he was engaged in research. Ovington said that the School’s founder, Charlotte Thorne, had “previously led a happy social life in New Haven Connecticut.”38 These two statements by Du Bois and Ovington show some similarity of identity between the Calhoun School and the Smith School, both with New England founders.

Zora received a large sum of money from a New England Woman, Mrs. Vanderpool.39 With this money Zora buys land to start a cooperative near the Smith School.40 There are counterparts to these facts in Du Bois’s research. In 1906, Du Bois said:

In this county during the last ten years there has been carried on a scheme of cooperative land buying under the Calhoun School .... it was made possible by the willingness of a White land lord to sell his plantation.... It was capitalized by White Northerners and inspired by a New England woman.41

In this statement, Du Bois discusses a cooperative land ownership plan which was assisted by a New England woman, just as he mentioned in The Quest of the Silver Fleece. Also in this statement the School purchased land

39 Ibid., 365.
40 Ibid., 402.
41 Du Bois, Speeches, 163.
from a smaller White landlord to start the cooperative. In the novel, Du Bois has the attempt to buy land from a smaller land holder blocked by the Cresswells.\textsuperscript{42} However, it is still notable that these large and small land holders, and a school, are intimately involved in the establishment of the cooperative.

Du Bois’s projection of the land cooperative is specifically similar to the Lowndes County counterpart, known as "the free land." It is also important, however, to take note of other references Du Bois had made to such ventures by Blacks in general. In a \textit{Phylon} article, Joseph P. DeMarco points to the promotion of economic cooperation among Blacks as one of Du Bois’s most important post World War I activities.\textsuperscript{43} DeMarco quotes statements by Du Bois in \textit{Dusk of Dawn}, and he also refers to \textit{The Atlanta University Publications} which were edited by Du Bois.\textsuperscript{44}

The \textit{Atlanta University Publication, No. 10} points out that a study of economic cooperation among Blacks must first recognize its widespread existence in Africa among various

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 390.


\textsuperscript{44} W.E.B. Du Bois, Editor, "Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans," \textit{The Atlanta University Publications, No. 10} (Atlanta, The Atlanta University press, 1907).
In the same publication, it is stated that the strength of the Black church survives from Africa, and that it was the center of cooperative effort among slaves and freed men, including insurrections, the underground railroad, economic emancipation, and land buying.  

Du Bois's positive portrayal of the cooperative in The Quest of the Silver Fleece re-enforces his research in Lowndes County and with the Atlanta University Studies. He dramatizes the cooperative as an alternative to sharecropping for the masses of rural Blacks.

In The Quest of the Silver Fleece, the Cresswells dominate Tooms County, and are the biggest landlords, with 50,000 acres of land. In his Lowndes County research, Du Bois said the leading landlord "owned 50 square miles about there and he doesn't sell to Negroes."  

The Cresswells can be identified as a possible counterpart to the dominant landlord in Du Bois's Lowndes County research. In considering this example of a possible counterpart, one has to realize that great and powerful landlords existed throughout the South. The key factor here is the landlord's proximity to the school and the land

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46 Ibid., 24-26.
47 Ibid., 40.
48 Du Bois, Speeches, 164.
cooperative as well as the New England founder. Each element alone exists throughout the South; but the presence of them all in the research increases the possibility that the novel is based on this research.

By the time of his Lowndes County study, W.E.B. Du Bois had compiled a considerable amount of research and publication going at least back to 1896, when he was hired by the University of Pennsylvania. The facts of his research had been published in journals, books, and in the annual Atlanta University Publications.

Though the Labor Commission destroyed his research, he could have presented the data through one of his other publication avenues, thereby scientifically opposing the racism he found, as originally planned. The fact that he didn’t do so is especially perplexing in light of two comments by Du Bois about his research in Lowndes County. First, Du Bois says his Lowndes County research was his best piece of sociological work. Second, in commenting on the cooperative land ownership program, Dubois said:

My honest belief is that what has been done in Lowndes County under the Calhoun School and the sensible far-seeing guardianship of John Lemon, Pitt Dillingham, and Charlotte Thorne could be duplicated in every single Black belt county of the South.

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49 Du Bois, Autobiography, 204.
That it will be done to some extent is my hope, and on that hope is based my faith in the economic future of this rural group.\textsuperscript{50}

These statements imply that Du Bois had conducted a social science study which he felt to be as good as or better than anything he had done in the past. Yet he did not publish the study. This meant withholding information which he thought millions of Blacks could benefit from.

Du Bois may have decided not to publish his Lowndes County study for two reasons. First, the U.S. Labor commissioner told him he would not publish the report because to do so would jeopardize the security of the Calhoun School, and also that a school trustee would not approve.\textsuperscript{51} Second, Ovington, lived at the Calhoun School for a while. In her book she spoke about Miss Thorne's feelings.

Although the sharecrop system was in full working order at Calhoun, Miss Thorne never allowed the information to be published, but now it is so far in the past that the former conditions may be written of as history. Whites as well as colored feared the owner of the plantation who worked his tenants hard, his overseers helping him .... the Blacks were in bodily danger. One Negro had been so terribly beaten that he was pointed out as an awful warning. I saw him, bent double, tottering down the road. A woman had been severely beaten because, against orders, she

\textsuperscript{50} Du Bois, \textit{Speeches}, 164.

sent her child to Calhoun School. All the tenants were in great poverty.52

The above statement suggests that, even if Du Bois had been willing to ignore the Labor Commissioners warnings against publication, the school’s founder prohibited the exposure of the harsh conditions. Apparently the landlords ruled very harshly. According to Ovington:

Miss Thorne said little about their early days of teaching, when they met with many rebuffs. The colored greeted them eagerly, but the Whites were hostile. Once their food was poisoned. Mabel Dillingham [a teacher] died under tension, but Charlotte Thorne, who was stronger physically, carried on successfully....

The school founded, literally in answer to a prayer, was in a small community where one man ruled with the authority of plantation days. He owned thousands of acres ... workers were in his power, and if they escaped from his plantation, they might be captured and imprisoned. It was peonage under the sharecrop system.53

Ovington’s comments seem to justify the fear and caution expressed by the U.S. Labor Commissioner and by Miss Thorne. If Du Bois’s report included the facts of violence and peonage as reported by Ovington, then it would be logical to expect reprisals from the landlord. Miss Thorne had apparently seen her life threatened, along with her students’ lives. Naturally, the school she had dedicated her life to would be jeopardized.

52 Ovington, Walle, 69.
53 Ibid., 68.
Du Bois was well aware of the violence which the people were exposed to. Referring to the cooperative, he says, "The Negroes round about call this the 'Free land' -- there are no overseers and riders roaming about whipping the workers and seducing their wives and daughters."\(^5^4\)

The comments by Du Bois and Ovington suggest that the former was familiar with the life-threatening violence perpetrated against the school, students, sharecroppers, and Miss Thorne. Also the statement of true counterparts in "The Note" validates the probability of such observations having been witnessed. Du Bois, therefore, may have known that, if he published what he considered to be his best sociological work, he could destroy institutions and lives.

Du Bois implies that there is a real counterpart for Miss Smith. This point is noteworthy in light of Edwin R. Embree's comment to Du Bois about the Smith character. Embree was President of the Julius Rosenwald Fund in the 1920's and 1930's and also wrote on race relations. He wrote Du Bois: "You must have known some such person in your own early experience. If so, you have paid the lasting tribute to an early friend."\(^5^5\) If Thorne and the

\(^{54}\) Du Bois, \textit{Speeches}, 164.

Calhoun School were indeed the counterparts for Smith and the Smith School, then a fictional rather than factual tribute was the only possible way to honor such a character. Because as Ovington verifies, Thorne "prohibited publication" of her story.

In the context of the Calhoun School, peonage, the successful land cooperative, and the landlord's dictatorial power, to publicize the name of Charlotte Thorne could potentially bring on disaster. Therefore she, the Trustee and the Labor Commissioner all said it could not be done. It can be deduced that in the former context the name Charlotte Thorne could not be written. This is a thread of evidence toward concluding that Thorne may be the one to whom The Quest for the Silver Fleece is dedicated. Du Bois writes that the book is dedicated: "To One -- whose name may not be written..."56

To the degree that the Quest of the Silver Fleece may mirror the destroyed study, this collection of similar people and facts may give the readers a glimpse of the oppression in Lowndes County and possibly lead to change.

Whether incidently or by design, Du Bois's first book of fiction fights racism by reflecting upon a

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56 Du Bois, Quest, located on the unnumbered page before the table of content.
particular oppressive situation which he had been prohibited from illuminating in fact. Though he apparently could not bring any direct pressure through publication to alleviate the oppression found in Lowndes County, the story could be a counterpart to what he had observed there. Though readers may not specifically have counterparts from Lowndes County in mind, the problems touched upon in the book existed throughout the South.

In addition to possibly producing a counterpart to facts which were destroyed and prohibited from publication, Du Bois may have had other motives for publishing his first novel. His statements in "The Criteria of Negro Art" imply that, as an artist, he had always written for the sake of truth, justice, "human interest and sympathy"; and that he would use these things to gain rights and enjoyment for Blacks. These motives could be fulfilled by writing the novel. However, there could be other factors contributing to his desire to publish The Quest of the Silver Fleece. Among other factors which could have contributed to the writing of the novel are two in particular.

First, between 1900 and 1910, there were many novels published which advocated racism and the suppression of Blacks. Regarding the publication of The Quest of the Silver Fleece, Aptheker says, "I think he did this all the more eagerly for he was faced with the tremendous successes
being achieved by the fiercely racist novels of Thomas Dixon, Jr."57

Secondly, this same time period witnessed the publication of several muckraking novels which sought to solve problems in society by exposing them. Aptheker points out:

While Du Bois's Quest was to have as a central theme the socio-economic realities involved in raising and marketing cotton,... there were the novels on wheat by Frank Norris, also hemp by James Lane Allen, and meat by Upton Sinclair.58

In his "Criteria of Negro Art," Du Bois says that the artist should project truth and justice. Though he was a scientist who was prohibited from publishing his best sociological study, and what he considered to be "the most complete study of the sort that has ever been made,"59 Du Bois was at the same time an artist. It seems he would have been compelled to artistically project the truth, and lack of justice he discovered, since his scientific option was blocked. The popularity of muckraking and racist novels at that time may also have contributed to his motivation to publish The Quest of the Silver Fleece.


58 Ibid., 110.

59 Du Bois, Speeches, 49.
Beyond illuminating a specific situation known to the author, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* addresses other situations common to millions of Southern Blacks and in this way is in opposition to American racism. In the novel, Du Bois projects reality for a large segment of the nation. Many aspects of the sharecropping system are examined from the perspective of landlords and tenants. Du Bois exposes the evils of the cotton industry as a socio-economic system. Robert Bone comments on the awareness by Bles and Zora of the nature of the sharecropping system. "When a Southern landowner, under pressure from Northern financiers, robs them of their crop, they begin to comprehend the harsh realities of the plantation economy."60 Dickson D. Bruce Jr. comments, "Cresswell will be involved in the effort to create a cotton cartel -- and most Blacks are reduced to abject poverty as tenants on Whites-owned land."61

By writing about the oppressive treatment of Blacks as peons at the lowest level in the cotton industry, Du Bois accomplished more than shedding light on the specific situation he knew. In the specific characters from *The

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**Quest of the Silver Fleece**, Du Bois projected types of people that were common throughout the South. He projected the Whites (who ran this system) negatively. This portrayal was common to many Whites throughout the country. Black share-croppers can be seen in a contrasting manner, to evoke, "human interest and sympathy." In the case of the Blacks and Whites, the portrayals were applicable to millions of people.\(^{62}\)

The sexual oppression of Black women by White men is exposed through Zora.\(^{63}\) Bruce comments that "accepting the old ways of slavery, Elspeth has made Zora available to Harry Cresswell."\(^{64}\) Bone sees Zora as having been forced, "while still a child ... to submit to the sexual pleasures of her former master. In a word Zora represents the moral degradation of the Negro under slavery."\(^{65}\)

Bone sees Black women as being degraded through sexual exploitation. But through Zora, Du Bois projects the purity that is sustained in all Black women who are victimized as captives of a physically oppressive society. Additionally, Zora projects dignity throughout the book.


\(^{63}\) Du Bois, *Quest*, 170.

\(^{64}\) Bruce, *Black American Writing*, 219.

\(^{65}\) Bone, *Negro*, 44.
This transcends her exploitation or rape. Her sustained dignity stands in opposition to American racism. The sexual exploitation of Black females by White men was common throughout the South even after slavery. Zora's portrayal attempts to elicit sympathy for millions of Black women in the South, and highlights a daily struggle.

Du Bois believed that the cooperative land buying scheme as seen in Lowndes County could be repeated throughout the South. Toward the end of the novel, Du Bois portrays the cooperative positively. In the midst of the chaos and oppression existing on the Cresswells property, the cooperative is an exception. Bone sees Du Bois's solution in The Quest of the Silver Fleece as Marxist.66 Bernard Bell points to a type of Marxist ideology, which Du Bois projects through Zora, as the ultimate solution for the community. Bell comments: "work for others; not your own salvation, but the salvation of the world." Bell also points to Zora's organizing the cooperative, "Her answer was to buy the swamp land ... and to develop it into a self sustaining Black community ...."67

Both Bell and Bone see Du Bois projecting a Marxist solution to racism through Zora's initiating the

66 Ibid.

Cooperative. Zora acquired the money to buy the swamp and inspired the people to develop it. The swamp is symbolic of the untapped potential of the Black race. Zora is representative of a central role to be played by Black women in resurrecting the whole race.

*Atlanta University Publication No. 12,*[^68] "Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans," clearly reveals that land buying cooperatives were a viable alternative to sharecropping. Positive references to such cooperatives by Du Bois get strong re-enforcement from the portrayal of cooperatives in *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. The technique in this case is somewhat Marxist; but, it is projected as a tool for fighting the racism of Tooms County and the South. From this perspective, the novel can be seen as an attempt to provide the masses of Black Americans with a viable method for escaping oppression and racism. Du Bois may have had as a prime motive in writing the novel to project artistically information which had been produced for scientific publication. He was compelled to project truth and justice. The popularity of Muckracking writers and Racist novels may also have helped to influence his decision.

Whether incidently or deliberately, the specific aspects of racism portrayed in the book reflect details of

his Lowndes County study; but they also reflect the lives of millions of Blacks and Whites in the South. The Quest of the Silver Fleece is a key example of how Du Bois used fiction to oppose American racism between 1897 and 1911.

Between 1897 and 1911, W.E.B. Du Bois utilized social science and fiction, in addition to other methods, in his fight against American racism. As this chapter demonstrates, his first short story pre-dates his first scientific study. However, Du Bois seems to have placed greater emphasis on science as a tool in the battle against racism during the years of this thesis' scope.

The affinity between Du Bois's obstructed Lowndes County study and his first major literary work provides the inducement for examining his use of science and fiction to confront racism. It is difficult to conduct a thorough examination of Du Bois's activities surrounding his work at the Calhoun School without eventually coming to The Quest of the Silver Fleece.

Eventually, Du Bois would make another major effort to confront racism through scientific studies when he returned to Atlanta University and edited Phylon there.69 His use of fiction would continue through the rest of his life. However, his initial use of social science and fiction acquired a special affinity; The Quest of the Silver Fleece.

Silver Fleece can be seen as a reflection of what he believed was his best social scientific work. Hopefully by examining Du Bois's early fight against racism from the perspective of his use of these tools, a contribution to the understanding of a major figure in American history has been made.


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**DU BOIS’S WORK EDITED BY OTHERS**


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Du Bois, W.E.B. *Writing in Periodicals Edited by W.E.B.*


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**WORK EDITED BY DU BOIS AND WRITINGS BY DU BOIS IN JOURNALS AND MAGAZINES**


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SECONDARY


**JOURNALS AND DISSERTATIONS**


