

RACECRAFT

The Soul of Inequality in American Life

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I Have a Dream speech or as a kind of peekaboo dishonesty on the part of self-interested racecraft. In like fashion, African villagers suspected that their self-appointed "civilizers" were dishonest, self-interested autocrats from afar, or, at best, well-intentioned but naive deniers of reality. We can think of King's dream as his own kind of civilizing mission in his own land, the natives of which have a choice to make. That choice is every bit as haunting as the one Appiah sets forth at the end of "Old Gods, New Worlds": "If modernization is conceived of, in part, as the acceptance of science, we have to decide whether the evidence obliges us to give up the invisible ontology."⁴² America is modern, has accepted science, and has yet to decide whether the evidence obliges us to give up the invisible ontology.

I have tried to suggest that Appiah refers to a predicament that is not restricted to African contexts but shared by all human beings. That being the case, our studies on witchcraft require general formulations that can apply beyond our immediate geographical sphere of work. My contention that examining witchcraft and racecraft together can illuminate both is one means to that end. My extending, and I hope not distorting, Appiah's notion of invisible ontology is another, so long as we can keep our footing along its slippery limits. I have shown that, in our different approaches to spirits and races, we have been traveling those slippery limits logically and ethically.

8 Individuality and the Intellectuals: An Imaginary Conversation Between Emile Durkheim and W. E. B. Du Bois

The American reviewer of a recent travel book about France marveled at the author's account of a despised people called the Cagots. The rituals that set them apart conjure up the American South during much of the twentieth century: forbidden to marry outside their group; restricted to designated entrances and seating at church (where the communion Host was delivered from the end of a stick); required to announce their presence by an identifying badge (which might be a goose foot pinned to the tunic), and so on. According to the reviewer, the "mystery of the Cagots is that they had no distinguishing features at all." As the following essay illustrates, different appearance is by no means essential to the deployment of a double standard based on ancestry. The essay juxtaposes America's turn-of-the-twentieth-century "Negro Problem" with France's "Jewish Question" of the same epoch. It imagines two great founders of sociology, Emile Durkheim and W. E. B. Du Bois, examining together the prospect of universal human rights.²

1 Ruth Scurr, on Graham Robb's *The Discovery of France: A Historical Geography from the Revolution to the First World War* (New York: Norton, 2007), in *The Nation*, December 10, 2007.

2 Originally published as "Individuality and the Intellectuals: An Imaginary Conversation between Emile Durkheim and W. E. B. Du Bois," in Christian Lerat and Nicole Ollier, eds., *Expansions/Expansionismes dans le monde transatlantique, Actes du colloque international*, Bordeaux, janvier 25–27, 2001 (Bordeaux: Maison des sciences de l'homme d'Aquitaine, 2001), and in a slightly different version, *Theory and Society* 31: 4 (October 2002), 435–62. I thank the

42 Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 135.

Religion is first and foremost a system of ideas by means of which individuals imagine the society of which they are members and the obscure yet intimate relations they have with it.

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*³

W. E. B. Du Bois found few promising interlocutors among American social scientists when he wrote in 1903, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia, in Africa, in America, and the islands of the sea."⁴ While everyone recognized the color line, not everyone considered it a problem. For some, indeed, the color line was the solution. Economically, its benefits were obvious, whether in America or in Europe's far-flung colonies. Morally, the "darker" races counted for less than the "lighter" ones. For scientists, the theoretically interesting problem was not the color line itself, but the biological basis of differences and different treatment that were held to be self-evident.⁵ To see the color line itself as a puzzle or a problem required an ability to look skeptically at the evidence of one's own eyes. For that subject, white American researchers, like white Americans in general, had little space on their mental templates. But in France,⁶ where races

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3 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated and with an Introduction by Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), 227.

4 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *Three Negro Classics* (New York: Avon, 1965 [1903]), 221.

5 As the late Stephen Jay Gould showed, with great elegance, they kept turning their theory inside out to prevent empirical data from appearing to contradict the self-evident inferiority of the inferior. See *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981).

6 This distinguishing trait of the Republic did not, however, preclude the

and colors figured in a different way, Du Bois would have found a promising interlocutor: Emile Durkheim. Durkheim found questions of theoretical interest and import, not self-evidence, in Europe's racial identifications—though all Europeans were what Americans would designate as "white."

Pursuing fundamental questions about religion and reason, Durkheim began the studies in the late 1890s that culminated in his 1912 masterpiece, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Durkheim pursued those questions through sustained analysis of aboriginal Australia's racial identifications—though all were "black" by American standards. In the process, he exposed the raw materials of mind and devices of social life by which social groups fashion a collective understanding of themselves. However, usual readings of *Forms* generally do not keep those various levels in view. In today's studies of race, for example, bits and pieces from *Forms* travel separately from it, reduced to glib formulas about the "social construction" of "collective identities."⁷ As a result, we lose sight of the living subjects and active verbs by which Durkheim arrived at the hard-won discoveries of *Forms*. We also overlook the historical context in which he won those discoveries: that of the Dreyfus Affair. This huge storm exposed a racist undertow in the politics of France's Third Republic that arrested Durkheim's attention—and that of W. E. B. Du Bois. Imagining them in conversation, therefore, is one way to draw fresh lessons from the sharp wit, spiritual heat, and abiding theoretical preoccupations of Durkheim's astonishing book.

However, to draw those fresh lessons from *Forms*, it is necessary to retrieve two facts, often forgotten or ignored: first, that they

institution of the color line in the colonies.

7 To keep in full view the objective facticity of the identifications that are the focus of *Forms*, I use the term "identification" throughout, not "identity." The confusions and ambiguities of the latter have been usefully combed apart by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick C. Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29:1 (2000), 1–47.

were contemporaries—Durkheim was born in 1858 and Du Bois in 1868; second, that in their own lives and scientific work, they grappled with comparable predicaments when racist politics took center stage in their respective societies. The “Durkheim and Du Bois” section below explores their comparable predicaments. The next section lays out possible topics of conversation between them. A fragment of one such imagined conversation then follows.

Academics traditionally imagine conversations in order to work out lines of intellectual descent (relating Durkheim to Comte or to Marx, for example), thereby sharpening our reflection on enduring problems. We also use them to explore intellectual contemporaneity, and sometimes do so with a vividness that registers the ongoing life of classical problems—for example, a recent collection that applies the term “misunderstandings”⁸ to markedly different positions that Durkheim and his contemporary Max Weber held *without regard to one another*. Here, an imagined conversation between Durkheim and another contemporary he never met will, among other things, suggest new answers to longstanding questions about his shift in the late 1890s toward the study of religion. Given that purpose, I range freely over other writings without necessarily stopping to revisit traditional debates with other purposes. Prepare, now, to encounter these profoundly engaged men of science on terms they could have set, if they had looked out over the social world together when their science was new and promising.

They meet on a Paris afternoon in 1916. The human costs of the war have been staggering. They ponder what is to be done if, as both hope, the Allies win. They of course do not know, as we do, that Nazism lies over the horizon of that victory. They begin on intellectual common ground. They agree that in *Forms* Durkheim uncovered fundamental truths about humankind—and most centrally, the diverse corollaries of his sobering conclusion that

8 See Monique Hirschhorn and Jacques Coena, eds., *Durkheim, Weber: vers la fin des malentendus* (Paris: Harmattan, 1994).

unreasonable divisions of humankind seem to be born from reason itself, not from its opposite. But what should be done in light of those truths? In that regard, each is disconcerted by writings of the other: Du Bois by Durkheim's 1898 article, “Individualism and the Intellectuals”; and Durkheim by Du Bois' 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Although both believe that upholding the value of humanity as such is the central problem of their time, each reproaches the other for having taken it up at the wrong end. Durkheim finds in “the Negro” of *Souls* an unwarranted particularism. Du Bois finds in the *qualité d'homme* of “Individualism” an unwarrantable generality. Now, as then, that disagreement does not stand open to facile choice between their positions, either conceptually or in the realm of politics. I have borrowed from the ancient form of the dialogue, because it suits questions that can be answered coherently in at least two different ways. Durkheim died in 1917, but Du Bois lived on until 1963 and repeatedly revised his answers. In America and in France, the questions and arguments are with us still.

Durkheim and Du Bois: The Predicament of Individuality in the 1890s

COMMON GROUND IN THE PREOCCUPATIONS OF FORMS

I offered above an unhabitual reading of *Forms* as if it were obvious and in no need of justification. Since neither is the case, let me begin again by briefly summarizing the book's rather particular theory of “religion,” which I consider to be inseparable from its account of collective social identifications. The scaffolding of its main argument is an extended study of collective identifications imagined in the same way as races: the totemic clans of aboriginal Australia. Unlike the Europeans' racial identifications, however, those of the Australian Aborigines cannot possibly be construed as natural; their claims of common traits and common descent implicate animals, plants, and sometimes physical objects, as well

as other human beings.⁹ Durkheim's general question is this: How is it that humans come to hold on to beliefs about cosmic nature that cannot possibly be true—and that, besides, cosmic nature unceasingly contradicts?¹⁰ He finds the answer in their social being, which is also the source of the most fundamental human capacity: reason itself.¹¹ Australia's totemic clans, Durkheim argues, permit study of that social being, and reason itself, in "elementary form"—elementary meaning basic and, in consequence, universal, not meaning inferior or a peculiarity of designated peoples.¹² But that answer raises another question of equivalent import. How is it that humans come to embrace beliefs about themselves that cannot possibly be true—and that, besides, their human nature contradicts? In that second inquiry, fundamental to the first, Durkheim studies the collective alchemy by which *reason* converts bald-faced inventions into external and constraining facts of nature, capable of resisting individual doubt.

To see this point concretely, let us turn to a stark example given by the real Durkheim that would have arrested the attention of my

9 I take this conception from *Suicide*: "Recently race has been understood to mean an aggregation of individuals with clearly common traits, but traits furthermore due to their derivation from a common stock." Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, ed., George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1966 [1897]), 83.

10 I borrow from the tidy, though misapplied, formulation of Raymond Boudon, who attaches it to a theory of magic that he claims can be gleaned from (unspecified) footnotes in *Forms*. In fact, his formulation suits religion—and specifically not magic—for reasons integral to strong positions of Durkheim's: in particular that, unlike the ends of religion, those of magic are technical, utilitarian, and individualistic, and that, furthermore, the relationships on which magic depends are "accidental and transient" rather than enduring. See Raymond Boudon, in Hirschorn and Coenen-Hutter, *Durkheim, Weber*, 104–12; and Durkheim, *Forms*, 39–42, 42 n16.

11 It was Durkheim's ambition to solve sociologically the problem of knowledge as set by Kant.

12 See Karen E. Fields, "Religion as an Eminently Social Thing," translator's Introduction to Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, xxxviii–xl, lix–lxi.

imaginary Du Bois. A Kangaroo, shown a photograph of himself by anthropological investigators, uses his relationship to his own photograph to illustrate for them his relationship to the kangaroo: "Look who is exactly the same thing as I," he tells them. "Well! It is the same with the kangaroo." Durkheim adds that "the Kangaroo was his totem," which is to say that he traced his descent through membership in a clan with the name "Kangaroo" and was as much like his fellow clansmen as he was like the kangaroo. Such statements must not be taken, Durkheim warns, in their "everyday empirical" sense.¹³ The Kangaroos do not resemble the kangaroo; nor do they necessarily resemble one another. Moreover, they do not resemble one another (or differ from White Cockatoos, for instance) in ways that would give both groups internally unifying and mutually exclusive common traits. What makes them alike is the abstract notion of common essence (kangaroo-ness). Bearing the same name logically presupposes it.¹⁴ Special affinities and moral obligations of various kinds derive from it. And so, too, for Durkheim, does the human capacity to form concepts.¹⁵ Any imaginable name-essence can express the overthrow of perception by conception: White Cockatoo, Black Cockatoo, Emu, Lizard, even Louise.¹⁶ Through periodically repeated ritual, and through symbolic reminders between times, the name-essence is experienced as palpably real. In that way, it gains an objectivity that makes individual dreams of repudiating the shared identification not so much undreamable as irrelevant. Such shared identifications are not negotiable contracts.

13 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 191.

14 Ibid., 134.

15 Ibid., 239–41.

16 Notice that from one point of view, this diversity is merely a diversity of collective identifications (a system of the form A, B, C, etc.). From another, however, it boils down to designating who is a member and who is not (a system of the form A/not-A). For an incisive discussion of the mistakes that follow inattention to this distinction, see Barbara J. Fields, "Whiteness, Racism, and Identity," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (2001), 48–56.

In vivid set-pieces, Durkheim depicts these shared identifications as becoming immediately real to the participants in frenzied rites, which he calls *effervescences collectives*. My imaginary Du Bois would thus have given full attention when Durkheim wrote, on the very first page of *Forms*, that he was not studying Australia's rites for their own sake, but because they promised access to something "fundamental and permanent" about "present-day man," since there is "no other that we have a greater interest in knowing well." Durkheim made this point even more prominent in the first English translation (1915) by dropping his French subtitle, "Le Système totémique en Australie."

LA QUESTION JUIVE, THE NEGRO PROBLEM

Even so, at first glance, nothing would seem more distant or different from Australia's totemic clans than the racial designations of Europe. They might seem less distant, however, if one imagined the France of the 1890s while reading Durkheim's vivid and, it seems to me, troubling descriptions of the *effervescences collectives* that enabled Australians simultaneously to create and experience their exotically contrary-to-nature collective identifications. Durkheim the scientist, if still alive in the 1930s, would have seen that point demonstrated in the rites of the Nazis.

I suspect that Durkheim's intuition may have begun with *effervescences collectives* that he had seen operating in France in precisely the same way. As a Jewish child growing up in Alsace, he surely heard about and may have witnessed the anti-Semitic demonstrations to reaffirm and re-arm Frenchness that came in the wake of France's traumatic defeat by Prussia in 1870, making Alsace-Lorraine German. In 1894 there was the court-martial for treason of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. Dreyfus, the first Jew to rise to the General Staff of France's army, was falsely accused and convicted of passing secrets to the German government, and saw that conviction reaffirmed even after the real culprit had become known. In the wake of his trial—or rather, anti-Semitic railroading—came ugly

street demonstrations and a nationally divisive struggle for justice that went on for twelve years.¹⁷ During those years, Durkheim the sociologist became Durkheim the activist, and a co-founder of the League for the Defense of the Rights of Man and Citizen.¹⁸

Du Bois reports having watched the Dreyfus Affair closely.¹⁹ Perhaps he drew a parallel between the frenzied French crowds and the American ones that sometimes seized prisoners and lynched them. Lynchings had wide enough acceptance for a *New York Times* headline in 1900 to read: "Negro Murders a Citizen: Posse are looking for him and he will be lynched."²⁰ Perhaps he saw a parallel with another defining court case of the same era, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in 1896. In that case, the Supreme Court of the United States found the segregation laws being enacted in the South to be consistent with equal treatment under law as supposedly guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, adopted in the wake of the Civil War.²¹ That case and the political

17 The only incriminating evidence was proved to be a forgery. The real culprit, Commandant Walsin-Esternazy, was unmasked in 1897 but acquitted the following year, to widespread celebration. Emile Zola exposed the outrage in his famous open letter, "J'accuse," charging the army's general staff with the scandal of having condemned an innocent individual, and was himself tried and convicted of defamation. Rioting and anti-Semitic demonstrations followed. A review by the Conseil de France again found Dreyfus guilty, but pardoned him. In 1906, a third trial finally exonerated Dreyfus, and thereafter he was reintegrated into the army.

18 Melvin Richter, "Durkheim's Politics and Political Theory," in Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *Emile Durkheim, 1858-1917: A Collection of Essays, with Translations and a Bibliography* (Columbus, OH: Ohio University Press, 1960), 172.

19 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life From the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 122, 177, 184.

20 Julius Lester, ed., *The Seventh Son: The Thought and Writings of W. E. B. Du Bois* (New York: Random House, 1971), 29, quoting from Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier, 1965).

21 Specifically, the case concerned segregated seating on intrastate carriers. It began when Homer Plessy, who appeared to be white, revealed his

developments it epitomized announced the twentieth-century world in which Du Bois the sociologist was shortly to become Du Bois the activist and a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

From the same vantage point in time, however, and faced with what seem to me analogous outrages, Durkheim wrote in a quite different spirit from Du Bois' about the line between Jews and Christians in Europe. If he imagined the possibility of a coming crisis along that line, he did not say so. What he said instead, together with the spiritual heat of *Forms*, provided my point of departure. In "Individualism and the Intellectuals," he wrote in defense of the agitation to free Dreyfus, and specifically in response to Ferdinand Brunetière, an ardent *antidreyfusard* who had recently blasted "individualism" as anti-social, anti-patriotic, anti-French. For the *antidreyfusards* in groups such as the *Ligue de la Patrie française*, the honor of the army—hence, that of the nation—was the fundamental value at stake.

Durkheim's article is passionate, a masterpiece of concise argument, justly famous, and yet, on the surface, rather strange. It is a response to the judicial railroading of Captain Dreyfus and to resurgent anti-Semitism in France; but it never mentions Dreyfus or Jews. Indeed, Durkheim says, "Let us forget the affair itself and the sad spectacles of which we have been the witnesses."²² Given the "sad spectacles" to be seen in America, therefore, I imagine Du Bois in rather sharp discussion with Durkheim about what he chose to say, and not to say, in that article. But since Du Bois would also have understood Durkheim's position, it seems to me they would have had much to say to one another about the complexities

Negro-ness after having been seated in the "whites-only" section of a train in Louisiana. Thereupon, he was ejected from the train. Plessy then sued the Pullman Company. The Plessy case coincided with a violent campaign of disfranchisement and repression across the South.

22 Emile Durkheim, "L'Individualisme et les intellectuels," in the Paris publication *Revue politique et littéraire: revue bleue* 10 (1899), 7 (my translation).

and the perplexities of living out one's own creative intellectual life amid the constraints of having not one but two pregnant identifications: in Durkheim's case, French and Jew; in Du Bois', American and Afro-American.

The common historical context of these two great social scientists was a time when "the Negro problem" in America and "the Jewish question" in France imposed themselves on the working lives of talented individuals, thereby forging and shaping their individuality. In *Forms*, Durkheim repeatedly argued—correctly, I believe—that individuality takes shape within collectivity. Nevertheless, let me underline the term "individuality." While my task is to set both men's work in the social context of a certain time, I do not mean to reduce those men of genius, or their work, to just that particular social context. To avoid crudely causal metaphors that dissolve individuality in collective identification and reduce complex thought to single themes, I propose an un-crudely causal metaphor, that of irritating sand in a pearl-producing oyster. Without the irritation, there is no pearl; but the form of a pearl cannot be predicted, explained, or even adequately described in terms of the sensation and the suffering that produce it.²³

DURKHEIM AND DU BOIS AS CONTEMPORARIES

Since we so consistently think of Du Bois and Durkheim separately, let me now add other dimensions in which it is instructive to think of them together. First, if Du Bois' academic career was possible only in the context of his people's emancipation, so, too,

23 Let me add that the historical and contextual issues about race that I have brought out here should open up *Forms*, not narrow it to suit well-worn academic slots. Some of Durkheim's passages, like the one about the human Kangaroo, invite new sorts of conversations among colleagues in the separate disciplines that study "mind," "brain," and the observable deployment of each in social life. If he is right, then we should abandon the proto-scientific notion that still has free reign in scientific milieux: racism as a response to the perception of physical difference.

was Durkheim's. Both men were inheritors of great emancipations following great democratic revolutions. That of French Jews came through a series of decrees beginning in 1790, which released them from various restrictions.²⁴ That of most African Americans came seventy-five years later, as an outcome of the Civil War, which Du Bois sometimes spoke of as "the Revolution of 1865"—although some, among them Du Bois' grandfather, were emancipated at the time of the American Revolution.²⁵ In addition, both men thought, taught, and wrote with passion about what democracy required amid the social and above all economic turbulence of the late-nineteenth-century world. Also, because they were committed democrats, they were committed universalists. For the same reason, I think, they read and listened to the socialists with attention—although neither rushed to embrace socialist politics, for different yet perhaps related reasons.²⁶

24 Paula Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 4. These restrictions applied in France's New World colonies. Thus, in 1777, through the provisions of Article I of the *Code Noir* (promulgated in 1685), a Jewish merchant in Bordeaux who received a plantation in St. Domingue, for payment of a debt, was able to secure possession of it only after obtaining a royal patent two years later. See Hélène Sarrazin, *Bordeaux: La Traite des Nôirs* (Bordeaux: CMD, 1999), 45.

25 H. Digby Baltzell, "Introduction," W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (New York: Schocken, 1967 [1899]), xi.

26 Du Bois upbraided American socialists for their shuttling between outrage when white workers were oppressed and silence when it came to black workers. It is commonly said, in relation to Durkheim's position, that the socialists' crude economic determinism and doctrines of class struggle, plus his own native conservatism, made him keep his distance from socialism (for example, Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study* [New York: Harper, 1972], 322-30). But it is also the case that, within socialism, anti-Semitic currents rushed alongside universalistic ones. See again Lukes, *ibid.*, as well as Robert F. Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France, I: Prelude to the Dreyfus Affair* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1950), 156-78, and Kenneth Thompson, *Emile Durkheim* (New York: Tavistock, 1982), 44. Adolph Reed, *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (New York: Oxford, 1997), has much of interest

Second, as pioneers in sociology, they opposed biological (or quasi-biological) understandings of the new discipline. Each lived on a racially defined edge of his society. In consequence, I submit, each was in a position to experience the social intuitively as a realm fundamentally distinct from the realm of nature. Du Bois' 1899 study *The Philadelphia Negro* argued against the racist theorizing that was common in American social science. He deployed empirical evidence to show that the causes of the pathology to be found in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward were social in character, not emanations from the inner essence of black people. He attacked racist arguments by providing detailed evidence of normality and advancement, to which he also assigned social causes. It followed that the racial theorists' quasi-biological causation could not accommodate those two opposite effects. Du Bois' American colleagues would already have seen Durkheim use that same strategy in *Suicide* (1897). There, for instance, he set up and then picked apart statistics about European races that could have been used to allege that Germans carried in their blood a "sad primacy" in killing themselves.²⁷

Third, although both men were witnesses to the terrifying racist and proto-fascist developments of the 1890s in their respective democracies, neither was prompted to embrace emigrationist strategies in response as propounded, for example, by Bishop Henry M. Turner in America and by Theodor Herzl in Europe. Both argued in word and deed not only that reform in the land of his birth was possible, but also that the scientific investigation of social life provided the would-be reformer of that land with tools.²⁸ Because some of the necessary tools were to be had in Germany, each to say about Du Bois' own conservatism and equivocal relationship to socialist politics in the early twentieth century.

27 Durkheim, *Suicide*, 85-93.

28 However, six decades later and in his nineties, Du Bois decided to expatriate to Ghana. For good measure, perhaps, and certainly with high humor, he took out a membership in the Communist Party of the United States of America, just as he was leaving.

traveled there early in his career—Durkheim in 1885–86 with a government fellowship, just after his *agrégation*, and Du Bois in 1892–94 with philanthropic support, just before his Harvard doctorate.²⁹

SOCIETY AS SEEN FROM OUTSIDE

In ways that, like their situations, are different yet comparable, Durkheim and Du Bois picked up the tools of social science from a particular position that combined a designated racial outsider-hood with an actual cultural insider-hood. Both men were inheritors of comparatively recent and still incomplete emancipations; neither was fully free or fully armed as a citizen. The everyday weight of those realities must have been epitomized in both men's minds by the two court cases of the 1890s that I mentioned earlier: Dreyfus in France and Plessy in America. I think of Du Bois as an outside insider and Durkheim as an inside outsider. In terms of his Protestant values, Harvard education, and general culture, Du Bois was far more like than unlike the mainline elite of white American academics in his day. He was excluded from its upper sancta only because racist practice foreclosed his becoming, to use his phrase, a "co-worker in the kingdom of culture."³⁰ Although he published important scholarly works in important places, his individuality had to be extruded through the narrow apertures of America's system of Jim Crow, in both the North and the South. One result, I think, is the high spiritual temperature of all his work, together with qualities of both topic and rhetorical mode that I think of as its "outsider imagination." Those qualities, I submit, he shared with the Durkheim of *Forms*.

In terms of education and general culture, Durkheim, too, was also more like than unlike the main line of French academics in

29 Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 86–95, and David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Holt, 1993), 117–76.

30 Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 215.

his day. But he was included in their upper sancta and integrated as a DuBoisian "co-worker." The ideology of Republican France was, as Americans would say today, "color-blind." Careers were open to talent, or so it must have seemed—until the Dreyfus Affair. Nevertheless, Durkheim was free to implement his vision of sociology from the pinnacle of French higher education: first at Bordeaux, where he began building *L'Année sociologique* with a team of colleagues and pupils; and then at the Sorbonne, where he continued and, in addition, became a powerful university administrator and politician.³¹ What is more, Durkheim had the task of helping to reform education throughout France, in accordance with the secularizing agenda of the Third Republic.³² His chair at the University of Bordeaux bore the two-fold title "pédagogie et sciences sociales." There came a time when his courses in the sociology of education were required for all French students who aspired to teaching careers in the humanities and social sciences.³³ It is said that his graduates working in little villages would wave away ignorant, meddling priests and ex-schoolmasters with sheaves of their lecture notes.³⁴ Du Bois had no such Archimedean point in the American academy. To suggest, then, that Durkheim's predicament and Du Bois' were comparable is not to minimize the differences. Those can be sketched in a rough-and-ready way by a historical What if? What if, in 1897, Harvard had created a chair in sociology and appointed Du Bois to it?

Notwithstanding such differences, here are two individuals who must have shared a marrow-deep intuition that the external and constraining social fact of bearing a collective racial identification

31 Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 372.

32 For a gripping biographical account of the portentous issues, described from the standpoint of a major participant, see Gabriel Merle, *Emile Combes* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 237ff.

33 Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 372.

34 Ibid., 13. As late as the 1940s at least, the "Durkheimian sociology" with which teachers were equipped had an aroma of subversiveness. Interview with Hélène Sarrazin, May 22, 2002.

is the source and resource of human individuality, including that of creative genius. Even if Durkheim's days were not necessarily shaped by the aspersions of those who called his work "Talmudic sociology,"³⁵ with anti-Semitic intent, he lived in the atmosphere created by the propaganda that spread through print and caricature in the 1880s and 1890s. For example, the two-volume book of the journalist and newspaper editor Edouard Drumont, *La France juive: essai d'histoire contemporaine* (1886) was an enormous best-seller.³⁶ According to one analyst, Drumont was the first to set up an explicitly racial opposition between "Semite" and "Aryan."³⁷ Then came the accusation of Dreyfus, who had risen as a talented, hardworking individual, and, above all as a loyal Frenchman, but found himself accused and hated in his collective racial manifestation as a Jew. At the very least, Durkheim must have lived in a state of continual irritation—hence my image of the sand and the pearl. I submit that, if we read *Forms* against the background whose importance I have been sketching, we find therein traces of that irritation.

Forms is not only audacious, but also obnoxious and heated, in ways that he and Du Bois will notice below. What is audacious and obnoxious about *Forms* is not only that, in it, Durkheim seemed to divinize society. That was bad enough at a time when some of the French were struggling to resuscitate a dying traditional God, from whom Durkheim had withdrawn his allegiance.³⁸ It is also that his argument entailed the social invention of precisely that Frenchness which some of the French were embracing as a matter of common

35 Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 10.

36 Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France*, 137–55, 320–40.

37 Pierre Birnbaum, "Drumont contre la France juive," *Le Monde: dossiers et documents* 310 [January 19, 1987] (June 2002), 3.

38 God, as earlier deployed by French kings, as deployed by militant Catholics in *fin-de-siècle* France, and God, period—Durkheim had decided against revealed religion as a matter of personal belief.

descent to which he had no access.³⁹ Furthermore, there is a caustic and ironic display of paradox in the dead-serious, yet at one level hilarious, accounts presented in *Forms*. There, dark-skinned men paint physical resemblance (for example, to white cockatoos) onto their bodies, and then, looking at the resemblance they themselves have just painted, affirm that they have shared it with those birds and with one another from time immemorial. According to his showings in *Forms*, anything at all could serve this purpose, without in any way disturbing anyone's assumptions about real resemblance.⁴⁰ I do imagine Durkheim laughed to himself as he kept making that point with different examples, in the process showing that three distinct species of lice had been called into service to designate three distinct kinds of human beings. I think of those moves—*Forms* is full of them—as eruptions from his outsider imagination. A related element of that outsider imagination was his taste for paradox. And I mean "paradox" literally: not as "strangeness," but rather as "against received teaching." Recall how the vignette of the man-kangaroo informed him about the workings of reason, not the supposed unreason of "primitives."⁴¹ Early on, his preface

39 The matter of racial designation is a story whose complexities are indicated, if not fully explicated, by Michael R. Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (New York: Oxford, 1971), 1–27.

40 In this way, it was not contradictory for the Nazis to hold that the physical distinctiveness of Jews was obvious to anyone's naked eye, though not so slavishly as to do without badges and armbands.

41 Here is an example of Durkheim's humor in deriding, *en passant*, one of the more preposterous ethnographic claims made about the Australians. The text starts this way: "Strehlow, like Spencer and Gillen, declares that, for the Arunta, sexual intercourse is by no means the sufficient condition of procreation..." A dry footnote continues: "Strehlow goes so far as to say that sexual relations are not even considered a necessary condition, a sort of preparation for conception. True, a few lines further on, he adds that the old men knew perfectly well the relationship between physical intercourse and procreation—and that, so far as animals are concerned, children know." He concludes: "This is bound to dilute somewhat the import of the first statement." *Forms*, 253 and 253 n55.

to *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1894) feistily declared: "If the search for paradox is the mark of the sophist, to flee from it when the facts demand it is the act of a mind that possesses neither courage nor faith in science."⁴²

It may be that the qualities I have just noted are the same ones noted in the perennial charge among Durkheim's commentators that both his conception of society as a reality *sui generis* and his rhetoric are extreme. For example, at the start of his masterful intellectual biography of Durkheim, Steven Lukes says that "Durkheim's style often tends to caricature his thought: he often expressed his ideas in an extreme or figurative manner, which distorted his meaning and concealed their significance."⁴³ But I believe Durkheim was fully in charge of his prose. Therefore, if that prose seems hotter than seems called for by his subject, then a review of our own understanding of his subject may be called for—it certainly is more than "religion" as conventionally understood. I say the same about the disparagement of his rhetorical mode as "manifesto-like,"⁴⁴ a trait that would put him in "infamous and suspect company"—people like the Dadaists and the surrealists, to come, or the Marxists, who for some were suspect already.⁴⁵ Durkheim's tendency toward stark, even shocking, formulation is sometimes explained (not mistakenly, I think, so long as it is not explained away) as a scientist's zeal in various debates over the object, structure, scope, and methods of sociology. But, important as that point is (and I would not dream of diminishing it), I suggest that, even

42 Patricia McCormack brings this statement front and center in her instructive article about *The Rules of Sociological Method*. See "The Paradox of Durkheim's Manifesto: Reconsidering the Rules of Sociological Method," *Theory and Society* 25:1 (1996), 85.

43 Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 4.

44 Thompson, *Emile Durkheim*, 39, 92–3. Thompson approvingly quotes the statement by Ginsberg that "in general, *la société* had an intoxicating effect on his mind," from Morris Ginsberg, *On the Diversity of Morals* (London: Heinemann, 1956), 51.

45 McCormack, "Paradox of Durkheim's Manifesto," 88.

if his sociology could be separated from his rhetorical mode (and I doubt this can easily be done⁴⁶), much more than that is at stake. After all, a scientist's zeal does not lead a life separate from its human source.

Spiritual intensity and rhetorical excess in the work of Du Bois have, so far as I know, puzzled no one. Those qualities are routinely recognized in his work; he termed them double-consciousness and wrote about the experience. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," an essay published in *The Souls of Black Folk*, gives us an imaginary conversation with a white compatriot who asks him, "How does it feel to be a problem?" For Du Bois, double-consciousness meant an irreducibly complex awareness of himself as his own self, an unsettled and always evolving subject, and at the same time as a despised object, fixed in caricatures, braced for the daily ritual insults of outsider-hood, enduring in all ways what Adolph Reed calls "the ascriptive lot of a racial collectivity."⁴⁷ But outsider-hood also carried with it an ability to stand on the edge of that very world to which he could not fully belong; and, from that vantage point, to see beyond its seemingly self-evident givens. He called that capacity "second sight." Here is the way he put those claims:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.

46 McCormack insists (*ibid.*, 86–7), correctly I think, that no such separation can (or, indeed, should) be made.

47 Reed, *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought*, 105, in the context of a nice examination (91–125) of the various uses and abuses to which "double-consciousness" has been subject.

One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.⁴⁸

Du Bois waged battles to re-educate America's collective consciousness, partly to prevent the apparent justification of outrages of all kinds, and partly because this consciousness served as a mirror whose reflections were one source of a tormented double-consciousness among black Americans. He sought to disrupt the social processes that invented "the Negro" as the object that he called a *tertium quid*; more than an animal, less than a human being. Turn to Durkheim, however, and the corresponding battles become indirect and convoluted.

In an 1899 article, he conceded that certain failings of "the Jewish race" could be invoked to justify anti-Semitism, but insisted that those failings were counter-balanced by virtues.⁴⁹ Besides, he wrote, "The Jews are losing their ethnic character with an extreme rapidity. In two generations the process will be complete."⁵⁰ If he and Du Bois had spoken in that year, Du Bois might have told him that, in the last analysis, cultural similarity or difference was not the heart of the matter. His exemplary study of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward did not earn him a post at the University of Pennsylvania. This insult was tendered to "the Negro" he was, not to the cultured New England Calvinist he also was, with ancestral roots in America going back to before the American Revolution.⁵¹

Durkheim, however, embraced the France of the *Declaration*

48 Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 215.

49 Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 345. The phrase "the Jewish race" is Lukes's. It appears, however, that in the France of Durkheim's day, Jews and non-Jews used the language of race. See Marrus, *Politics of Assimilation*, 10.

50 Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 346.

51 Du Bois reflects at length on his genealogy in his 1940 autobiography *Dusk of Dawn*, a subjective, individualist genre that nonetheless bears the subtitle *The Autobiography of a Race Concept*.

of the *Rights of Man*, that is, not the France of Gobineau but the "color-blind" Republic. Unlike Theodor Herzl, who considered French racism vis-à-vis Jews to be an authentically native product, Durkheim regarded it as a German import, amounting to no more than "a consequence and the superficial symptom of a state of social malaise."⁵² It was true, he conceded, that in France certain right-wing Catholic ambitions had started to barren on that malaise. But he reasoned that if anti-Semitism had indeed been the rank flower of Catholicism in the 1890s, its fresh flowers would have been in full bloom twenty years earlier, when religious sentiment was, if anything, stronger. Yet this was not true, he claimed; and so it was more likely that anti-Semitism was not intrinsic to Catholicism but an epiphenomenon of social disorder and economic distress. His solutions were to seek justice, to mend the social fabric, and to educate the French differently. I do not minimize either his analysis or his solutions; every aspect of the problem is complex.⁵³ I simply point out that he advanced nothing like the DuBoisian agenda of doing battle forthwith, and very directly, to take the *tertium quid* out of play and to replace it with a full-scale human being. Hence this from Durkheim:

When society undergoes suffering, it feels the need to find someone whom it can hold responsible for its sickness, on whom it can avenge its misfortunes: and those against whom public opinion already discriminates are naturally designated for this role. These are the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. What confirms me in this interpretation is the way in which the result of Dreyfus's trial was greeted in 1894. There was a surge of joy on the boulevards.

52 Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 354.

53 The complexity of the question, even for Germany, is brought out in voting research that found that the Nazis never won the electoral support of Catholics in rural Germany. See the analysis and summary of voting patterns by Richard Wolin, "Between Fact and Interpretation: On the Social Misconstruction of Reality," *Theory and Society* 27:5 (1998), esp. 717.

People celebrated as a triumph what should have been a cause for public mourning. At last they knew whom to blame for the economic troubles and social distress in which they lived. The trouble came from the Jews. The charge had been officially proved. By this very fact alone, things already seemed to be getting better and people felt consoled.⁵⁴

In other words, whoever or whatever cannot lay claim to "fellow-feeling" is available for designation as society's "It"—Du Bois' *tertium quid*—at whose expense that fellow-feeling is affirmed. Durkheim does not stop to examine how the *tertium quid* is created. Looking back years later, though, he placed in the late 1890s his revelation as to the importance of religion. I suspect that those observations about the Dreyfus Affair let us glimpse one institutional source of *Forms*.⁵⁵

What can be known for certain is that Durkheim reproduced this formulation almost exactly in the last chapter of Book III, on rites of mourning, which famously demonstrates the independence of such rites from the subjective states of individuals.⁵⁶ There again, however, he does not stop to examine how the expiatory victim and its fate come into being:

54 Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 345. Lukes drew this from comments Durkheim made in 1899 to a journalistic inquiry into anti-Semitism.

55 It is unimaginable that a work as complex as *Forms* would have only one such source. See Fields, "Religion as an Eminently Social Thing," xxvi–xxxi, which explores his religious upbringing.

56 In addition, that chapter examines in detail William Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1894), to which Durkheim acknowledged a large intellectual debt in regard to the priority of rites over beliefs. It is also worth considering that the prevalence of anti-Semitism at the time would have set discussion of Smith's book afloat on complicated and sometimes troubling currents of opinion. See the flawed, yet instructive, analysis of Ivan Strenski, *Durkheim and the Jews of France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), and a review of it by Karen E. Fields, in the *Journal of Religion* 79:1 (1999).

If every death is imputed to some magical spell and if, for that reason, it is believed that the dead person must be avenged, the reason is a felt need to find a victim at all costs on whom the collective sorrow and anger can be discharged. The victim will naturally be sought outside, for an outsider is a subject less able to resist; since he is not protected by the fellow-feeling that attaches to a relative or neighbor, nothing about him blocks and neutralizes the bad and destructive feelings aroused by the death.⁵⁷

POSSIBLE TOPICS OF CONVERSATION

If Durkheim and Du Bois had had a talk in 1899 that made explicit the common features of their different predicaments, Du Bois might have upheld his own public actions against "the Negro" as America's *tertium quid* by relating both of those passages to Durkheim's famous relativistic definition of crime in *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Following his own principle of relating social facts to other social facts, Durkheim there defined crime as that which is repressed in any given society, thus permitting the *conscience collective* to affirm itself. That analysis holds the criminal character of an act not to be intrinsic to it or valid for all societies. But if *Rules* was right in its claim that crime and repression of crime have the positive function of providing the means and the occasion for reaffirmation of the *conscience collective*, then, it would seem, pariah-hood would work analogously: Periodic affirmations of pariah-hood would then have the function in social life of permitting the periodic affirmation of insider-hood.

Looking ahead now to *Forms*: If Durkheim was right there, then in both instances, public opprobrium, ritually enacted, would

57 Durkheim, *Forms*, 404. What comes next is also interesting, in that its own "social construction" could have been applied to women's status, but had to await other minds. Durkheim simply writes: "Probably for the same reason, a woman serves more often than a man as the passive object of the most cruel mourning rites. Because she has lower social significance, she is more readily singled out to fill the function of a scapegoat."

simultaneously create and express what it will thereafter be alleged merely to have expressed. In addition to all the other achievements of mourning rites that Durkheim sets forth, they also define the boundaries outside which stands the victim. In Dreyfus's fate, crime and pariah-hood came together. As a citizen found guilty of treason, he was sentenced to deportation for life to France's streaming prison colony in Guyana. As a member of the army elite found guilty of disloyalty, he was subjected to a solemn degradation ceremony on the parade ground of the École Militaire as part of his sentence: the defacement of his uniform; the breaking of his sword; and the shouted insults of his brother officers, while a crowd added their voices from outside in the street. An artist's rendering of that huge ceremony in the courtyard of the École Militaire appeared in *Le Monde Illustré*.⁵⁸

A different talk in 1899 might have exchanged programmatic statements that both Du Bois and Durkheim had made about the agendas each had for the properly sociological posing of social problems—Durkheim in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) and *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Du Bois in *The Philadelphia Negro* and in "Sociology Hesitant," an extended critique of American sociology that, for various reasons, he never published.⁵⁹ A talk in 1901 would have revealed Durkheim's invitation to leave Bordeaux for a post at the Sorbonne, there to keep building his *équipe* and its research journal. In addition, one aspect of his work at the Sorbonne would be to lay a scientific basis for secular public education in France. Durkheim would have learned that Du Bois had been dreaming analogous dreams in 1897, when he went to Atlanta University, there to busy himself with plans to build his own laboratory, his own team, and a series of publications. Du

58 Larousse, *La Grande Encyclopédie* (Paris: Editions Larousse, 1973), 3979.

59 Lewis (*W. E. B. Du Bois*, 202) reports his belief that "Sociology Hesitant" is no longer extant, but dates its completion as some time after 1900 and characterizes it as a robust critique of regnant forms of grand theory that, at best, minuted with observable facts.

Bois' grand proposal was to document the working-out of democratic ideals, central to the West for the previous hundred years, by conducting a broad-gauged, longitudinal study of emancipation in America—his *Atlanta Studies*. That talk about the successor regimes to slave-trading and slavery might, in turn, have led them to discuss the imperial élan of republican France, just then consolidating exploitative interests "in Asia, in Africa, and in the islands of the sea"—and, as two recent analysts put it, inserting "a ring in the nose of the republic."⁶⁰

They could actually have met in person in 1900, since both traveled to Paris for the Exposition Universelle. Du Bois had major responsibility for an exhibit, which won a gold medal, on Negro achievement since Emancipation.⁶¹ Durkheim was there lecturing at the Congrès Internationale de l'Éducation Sociale, an event that was part of France's contribution to the exposition.⁶² Or they might have come to know one another by reputation through the *American Journal of Sociology*, for which Durkheim was an advisory editor from 1895 until the war,⁶³ and in which a response by Du Bois to a scurrilous paper titled "Is Race Friction in the United States Growing and Inevitable?" appeared in 1904.⁶⁴

If the two had met in 1916, they could have discussed their respective patriotic writings in the service of war against Germany—with Du Bois making it clear that America's involvement was inevitable, as well as desirable. Let me mention these writings, but for now characterize only briefly certain differences between them.

60 Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard, "Le Colonialisme: un anneau dans le nez de la république," in a special issue titled "L'Héritage colonial: un trou de mémoire," in *Hommes et migrations* 1228 (November/December 2000), 80.

61 Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 247.

62 Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 350.

63 Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 247.

64 Ibid., 372. Lewis reports, in addition, that a brief commendation of Du Bois' *Atlanta Studies* appeared there in 1903. By the way, I do not assume that Du Bois was unaware of Durkheim's work. But since his papers have long been difficult of access, knowing about that must await future study.

Durkheim was writing government-commissioned pamphlets and open letters to the French, and so he was able to speak, as it were, in major key. By contrast, Du Bois wrote his wartime exhortations for *The Crisis*, the magazine of the NAACP, and in minor key. He insisted that black Americans must prepare to fight enthusiastically "over there" on their own behalf, as Americans of long lineage, while knowing full well that it was vital to prevent their enemies at home from adding disloyalty to the already long indictment of the race.⁶⁵ Both men looked forward to improvement after the war. Durkheim was enthusiastic about an "enriched vitality" and a heightened "moral enthusiasm," that could be husbanded once peace was re-established. Then, he thought, it would be possible to "revive the sense of community, to render it more active and make the citizens more accustomed to combining their efforts and subordinate their interests to those of society..."⁶⁶ Like Durkheim, Du Bois saw over the horizon of Allied victory and looked forward to renewed fervor—but the fervor he welcomed was specifically that of black Americans. Writing, as usual, in the minor key of double-consciousness, Du Bois felt certain, nonetheless, that victory by the Allies would help spread "new ideas of the essential equality of all men."⁶⁷

In 1916, the two men might also have discussed each other's contributions to wartime documents of a different sort. As editor-in-chief of *The Crisis*, Du Bois not only continued to display Afro-Americans' achievements but also began publishing evidence

⁶⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, "World War and the Color Line," *The Crisis* 9:1 (1914), reprinted in Lester, *The Seventh Son*, Vol. I. In 1916, Du Bois campaigned for the training of Negro officers, even under the conditions of a separate, segregated training camp, and he detailed the exploits of Maj. Charles Young in Mexico and in Haiti, hoping (along with many Afro-Americans) that Young would be projected into leadership when America entered the war (Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 517). Although its spirit is present earlier, Du Bois' famous (to some, infamous) piece titled "Close Ranks" did not appear until 1918.

⁶⁶ Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 553–4.

⁶⁷ Du Bois, "World War and the Color Line," 67.

of their patriotism and willingness to die for their country. Those displays were meant as Exhibit A against the gathering racist onslaught, and were produced in an extended report after the war.⁶⁸ Along with double-consciousness went what can be called "double death"—dying once for America and once for Afro-America. Dead or as surviving veterans, African Americans had to be counted as black dead or black survivors, else their sacrifices on America's behalf would not be recognized as such.⁶⁹ If Du Bois had been watching his colleague closely, however, he would have seen that Durkheim faced the same predicament—in his capacity as president of the Research Committee for Documents of the Société des Études Juives. By 1916, anti-Semitic attacks were on the rise, often taking the form of slurs against the loyalty of Jews, who were said to be German agents. Durkheim himself was publicly slurred by name at least twice during that year, notwithstanding the loss of his son to the slaughter.⁷⁰ In that climate, the Research Committee of the Société began collecting and verifying the names of Jewish soldiers killed, wounded, decorated, or promoted during the war. According to the Committee, "the love which they bear for their country does not command them to deny their Jewishness ... It is not without interest to know how Frenchmen of Jewish origin, who have not embraced another religion, conducted themselves in the war."⁷¹ Among France's fallen heroes, too, the outsiders had

⁶⁸ Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 501–34.

⁶⁹ I note, however, that the African colonial non-citizens who defended France in World War I, as *Tirailleurs sénégalais*, gained a memorial near the main training camp, at Cazeau, only in 1967, and that their inclusion in Armistice Day ceremonies began only in November 1998, under the impetus of the Union des Tirailleurs sénégalais. Interview with UTS members, Bordeaux, November 2000.

⁷⁰ Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 557.

⁷¹ The results were published under the title *Les Israélites dans l'année française*, in 1920 and 1921 by Albert Mannel, treasurer of the Committee and secretary-general of the Paris Consistory. See Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 57.

to die twice, once to defend the country against external enemies and a second time to defend themselves against internal ones. Wide publicity was accordingly given to the exploit of Rabbi Abraham Bloch, who was killed while delivering a crucifix to a mortally wounded Catholic soldier.⁷²

"Individualism and the Intellectuals": A Fragment of Conversation

Therefore, a conversation in 1916 could have moved from the sad spectacle of double death to Durkheim's instruction at the start of "Individualism and the Intellectuals": "Let us forget the affair itself and the sad spectacles of which we have been witnesses." It would move from there to the fact that this remarkable piece does not mention Dreyfus, Jews, or anti-Semitism. The article does not so much attack the attackers as defend the defenders—and proclaims the central issues of the Affair to be the preservation and expansion of Individualism and Reason. Those, he claims, go "infinitely beyond the actual incidents and should be separated from them."⁷³ One need not claim otherwise to observe, nonetheless, that "Individualism and the Intellectuals" seems an abstract response to a blood-and-guts issue.

In that article, we learn from Durkheim that the individualism of the French utilitarians (also of Spencer and the economists) is rightly attacked as incompatible with social existence. But there is another "individualism," which he calls its "opposite," that was formulated in *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* and is the very basis of social existence. This individualism makes the human person the touchstone of morality. It is individualist "because man is its object, and man is individual by definition."⁷⁴ The individualism of the Rights of Man takes on the character of

⁷² Ibid., 12.

⁷³ Durkheim, "L'Individualisme," 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 10.

a religion in which man is the believer and the God. Therefore, an attack on life, liberty, or honor is like profaning an idol. No *raison d'être* can supersede this individualism, contrary to Brunetière's claim, because it is prior to the state. This individualism has left its ivory tower company of Kant and Rousseau, and has so deeply penetrated institutions and mores that to remove it would mean re-forging everything, top to bottom. Furthermore, such is the social diversity of the modern world that the only thing held in common is human-ness (*la qualité d'homme*). There is nothing to love and honor collectively, if not man himself. Far from being the source of anarchy, then, individualism is the only system of belief capable of ensuring the moral unity of the country. To defend it is therefore nothing less than to defend the very patrimony of the nation.

Durkheim goes on to describe the "religion of humanity, which has all it takes to speak just as authoritatively as the religions it replaces." This religion does not flatter the instincts, but does violence to them (a point about religion he makes repeatedly in *Forms*), for the sacredness of the individual does not arise from individual characteristics and individual characteristics do indeed work against solidarity. "This cult, of which the individual is agent and object, is not addressed to who the person is and has his name, but to the human person wherever met with and in whatever form incarnated . . . It glorifies the individual in general."⁷⁵

"But who is that 'individual in general'?" Du Bois might have asked Durkheim—as a prelude to recounting an enigmatic story about individual identity and collective identification, as he had experienced them during his travels through Europe between 1892 and 1894:

My dark face elicited none of the curiosity which it had in blond Germany, for there were too many dark Gypsies and other brunettes. I saw poverty and despair. I was several times mistaken for a Jew. Arriving one night in a town of north Slovenia, the driver

⁷⁵ Ibid., 11.

of a rickety cab whispered in my ear, "Unter die Juden?" [Among Jews?]. I stared and then said yes. I stayed in a little Jewish inn. I was a little frightened as in the gathering twilight I traversed the foothills of the dark Tatra alone and on foot.⁷⁶

Du Bois: I know your "Individualism and the Intellectuals." When I wrote *The Souls of Black Folk*, everything within me pushed "How does it feel to be a problem?" onto the page. But, even if someone held a pistol to your head, I don't think you could write, "How does it feel to be a question?" It's as though everything within you pushed it off your page. You rest your case on a certain *qualité d'homme* that you suppose joins us all amid the diversity of the modern world. I think you've rested your case on shifting sand.

Durkheim: Ah, perhaps. But it is the only place I have to rest it. If in France we can just proceed with a scientific understanding of the kind of society France is, we can realize the promise of 1789. As I wrote in that article, "With social diversification, the growth of individuality reaches a point where the only thing held in common is human-ness [*la qualité d'homme*]. There is nothing to love and honor in common if not man himself. This is why man is a god to himself and can no longer make other gods for himself."⁷⁷ [Both savor this turn on the Ten Commandments.]

Du Bois: No doubt, my dear M. Durkheim, that elevated sentiment greatly calmed the very Catholic M. Brunetière. [Wicked chuckles from both.] I, too, know how to plant mines on my pages. But, you know, it's not the religious mines that blow the most shrapnel in America. It's, say, my comparing illiterate Negro peasants with illiterate Austrian clodhoppers, showing the published illegitimacy rates among the Negroes to be no higher. I need not be

⁷⁶ Du Bois, *Autobiography*, 174-5.

⁷⁷ Durkheim, "L'Individualisme," 11.

close enough to have a "cigar and a cup of tea" with a white Jim Crow Southerner to know his likely reaction to my transgressing the color line's etiquette, even with statistics. [Laughs.] Seriously, though, I am convinced you are right about the kind of morality we need. I myself wrote that one stream of modern thinking is "swollen from the larger world ... [and that] the multiplying of human wants in culture-lands calls for the world-wide cooperation of men in satisfying them. Hence arises a new human unity, pulling the ends of earth nearer, and all men, black, yellow, and white."⁷⁸ But to leap from that useful unity to a shared moral humanity poses a question, not an answer, and it is the question for any "religion of humanity." You see, I went on to say this: Behind that stream of "thought lurk[ed] the afterthought of force and dominion—the making of brown men to delve when the temptation of beads and calico cloys."⁷⁹ So, in the end, who is *l'homme* that *l'homme* should take account of him? [They laugh, recalling the 8th Psalm.]

Durkheim: I know what you mean. How *l'homme* comes to recognize *l'homme* morally is the most important question our discipline can help us answer.

Du Bois: But you seem to assume, rather than demonstrate, that *l'homme* can possibly recognize *l'homme* in the abstract. I thought you showed precisely the opposite in *Forms*, that a man can become convinced he is as different from another man as a kangaroo is from a tree louse, when actually they all look as much like one another as you French do—O, as they say, you of "the Latin race." [Eyes twinkling.]

Durkheim: Quite so. You caught that one, did you? Vulgar empiricism will no more give you physical resemblance between a man

⁷⁸ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 271.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

and a tree louse than it will the resemblance between two members of the Tree Louse clan—or, yes, two members of our “Latin race.” That is that, for the vaunted races of Europe, and, besides, for your different races in America. Human mentality is flexible enough to accommodate the most disconcerting designations, *n’est-ce pas?* The whole *raison d’être* of my work in education is that human mentality can also accommodate other designations that are, to Reason, rather less *déconcertantes*. But we must inculcate the young with them, and we must see that they are enacted periodically. *Forms* is about a human world. That world exists through human doing and is therefore our own ethical responsibility.

Du Bois: That is true. But even so, again I ask, “What constitutes *l’homme?*” Let’s suppose it means having a soul. If it’s having a soul, a spark of divinity from that divinized social unity of yours in *Forms*,⁸⁰ then think about that unseemly outburst of mine, *The Souls of Black Folk*. It was my Exhibit A for *la qualité d’homme*. In it, I set my soul—our souls in colored America—against something else: namely “the sincere and passionate belief that somewhere between men and cattle, God created a *tertium quid* and called it a Negro...”⁸¹ All my words about “double-consciousness,” and about how it feels to be a problem, finally led some people at long last to suspect my—our—humanity, in other words, the humanity of that *tertium quid*. Rev. Washington Gladden, gallant warrior for social justice, went so far as to tell his congregation that reading *Souls* would “give [them] a deeper insight into the real *human* elements of the race problem than anything that [had] yet been written.”⁸² The “*human* elements,” notice. What on earth did they imagine before? But if I had ever doubted what claiming those “human” elements meant to some of my compatriots, the *New York Times* reviewer dispelled all doubt: According to the *Times*, *Souls*

80 Durkheim, *Forms*, 265.

81 Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 271.

82 Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 294 (my emphasis).

boiled down to something very simple. Du Bois’ hidden personal agenda was “to smoke a cigar and drink a cup of tea with the white man in the South.”⁸³

Durkheim: So it is that way in America. Then again, perhaps I do know what you are talking about. A century and a half ago, Moses Mendelssohn was—how did you say it?—he was an “Exhibit A.” Most people still doubted that Jews had *la qualité d’homme*. Some thought Jews might have it (those were the open-minded ones). And so, never having met *la qualité d’homme* in a Jewish body, they invented it as a purely theoretical possibility to debate over.⁸⁴ Enter Mendelssohn. His task was to try to prove, in the flesh, that “a Jew could be philosopher, aesthete, even Prussian patriot ... and most of all that ... a Jew could be virtuous.”⁸⁵

Du Bois: I think I understand, and that’s not so very long ago. But look what happened next. If he was human, for them it followed that he ought to embrace Christianity. No, my dear M. Durkheim, I am unconvinced that it’s enough to talk now only about shared universal humanity, your lovely *qualité d’homme*. I came to believe long ago that each group has its special gift and brings that to common humanity, a place where we can then agree—maybe—to be “co-workers in the kingdom of culture.”⁸⁶ Even now, I maintain my position that peoples have to battle their way into common humanity, tribe by tribe.

Durkheim: What did William James say about your book? Since the 1890s, we’ve been reading with great interest his provocative

83 Ibid., 293.

84 Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1794–1824* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1974), 15.

85 Ibid., 18.

86 Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 215.

work in psychology and his philosophical arguments about the nature of truth. Was James not your teacher?⁸⁷

Du Bois: Oh, yes. He thought *The Souls of Black Folk* was a "decidedly moving book," and he sent off a copy to his brother Henry, noting that it was written by a "mulatto ex-student of his."⁸⁸

Durkheim: [Pauses] *Ah, oui.* I think I comprehend your predicament.

Du Bois: Let's come back to our *qualité d'homme* in this war.

Durkheim: It is true, my dear M. Du Bois. Your predicament and mine in this dreadful war is to record second deaths of our own people. It has not been enough simply to count the corpses—*hélas*. We cannot count and mourn everyone together in their *qualité d'homme*. Still, if we just take hold of the present vitality in this land, and guide it, we can complete the great work of our grandfathers. *Malgré tout*, I still believe as I did in 1898: If we build that religion of humanity as we should, there will be strong opposition to all that threatens our common faith. "If every enterprise directed against the rights of an individual revolts [us], it is not only by sympathy with the victim, neither is it for fear of having to suffer like injustices [ourselves]. It is that such attacks cannot go on with impunity without compromising the nation's existence."⁸⁹ I think sociology can enable us to bring that about. With it, we can uncover the profound dynamics of social life that make the social world we see before our eyes.

⁸⁷ For a searching examination of what, if any, influences can be found of James's notions of double or multiple consciousness on Du Bois's, see Reed, *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought*, 100–5.

⁸⁸ Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 294.

⁸⁹ Durkheim, "L'Individualisme," 11–12.

Du Bois: I read that article. You went on and on about Individualism and Reason. You got more and more heated as you went on. Such attacks can't be made, you thought, "without arousing the sentiments that were violated." Those were the "only sentiments that [could] bind the nation," so they couldn't weaken without disrupting the cohesion of the society. Otherwise there would be *un veritable suicide moral*—a veritable moral suicide. Without Individualism and Reason, there is moral suicide! Hellfire preaching, that, M. Durkheim! Still, you had the sinners dead to rights: men of impoverished conviction, you called them; they weren't apostles overflowing with anger or enthusiasm, you said; they weren't savants bringing forth products of research and reflection, you insisted. They were men of letters seduced by an interesting theme and playing games of dilettantes. So you thought it impossible that those games of dilettantes would manage to hold the masses for very long—if we knew how to act, you said. Your "we" was whoever, in democratic France, embraced humanity as the reason and the goal of morality.

Durkheim: I did say all that. I deeply believe all that. Yet I am, like you, reconciled to gathering invidious memorials of double death. For now, it cannot be helped.

At the time W. E. B. Du Bois began his work on the problem of the color line, Emile Durkheim had set for himself the problem of religion—in particular, religion's characteristic freight of false statements about nature and humankind, with their singular capacity to survive disproof. If he had not underlined his interest in "present-day" man, his itinerary might not have crossed Du Bois' in the ways I have suggested, and we might well hold that his study of Australian totemic cults has little to teach us about his social world, or our own. But for me, at least, *Forms* invites new sorts of conversation about collective identifications, formulated so as to link sociologists with colleagues who approach the study of human

intellect with the different tool kits of disciplines such as economics, philosophy, and brain science.⁹⁰ If Durkheim is right, obvious physical difference is the wrong place to start, but so, too, is reason conceptualized with individualistic models.

Again, if Durkheim had conceived religion differently—for example, as the subjective experience of individuals—his intellectual itinerary might not have converged with Du Bois'. But those itineraries did indeed cross, because Durkheim located religion in human groups—in the social and intellectual processes that designate groups, their boundaries, their members, and the place of all the foregoing in the larger cosmos. Conceived that way, religion met race, not only in the rarefied world of philosophy and scientific theorizing but also in the real world of ethical choices and practical politics. I think this is why nowadays Durkheimian ideas find themselves on DuBoisian terrain: In studies of race, the notion of double-consciousness jostles that of collective identifications produced in social life. Even so, the two men's different approaches to the practical questions have not resolved into one. What is to be done is no more obvious now than it was on my invented Paris afternoon in 1916. I cannot say what difference it would have made if they had met. What I can say is that the stakes were high, as the unfolding of the twentieth century proved.

Conclusion:

Racecraft and Inequality

In the preceding essay, Emile Durkheim and W. E. B. Du Bois grapple with the racism that usurped democratic politics in France and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Our viewing them together stands as a reminder that what Americans designate by the shorthand "race" does not depend on physical difference, can do without visible markers, and owes nothing at all to nature. As the social alchemy of racecraft transforms racism into race, disguising collective social practice as inborn individual traits, so it entrenches racism in a category to itself, setting it apart from inequality in other guises. Racism and those other forms of inequality are rarely tackled together because they rarely come into view together. Indeed, the most consequential of the illusions racecraft underwrites is concealing the affiliation between racism and inequality in general. Separate though they may appear to be, they work together and share a central nervous system.

Does the election of Barack Obama add anything to the old story? When we proposed the present collection to a publisher during the spring of 2008, everyone agreed that we ought to mention the coming presidential election. No matter what the outcome, the nomination of a candidate of African descent by a major party seemed a significant moment. It was not self-evident, however, exactly how and why the moment was significant. If anything, it has become less evident since.

⁹⁰ See, for example, recent work by an economist who stretches his discipline's methodological individualism toward its limits: Glenn C. Loury, *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).