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CHAPTER

The Making of Black Marxism: The Complementary Perspectives of W. E. B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon

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Abstract

The well-known shortcomings of the writings of Marx and Engels have given rise to the Marxist tradition that continually reconstructs itself to accommodate the challenges it meets in different places at different times. Thus the Marxist tradition has sprouted a succession of branches. One of the most enduring is Black Marxism, a Marxism that adopts the standpoint of racially subjugated populations. This essay considers W. E. B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon as representative of this tradition. Despite their divergent biographies, they share important features and objects of analysis. Both made a radical shift from a phenomenology of racism to Black Marxism, which is represented by their iconic works *Black Reconstruction in America* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Moreover, both systematically incorporated “race” into their accounts of the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of revolution. Yet they also diverge in key respects: Fanon focused on class struggle on the dark side of the color line while Du Bois focused on the class struggle on the white side of the color line; and while Fanon tended to homogenize the forces of colonial domination, Du Bois tended to homogenize the agency of the racially subjugated. Comparing these two Black Marxists highlights the strengths and limitations of each, while at the same time underlining the vitality of their shared Black Marxism as a truly global project.

Keywords: [Fanon](#), [Du Bois](#), [Marxism](#), [revolution](#), [class](#), [race](#), [colonialism](#), [Reconstruction](#)

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Marxism is a living tradition. To be true to itself Marxism has to undergo continual revision. As a set of ideas, it must reflect the material context within which it is produced; as the material context changes so too must Marxism. As a set of practices that engages the world, similarly, Marxism must change with the world it seeks to transform. Therefore, although founded on the writings of Marx and Engels, Marxism necessarily reconstructs itself for different times and places. German Marxism, Russian Marxism, Western Marxism, and Third World Marxism all reflect specific historical challenges to the writings of Marx and Engels. Each branch of Marxism develops as a critique of the works of Marx and Engels yet remains consistent with their defining assumptions.¹ Each branch tangles with other branches, advanced in specific historical contexts.² In this essay I explore the making of one of the most enduring and uniquely global branches, Black Marxism, by juxtaposing the work of W. E. B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon.

Though sociologists have tended to ignore or sideline Du Bois’s Marxism or to dismiss it as hagiography, there is little dispute that Du Bois was a follower of Marx for the last thirty years of his life and for the previous twenty-five years was an avowed socialist. The question is: what sort of Marxist was he? Manning Marable (2005) regards him as a Western Marxist, given his literary and artistic interests that put him at a distance from the working class, while Tommie Shelby (2021) considers him an analytical Marxist,

underlining his independent thinking. But neither of these perspectives does justice to Du Bois's analysis of race, the origin of his Marxist commitments. Building on the work of Cedric Robinson (2000 [1983]), Reiland Rabaka (2009), and others, I argue that Du Bois was a pioneer of Black Marxism—a branch of Marxism defined by the standpoint of racially subjugated people across the globe, what Du Bois called the “darker races.” Unlike Robinson (2000 [1983]), however, I don't believe Du Bois ever abandoned Marxism.

Black Marxism is populated by such redoubtable figures as C. L. R. James, Oliver Cromwell Cox, Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, and Stuart Hall, as well as W. E. B. Du Bois. They all considered themselves part of the Marxist tradition, albeit recognizing that Marxism had to be reconstructed if it was to attend to the perspective of the racially subjugated. Thus, Du Bois (1995 [1933]: 543) declared that the “Marxian philosophy ... must be *modified* in the United States of America and especially so far as the Negro group is concerned,” and Fanon (1963 [1961]: 40) wrote that “Marxist analysis should always be slightly *stretched* every time we have to deal with the colonial problem.” “Modified” and “stretched” connote “reconstructed” to meet specific historical challenges, which is precisely how Marxism has always developed.³

To analyze the making of Black Marxism requires demonstrating that its constituent thinkers have something in common and that they can be placed in critical dialogue with one another. Although their lives overlapped, Du Bois and Fanon were not in direct conversation with one another. Yet, as I will show, an imaginary conversation can be constructed that illuminates their complementary contributions to Black Marxism. Both examined the political economy of revolution and white supremacy—the one based on the Civil War and its aftermath in the United States and the other based on the anticolonial struggles in Africa and the forging of postcolonialism. By comparing their theories across different centuries, I hope to demonstrate that they share a commitment to Black Marxism. This comparison across time and space is not just a methodological strategy to seek commonality across maximal difference; it also serves to underline the extraordinary geographical and historical scope of Black Marxism—a truly global Marxism that reflects the ubiquity of racism. As Du Bois wrote in 1906: “the color line belts the world.”

Du Bois and Fanon both turned from a phenomenology of racism to a Black Marxism, but they made this “epistemological break” from different theoretical positions.⁴ While Du Bois set out from a phenomenology with a sociological bent, Fanon set out from a phenomenology with a psychological bent. But they both arrived at a political economy of emancipation. For Du Bois the pivotal moment in US history was neither the Declaration of Independence nor the beginning of slavery but the Civil War (1861–1865), which led to Reconstruction and the possibility of an interracial democracy. That Reconstruction was actually followed by new forms of racial domination had fateful consequences not just for the United States but for the whole world. For Fanon, the pivotal moments in Africa's history were anticolonial struggles and the possibilities they nurtured for a democratic socialism. Despite important endeavors in that direction, postcolonial Africa instead took “national bourgeois” roads that closed down both democracy and socialism. For Du Bois and Fanon alike, the racially subjugated took history into their own hands; if the result was a “splendid failure,” this was not because of human shortcomings but because, ultimately, the balance of economic, political, and military forces was not in their favor. Once they arrived at their Marxist vision of history neither Du Bois nor Fanon turned back to their earlier phenomenology of race; nor did they ever give up on their Marxist-inspired, utopian visions.

In what follows, I compare Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967 [1952]) and Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* (1989 [1903]) as studies in the phenomenology of racism; I then turn to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1963 [1961]) and Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America* (1998 [1935]) as contributions to a Black Marxism. In both cases, the shift to Marxism reflected the author's own changing engagement with the world he aimed to transform, so I begin the essay by tracing their very different political trajectories. I conclude the essay by considering the ways Du Bois's Marxism shifted after writing *Black Reconstruction* as he developed his critique of imperialism alongside socialist possibilities in Africa, indicating the ways his views both diverge from and complement Fanon's postcolonial view of Africa.

Two Roads to Marxism

The writings of Fanon and Du Bois can only be understood in relation to their own “lived experience” of racism —in Martinique and France for Fanon, in the United States for Du Bois. Despair led both to a radical politics. For Fanon it was the struggle against France for Algeria’s independence; for Du Bois it was the struggle for civil rights in the United States. In both cases they projected their struggles onto a wider canvas.

Fanon was born in 1925 into middle-class Martinican society. In high school he was a student of Aimé Césaire, and even before he finished school he enrolled in the Free French Army, ending up fighting in North Africa. Although he was decorated for bravery, this was Fanon’s first significant taste of racism: the discovery that he was not French but Black. At the end of the war he returned to Martinique, but soon afterward he left for France on a scholarship, first to Paris and then to Lyons, where he trained to be a psychiatrist. He proposed what was to become *Black Skin, White Masks* for his medical thesis, but it was roundly rejected by his supervisor, who required him to research the physiological basis of mental illness (Gordon 2015: 15).

So long as he was in France, he saw only a psychoanalytical way beyond racism. “It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world” (Fanon 1967 [1952]: 231). In search of a way forward, he returned to Martinique in 1951 to practice medicine but found this stifling and soon returned to France to join Francois Tosquelle’s center for institutional psychotherapy. Its aim was the integration of everyday life into the therapeutic process, with a view to developing therapeutic communities.⁵ Fanon took this approach to psychiatric practice with him when he left France in 1953 for Algeria. That led him beyond a phenomenology of racism to Marxism.

Fanon was awarded an important position at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital, outside Algiers, where he treated victims of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), both colonizers and colonized. It soon became apparent that psychiatry could not deal with the horrors of colonialism that lay at the root of the mental illnesses he confronted. He was increasingly drawn to a political avenue, namely the expanding “national liberation struggle,” as he termed it. As the colonial war intensified, he resigned his post at Blida-Joinville and began training liberation fighters in self-defense and counter-interrogation. Forced to leave Algeria at the end of 1956, he went to newly independent Tunisia as a representative of the Front de libération nationale (FLN), where he continued to practice psychiatry. He became a roving representative of the FLN in exile, spending extended periods in Accra, Ghana, as well as Tunis. Diagnosed with leukemia, he was thirty-six when he died in a hospital in Washington, DC, in 1961, the very year Du Bois left the United States to take up residence in Ghana.

When Fanon was born in 1925, Du Bois was already fifty-seven years old, and easily the most distinguished African American intellectual of his time. Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Du Bois, like Fanon, had seldom suffered overt racism in his youth. To the contrary, the local white Methodist community nurtured his intellect and sponsored his enrollment at Fisk University in Tennessee. There he flourished, moving to Harvard in 1888, where he became the first African American to receive a PhD in 1895. He also spent two years as a graduate student at the University of Berlin, where he developed his interest in sociology. Only residence requirements stopped him from getting a second PhD.

For Du Bois, Germany was a breath of fresh air, enabling him to explore the field of sociology at the feet of leading scholars, liberated from the humiliating and violent racism he had faced in the South after leaving Great Barrington. Even though he now had the equivalent of two PhDs, one from Harvard and one from the University of Berlin, he was denied access to the best US universities. On returning from Germany in 1894, he took a teaching position at Wilberforce University, a historically Black institution in Ohio. Forced to teach classics and not his new passion, sociology, he lasted two years before taking up a temporary position as an “assistant in sociology” at the University of Pennsylvania, assigned to write a report on the lives of African Americans in Philadelphia. The result was *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), now recognized as a classic in urban sociology. From the University of Pennsylvania he moved to Atlanta University in 1897, where he built up the Atlanta School of Sociology, directing the production of a series of monographs on the lives of African Americans (Morris 2015). During this period he also wrote a succession of brilliant essays about life in the South, brought together in the iconic *Souls of Black Folk* (1903).

Despite these extraordinary achievements, Du Bois was denied resources and recognition for his research. His future in US academia was blocked. Realizing that his scholarship would not ameliorate the brutal racism of the South, he turned to politics, becoming a founder of the Niagara Movement, which then morphed into the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1910 he left Atlanta University to become the editor of *The Crisis*, the NAACP magazine, consolidating an astonishing career as a critical public intellectual, fighting for racial justice not just in the United States but all over the world. He had attended a Pan-African Conference as early as 1900, and he became a key organizer of Pan-African Congresses in 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927, and 1945. As a racialized subject in an imperial nation, Du Bois's political career involved a complex interweaving of national and global concerns.

It was in Germany that Du Bois first encountered socialism—attending meetings of the Social Democratic Party in Berlin and listening to university lecturers espouse ideas of socialism (Barkin 2000). He was attracted to its egalitarian universalism yet dismayed by the racism he found in the US labor movement. Influenced by the leaders of the US Socialist Party, especially Eugene Debs, he joined in 1911, but only for a year. An early endorsement of what he called “socialism of the path,” appeared in 1907 in the magazine the *Horizon* (Du Bois 1985 [1907]). A more elaborated commitment emerged in the essays published in *Darkwater* (1999 [1920]), full of encomia to a participatory democracy that required public ownership of the means of production and the equalization of income. But Du Bois also insisted that there could be no socialism until the race problem was solved—one can't build socialism on the backs of the “darker races,” the majority of the world's population. This was his period of *utopian socialism*—when he struggled to see how the ideal society could be realized.

Du Bois was decidedly agnostic about the Soviet Union until he visited that newfangled world in 1926. He came away impressed by the way the Soviet state was tackling poverty and inequality and, as far as he could see, the absence of racism. He wrote: “if what I have seen with my eyes and heard with my ears is Bolshevism, then I am a Bolshevik.” According to David Levering Lewis (2000: chap. 6), the experience had a profound impact on his thinking, taking him from a utopian socialism to Marxist analysis. He plunged into the writings of Marx, especially *Capital*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and the essays on the American Civil War, complaining that his teachers at Fisk and Harvard had never brought Marx to his attention (Du Bois 1950: chap. 1). In 1933 he wrote:

There are certain books in the world which every searcher for truth must know: the Bible, the Critique of Pure Reason, the Origin of Species, and Karl Marx's *Capital*. Yet until the Russian Revolution, Karl Marx was little known in America. He was treated condescendingly in the universities, and regarded even by the intelligent public as a radical agitator whose curious and inconvenient theories it was easy to refute. Today, at last, we all know better, and we see in Karl Marx a colossal genius of infinite sacrifice and monumental industry, and with a mind of extraordinary logical keenness and grasp.

(Du Bois 1995 [1933]: 538)

In this passage Du Bois is trying to excuse his own ignorance of Marx. He had adopted the same condescension as his teachers in Berlin and at Harvard, although he must have been aware that Marx's writings were hotly debated in the German Social Democratic Party.⁶ Be that as it may, Du Bois's deepening interest in Marx (Saman 2020) led him to a radicalism that was impatient with social reform, which in turn brought him into conflict with the NAACP. In 1934, he was effectively fired from the editorship of *The Crisis*, whereupon he rejoined Atlanta University to chair the sociology department and complete his magnum opus, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1998 [1935]), with its often-forgotten subtitle “An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America.”

He taught for eleven years at Atlanta University before being forced out. He then rejoined the NAACP as “director of special research,” but animosities between him and the executive secretary, Walter White, continued. He was fired in 1948 for political activity, including his support for the Progressive Party, while burgeoning involvement in the international peace movement put him on the wrong side of the Cold War. He became an official enemy of the US state in 1950, facing trumped-up charges of being an undeclared foreign agent of the Soviet Union. The judge threw out the case in a public trial that took place in 1951 (Du Bois 2007 [1952]). The State Department still confiscated his passport, limiting his travel until 1958, when the Supreme Court ruled the confiscation illegal. With his passport in hand he was able to visit the leaders of the Soviet Union and China, openly denouncing US imperialism abroad and racism at home. Fearing

imprisonment in the United States, he and his second wife, Shirley Graham, accepted the invitation of Kwame Nkrumah, recently installed as president of Ghana, to make their new home in Accra. They arrived in Ghana in 1961, where Du Bois died two years later at the age of ninety-five.

There is no evidence that Fanon and Du Bois ever met. Although they must have been aware of each other, I can find no reference to that in their writings. Were it not for the US State Department's confiscation of his passport, Du Bois would have met Fanon in Paris in 1956 at the First World Congress of Black Writers and Artists. Du Bois sent a telegram to the delegates, which received rapturous applause when he explained that his absence was due to the American government's fear of "Negro-Americans discussing race conditions in the US" or declaring themselves to be socialist. He ended by saying: "I trust the black writers of the world will understand this and will set themselves to lead Africa towards the light and not backward toward a new colonialism where hand in hand with Britain, France and the United States, black capital enslaves black labor" (quoted in Macey 2000: 281). Fanon and Du Bois could also have met in 1958 in Accra at the All-African People's Congress, which was—though not so named—effectively the first Pan-African Congress to be held in Africa. But because Du Bois was recuperating from his exhausting travels in Moscow at the time, Shirley Graham delivered her husband's apocalyptic speech declaring that Africa faced triumph or tragedy, socialism or a benighted capitalism. At that same conference Fanon received a standing ovation when he insisted on the necessity of violence, even though that was very much against the prevailing ethos of negotiation (368).

Notwithstanding their different views on violence, a difference stemming from different life experiences, Fanon and Du Bois both expressed concern about the dangers to their shared vision of a socialist future for Africa. But their emphases were different. Fanon's break with France and joining the FLN led him to write *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963 [1961]), which focused on the balance of class forces within the new nations, albeit within an imperial context. In contrast, Du Bois saw Africa from afar as either an extension of imperialism or a challenge to imperialism, but not in terms of its internal struggles—a view strikingly different from his analysis of the US situation in *Black Reconstruction* (1998 [1935]). As the following section shows, despite their divergences each arrived at a Marxist analysis after breaking with his early phenomenology of racism.

The Phenomenology of Racism

What better way to introduce the phenomenology of racism than with the famous quotation from Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* where he defines *double consciousness*:

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. 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. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and *truer self*.

(Du Bois 1989 [1903]: 5; italics added)

Eloquent and widely cited though this passage is, Du Bois himself did not devote much space to advance and deepen the concept of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* and only occasionally referred to it subsequently.⁷ By itself, as Adolph Reed (1997) has pointed out, the idea of double consciousness is not particularly original. Coming from a psychoanalytical tradition, and influenced by the existentialism of Sartre, Fanon's merciless indictment of the psychic effects of racism in *Black Skin, White Masks* implies a similar notion.

Fanon described the experience of Martinican immigrants to France: expecting to be embraced as French, they are despised as black. Black immigrants strive to become French by merging their Martinican self and their French self into a truer self, but at every attempt they become the object of contempt and pity. In demonstrating their facility in language, in seeking sexual partners of the opposite race, in short in trying to

become white, in measuring themselves against the tape of an alien, hostile world, they only cement their exclusion, eliciting derision and hatred from those that dominate them. Martinicans deceive themselves into thinking that they can prove themselves equal to the French, yet striving for acceptance as fellow humans proves futile. They are simply not recognized. The lucidity with which Fanon described this double consciousness, seeing oneself through the eyes of the other, is his own version of “second-sight.” He saw what his fellow Martinicans didn’t. He even ridiculed their pretensions, as the title of his book suggests.

At the heart of Fanon’s analogue of double consciousness lies symbolic violence: “what is often called the black soul is a white man’s artifact” (Fanon, 1967 [1952]: 16); “willy-nilly, the Negro has to wear the livery that the white man has sewed for him” (34). Every path of escape is a response to and thereby deepens the “epidermalization of inferiority.” Fanon vehemently repudiated Aimé Césaire’s turn to Negritude and the idea of seeking salvation in the past: “in no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and of my future” (226). The past is no guide to the present.

In rejecting Mannoni’s view of an inherited dependency complex,⁸ Fanon locates the source of racism outside the individual. “As a psychoanalyst, I should help my patient become *conscious* of his unconscious and abandon his attempts at a hallucinatory whitening, but also to act in the direction of a change in the social structure” (Fanon, 1967 [1952]: 100). But how “restructuring of the world” is possible remains unclear, as the focus of *Black Skin, White Masks* is on the “psychoexistential complex” binding Black and white together. There are allusions to class structure, and even a claim that the working class is so focused on contesting exploitation that it plays no part in the intellectual alienation of middle-class society (87, 224). Therapy can demystify the source of racism as lying outside the individual, but that only gestures toward a solution. It is not a solution in itself. That will have to await his Marxist turn.

Du Bois did not make the same reduction to psychodynamics—his phenomenology of racism was sociological. For him the concept of the veil was key. Where Fanon reduced the lived experience of Blacks to a zone of nonbeing, a zone invisible to whites, the essays in *The Souls of Black Folk* offer rare and rich accounts of life within the veil. There Du Bois maps the borders of the veil, separating Black from white society. He examines the economic destitution in the cotton belt and its class stratification, composed of croppers, tenants, wage laborers, and a small group of land owners. He laments the appalling poverty and demoralization. He writes of the achievements during Reconstruction of the Freedmen’s Bureau, despite its limited resources. Du Bois depicts the thirst for education in the poorest communities and the virtues of higher education. Not all of the African past was destroyed by slavery—communities recreated religion, the African church, the music, the sorrow songs. He writes of the tragedies of progress for those held prisoners within the veil: the death of his first-born son, the desperation of the talented tenth as even they are denied their humanity.

In the chapter on Booker T. Washington, Du Bois (1989 [1903]: chap. 3) delineates three different responses to the veil: revolt and revenge, self-realization and self-assertion, and adaptation or resignation. Du Bois embraced the second: the fighting for political power, civil rights, and education. He still held out hope that the advances made since Reconstruction could eviscerate the veil. This lyrical sociology aimed to make visible to whites the humanity of African Americans despite their subjugation. Whereas Fanon exposed the symbolic violence of racism and denounced Blacks for their self-defeating practices, Du Bois appealed to whites to cast aside their irrational fears of Blacks. Neither saw the oppressed as taking history into their own hands.⁹ Fanon focused on the delusions of intellectuals and professionals, ironically the very people Du Bois regarded as exemplary leaders—the talented tenth—of the broader African American population. Neither of these opposed assessments of the potentiality of the middle classes offered a credible path forward. That did not come until they made their Marxist turn.

As Ricarda Hammer (2017) shows, *The Wretched of the Earth* does not abandon Fanon's earlier phenomenology of racism with its focus on the lived experience of subjugation. The devastating effect of the colonial war not only on the psyches of the colonized but also on the psyches of the colonizers became so overwhelming that he had to leave Blida-Joinville Hospital. Fanon realized that psychiatry had no answer to the psychic pathologies that stem from colonial violence, economic dispossession, and political disfranchisement. Thus, Fanon joined the FLN, organized to overthrow colonialism through political and even military means.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argued that colonialism, maintained by violence, can only be deposed by collective violence. But the violence of more than a century had entered deeply into the psyche of the colonized, creating an internalized oppression that could only be expurgated through the catharsis of collective counter-violence. "At the level of individuals, [collective] violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction: it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (1963 [1961]: 94). But collective violence is also unifying: "all-inclusive and national ... involved in the liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism" (94), forcing leaders to be accountable to the led.

If the first moment is an assault on the structures of colonialism, the second moment is a struggle for the future of the postcolony. Fanon defined two roads to decolonization. On the one hand there is what he called the "national bourgeois road," led by the incipient bourgeois class, made up of civil servants, teachers, small traders, nurses, journalists, and lawyers and supported by the colonial working class, a labor aristocracy bent on preserving the (relative) security they enjoyed under colonialism.

It cannot be too strongly stressed that in the colonial territories the proletariat is the nucleus of the colonized population which has been most pampered by the colonial regime. The embryonic proletariat of the towns is in a comparatively privileged position.... In capitalist countries, the working class has nothing to lose; it is they in the long run who have everything to gain. In the colonial country the working class has everything to lose.... It is these elements which constitute the most faithful followers of the nationalist parties, and who because of the privileged place which they hold in the colonial system constitute also the "bourgeois" fraction of the colonized people.

(1963 [1961]: 108–109)

The national bourgeoisie is focused on replacing colonists, Black replacing white, but without any fundamental change to the social structure. As in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon remained contemptuous of this imitative national bourgeoisie, appendage of the metropolitan bourgeoisie. Pursuing an ostentatious life of conspicuous consumption, it is not a true bourgeoisie capable of capital accumulation. "In underdeveloped countries, we have seen that no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or of inventiveness. It remembers what it has read in European textbooks and imperceptibly it becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature" (1963 [1961]: 175). The consequences are catastrophic. Without a material basis for class compromise, the national bourgeoisie's initial inauguration of liberal democracy gives way to a one-party state, which in turn degenerates into a one-man dictatorship.

Anticipating the disaster that lies ahead for the national bourgeois road, Fanon calls for a national liberation struggle that will radically transform the class structure in a transition to a democratic, participatory socialism, propelled forward by an organic fusion of dissident intellectuals fleeing the city and a volcanic peasantry erupting in collective violence against land dispossession. "It is understandable that the meeting between these militants with the police on their track and these mettlesome masses of people, who are rebels by instinct, can produce an explosive mixture of unusual potentiality" (1963 [1961]: 127). Although Fanon saw the African peasantry as a revolutionary class, he adopted a more orthodox Marxist vision of the Western world, where the working class is the revolutionary class, subject to bourgeois hegemony, and the peasantry is an "objectively reactionary class" (111). Fanon offered a Marxist analysis to explain why the peasantry in colonial countries is revolutionary—it is because it has been denied access to land, the peasants' essential means of production, which also forms them into a collective. Fanon understood

revolutionary action in the “Third World” to be based on exclusion or dispossession, unlike the revolutionary formations in the West, which Marx portrayed as based on inclusion or exploitation.¹⁰

Fanon had a romantic vision of the collectivism that could emerge from the liberation struggle, especially if joined with political education and a responsive political party.

If the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat. The bridge should not be “parachuted down” from above, it should not be imposed by a *deus ex machine* upon the social scene; on the contrary it should come from the muscles and the brains of the citizens. Certainly, there may well be need of engineers and architects, sometimes completely foreign engineers and architects; but the local party leaders should be always present, so that new techniques can make their way into the cerebral desert of the citizen.

(1963 [1961]: 201)

Fanon was not so naïve as to think that the abstract appeal of socialism would lead to its victory. Far from it. The imagination of a socialist paradise becomes a weapon in the ensuing struggle for hegemony between the two blocs: the urban bloc behind the national bourgeois road and the rural bloc behind the national liberation struggle, each vying for the support of intermediate classes, specifically the lumpenproletariat in the urban peripheries and the traditional chiefs, previously a screen for the colonizers. Once it becomes clear that the die is cast for the termination of colonialism, the colonizers’ last desperate move is to throw their weight behind the national bourgeoisie. Fanon did not say that one road or the other would prevail; the outcome was an indeterminate result of the struggle for hegemony, within limits set by class structure on the one side and military forces on the other.

Looking back to the 1960s and 1970s, what were the chances of the national liberation struggle building socialism? The unfolding wars in Algeria proved unpromising after the early honeymoon years of independence. With South Africa’s strong and popular Communist Party, a militant and powerful trade union movement along with the African National Congress, class struggles against South African apartheid held out possibilities for a socialist road, but it too was ultimately hijacked by a national bourgeoisie, in alliance with white capital, which took advantage of the negotiated transition.¹¹

Even when the internal balance of power might have favored a socialist road, external forces held Africa in a vise. Here Fanon’s analysis was skimpy and overly optimistic. On the one hand he made a moral appeal for material reparations. “We are not blinded by the moral reparation of national independence; nor are we fed by it. The wealth of the imperial countries is our wealth too.... For in a very concrete way Europe has stuffed herself inordinately with the gold and raw materials of the colonial countries: Latin America, China, and Africa.... Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped peoples” (1963 [1961]: 102). The Third World, therefore, claims just reparations not as charity but as their due. “For if, through lack of intelligence (we won’t speak of lack of gratitude) the capitalist countries refuse to pay, then the relentless dialectic of their own system will smother them” (103). Here Fanon adopted the Marxist view that capitalism needs the markets and resources of Africa. If capitalists don’t pay up, then the Third World will declare “collective autarchy,” generating crises of overproduction and unemployment that will “force the European working class to engage in an open struggle against the capitalist regime” (105). Fanon appealed in vain to the European peoples to “wake up and shake themselves, use their brains, and stop playing the stupid game of the Sleeping Beauty” (106). He drastically underestimated the power of international capital, and its ability to continue to plunder the Third World with the aid of Western governments. In effect there has only been one road of decolonization—or better, a motorway with competing lanes, all heading in the same direction, toward the ascendancy of a national bourgeoisie. Socialism in Africa became a distant mirage, or a “splendid failure,” as Du Bois said in 1935 of Reconstruction in the United States.

Written in 1961, *The Wretched of the Earth* is a prophetic document, anticipating the trajectory of so many African states—those that followed the national bourgeois road and even those that attempted a national liberation struggle. There was no escape from a capitalist world order, and for those at the periphery of that order, there was no escape from poverty and inequality.

It may appear strange to compare the decolonization of Africa in the second half of the twentieth century with Reconstruction in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, but doing so reveals the parallel analyses of Fanon and Du Bois, pointing to their common Marxist framework. Both set out from an economic analysis that defined the limits and possibilities of political transformation through class struggle; and both present alternative outcomes of that struggle, explaining why the reactionary outcome is victorious.¹²

Du Bois challenged what was in his time the conventional view of Reconstruction—among both historians and in white mythology—as an unmitigated disaster brought on by the enfranchisement of “ignorant,” “subhuman” African Americans and the “corrupt practices” of their elected leaders. For Du Bois, far from being a catastrophe, Reconstruction was a “splendid failure” (1998 [1935]: 708) that held the possibility of an interracial democracy. “The most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history is the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the new-found Eldorado of the West. They descended into Hell; and in the third century they arose from the dead, in the finest effort to achieve democracy for the working millions which this world had ever seen. It was a tragedy that beggared the Greek; it was an upheaval of humanity like the Reformation and the French Revolution” (1998 [1935]: 727).

Twenty-five years before the publication of the humongous *Black Reconstruction*, in an article, largely ignored, in the *American Historical Review*, Du Bois (1910) had defended Reconstruction as a progressive experiment that brought to the South democratic state constitutions, the expansion of civil and political rights, the election of Black politicians, egalitarian social legislation, and free public education—all accomplished if not initiated by African Americans even while facing the reign of white terror. As late as 1924, writing in *The Gift of Black Folk* (2007 [1924], chap. 5), Du Bois celebrated the contribution of the enslaved population to the Northern victory, anticipating again the radical substance of *Black Reconstruction*. Until *Black Reconstruction*, however, the novel Marxist architecture was absent in Du Bois’s writings. That architecture paralleled the trajectory analyzed in *The Wretched of the Earth*: anticolonial struggle, postcolonial democracy, reactionary degeneration. Or as Du Bois wrote: “the slave went free; stood for a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery” (1998 [1935]: 30).

Black Reconstruction begins with the dynamics of global capitalism. As Du Bois had argued in his Harvard dissertation (2014 [1896]), here too he noted that the writers of the US Constitution assumed that slavery would die out, to be displaced by newer methods of production. However, as he now elaborated in detail in *Black Reconstruction* (1998 [1935]), they did not take into account the revolution that was overtaking the textile industry in England and the heightened global demand for cotton. As a result, in the first half of the nineteenth century slavery intensified into an even harsher regime of production. Subject to the pressures of the manufacturers and merchants, the planters squeezed ever more from their enslaved labor, and they also needed to expand: “The South was fighting for the protection and expansion of its agrarian feudalism. For the sheer existence of slavery there must be a continual supply of fertile land, cheaper slaves, and such political power as would give the slave status full legal recognition and protection, and annihilate the free Negro” (Du Bois 1998 [1935]: 29). The North entered the Civil War not to oppose slavery per se but to contain it geographically, and to prevent the Confederacy from bringing slavery to erstwhile “free” states.

The military balance of forces favored the South. Its 4 million enslaved Blacks would furnish supplies for its armies drawn from 5 million whites. Neither North nor South expected an exodus of some half a million enslaved workers from the plantations. Both sides assumed they would be loyal to their masters, but instead these fugitives seized the opportunity for their own freedom. Du Bois, provocatively, called it a General Strike, underscoring the collective agency of African Americans and recalling a proletarian revolution. Yet the process had an air of spontaneity: in the beginning the Northern armies were not allowed to interfere with slavery, but once enslaved peoples landed in their midst they began to treat them as contraband, and then enlisted them as soldiers to replace whites demoralized by a war that was not their own. Fugitive slaves not only bolstered the Northern armies with resolute soldiers but also reduced supplies to the Confederate armies.

The North’s dependence on the enslaved Blacks prompted the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, as well as Reconstruction itself, guaranteed by a northern military presence and the all-important Freedmen’s Bureau. The passing of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments—the abolition of slavery,

defining citizenship as a birthright, and the protection of voting rights—set the agenda for the development of an interracial democracy. Whereas Fanon saw two alternatives in the postcolonial struggle for hegemony—democratic socialism and dependent capitalism—Du Bois saw an array of possibilities across different states, shaped by the varying balance of race and class forces. The prospects for interracial democracy were most promising in South Carolina and least promising in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, while Louisiana and Mississippi lay in between.

But in all these states, the material basis of any ongoing democracy—land redistribution—would never be realized. The revolutionary experiment came to an end after eleven years, as the balance of power in Congress shifted toward the Democrats. The Supreme Court, acting under the influence of Northern capital, effectively annulled the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, allowing states to set their own voting rules. After the electoral fiasco of 1876, a bargain was struck: Democrats would accept the Republican Hayes as president on the condition that the US military would withdraw from the South, effectively spelling the end of Reconstruction. Thus, Du Bois explained, Northern capital struck an alliance with the defeated planter class, who in turn orchestrated a return to white supremacy by means of a reign of terror against Blacks: “From war, turmoil, poverty, forced labor and economic rivalry of labor groups, there came again in the South the domination of the secret order, which systematized the effort to subordinate the Negro.... It uses Fear to cast out Fear: it dares things which open method hesitates; it may with a certain impunity attack the high and the low; it need hesitate at no outrage of maiming or murder; it shields itself in the mob mind and then throws over all a veil of darkness which becomes glamor. It attracts people who otherwise could not be reached. It harnesses the mob” (Du Bois 1998 [1935]: 677–8). Mob rule ensured that planters had access to labor—Blacks were forced into sharecropping backed up by convict leasing (Muller 2018), and voter intimidation stripped them of electoral power. They faced discrimination in schooling, hospitals, policing, and taxation—effectively dividing Black labor from poor whites who, it turned out, preferred poverty to equality. “It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage” (Du Bois 1998 [1935]: 700). This set the stage for Jim Crow segregation.

In excruciating detail Du Bois described the traumatic effect of this racial order on Blacks in the South, especially those who “dared” to make economic gains. The psychological effect of degradation, servility, hopelessness, submissiveness, and a deep sense of inferiority, denying them their potential, was gainsaid by an extraordinary record of accomplishment. In Du Bois’s eyes the battle for Reconstruction was the real revolutionary war whose outcome reverberated beyond the United States, strengthening worldwide imperialism. “It was a triumph of men who in their effort to replace equality with caste and to build inordinate wealth on a foundation of abject poverty have succeeded in killing democracy, art and religion” (1998 [1935]: 707). He ends with an apocalyptic appeal to socialism: “the chief and only obstacle to the coming of the kingdom of economic equality which is the only logical end of work is the determination of the white world to keep the black world poor and themselves rich. A clear vision of a world without inordinate individual wealth, of capital without profit and of income based on work alone, is the path out, not only for America but for all men. Across this path stands the South with flaming sword” (706–707).

Here lies the fundamental difference and complementarity between Du Bois and Fanon. For Du Bois “the chief and only obstacle” to a socialist future was the *power of white supremacy*, the forging of unity among white classes: on the one side the alliance of white labor and the new class of planters in the South and on the other side the alliance of Northern capital with that new planter class. Fanon, by contrast, emphasized the *class divisions within the Black world* as the key threat to socialism. They were writing at different conjunctures of time and place: Fanon was writing at the time of the withdrawal of colonial powers from Africa, Du Bois long after Reconstruction had been vanquished and replaced by Jim Crow. One might ask, then, how Du Bois approached the struggles of his time, namely, during the New Deal.

Even as he was composing *Black Reconstruction* Du Bois was hard at work creating another socialist vision, not of an interracial democracy but nevertheless a collectivist vision for African Americans. Frustrated that the New Deal left so many African Americans out in the cold, he hoped that racial solidarity would trump class in the constitution of a separatist, socialist economy (Du Bois 1936). This was not a new idea. As early as 1907 Du Bois had published a book-length study of economic cooperation among African Americans. His 1911 novel *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* revolved around the attempt to create a cotton cooperative in the South. Now he was calling for “A Negro Nation within the Nation” (1970[1935])—taking advantage of the realities of segregation to build a cooperative commonwealth, an autarkic black economy that would

minimize its reliance on the larger US economy.¹³ Yet how could Du Bois assume that a Black bourgeoisie would not arise to obstruct an emancipatory outcome?

Contrasting Views of Decolonizing Africa

I have suggested parallels between Fanon and Du Bois: how in both cases each writer's early phenomenology of race became a political cul-de-sac, prompting his turn to Marxism, in both cases centering the historic agency of the subjugated race, albeit within conditions inherited from the past. Both *Black Reconstruction* and *The Wretched of the Earth* begin with an account of the economic structure that determines the actors who enter struggles within the political arena. Such political struggles are limited not only by economic factors but also by the balance of military forces. Both analyses distinguish between a violent civil war that overthrows the old order and the struggle for hegemony in the building of a new order. In the struggle for hegemony, an emancipatory vision—abolition–democracy and socialism—competes with a reactionary vision that gives rise to new forms of oppression. The emancipatory vision advances unevenly in both the US South and Africa—but in both reactionary vision triumphs. Within the US, *external forces* withdraw support for Reconstruction, and the South turns back toward slavery and Jim Crow; within Africa, the balance of *internal forces* leads to National Bourgeois degeneration from liberal democracy to one-party dictatorship. The two writers shared a Marxist method to trace the consolidation of racial capitalism.¹⁴

Fanon tragically died soon after finishing *The Wretched of the Earth*, but Du Bois lived another three decades after completing *Black Reconstruction*, during which time he further developed his account of imperialism, especially in relation to the struggles for African independence. Although Du Bois was sensitive to the class forces at work in the dynamics of Reconstruction, when it came to Africa, class took a back seat to race. While he recognized the danger international capital might pose to postcolonial Africa, he overlooked the internal class divisions that were so central for Fanon (Du Bois (2007 [1945])).

One reason for Du Bois's rose-tinted view of African independence lay in his limited knowledge of internal divisions. Whereas Fanon had lived those divisions, Du Bois could only observe Africa from a distance. He was locked out of Africa because of his anticolonial politics, and when it became feasible to visit Africa after World War II the State Department denied him his passport. But other factors were also at work. Before he moved to Ghana in 1961, Du Bois had visited Africa only once—as part of a trip to Liberia in 1923, when he was appointed as a representative of President Calvin Coolidge at the inauguration of Liberian president C. D. B. King. He spent time with the African American leadership in Liberia, seemingly unaware that they imposed a colonial rule no less brutal than that of white Europeans, and even promoted Firestone's exploitative investment in Liberia's rubber plantations, although he later regretted that decision (Du Bois 1933; Levering Lewis 2000: 123–126; Robinson 1990).

Du Bois's determination to put Africa on the map of great civilizations—countering the racist denigration of African Americans—led to his romanticization of Africa, exactly what Fanon had vehemently repudiated as a distraction from the real struggles for emancipation. Du Bois's attempt to elevate African civilization was already manifest in *The Negro* (2016 [1915]) and continued into *Black Folks, Then and Now* (2014 [1939]) and *The World and Africa* (2007 [1947]). His Pan-Africanism aligned well with the perspectives of the new leaders of independent Africa and their visions of an “African socialism” rooted in precolonial society. In sharp contrast, Fanon regarded these attempts, with suspicion, as a ruse to hide the reproduction of the colonial class structure.

Du Bois's tendency to identify with the perspectives of postcolonial leaders extended beyond Africa. Juliana Góes (2021) analyzes his embrace of the Brazilian elite's claim to racial democracy based on miscegenation, ignoring the plight of Afro-Brazilians. Miscegenation may have been an appealing antidote to Jim Crow segregation, but it hardly signaled the racial paradise painted by Du Bois and the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre. Similarly, Bill Mullen (2015) has documented how Du Bois's enthusiasm for Indian independence led him to endorse a rather benign view of Hindu nationalism, and Anaheed Al-Harden (In press) explores how Du Bois's advocacy on behalf of Israel after World War II obscured the subjugation of Palestinians, although his views changed after the 1956 Suez Crisis.

Throughout his life Du Bois identified with leaders, starting with his boyhood valedictory speech on the abolitionist Wendell Phillips, his commencement speech at Fisk on Bismarck, and, more controversially, his

disquisition at Harvard on Jefferson Davis—not to mention his later defense of Stalin. Yet Du Bois modified his views. His original 1903 view of the “talented tenth” (reprinted in Gates and West 1996: 133–157) called for an elite necessary for the advance of African Americans, but over time he came to see that an elite can develop its own interests. His 1948 revision of his original thesis appealed to a “guiding hundredth” who would be accountable to the led and would make sacrifices in the interests of all (Du Bois 1948 reprinted in Gates and West 1996: 159–177), but such a “responsible” elite could no longer be taken for granted.

The genius of *Black Reconstruction* is its bringing together of the national and the global—internal struggles shaped by and simultaneously shaping international capitalism. But those struggles, as portrayed in *Black Reconstruction*, do not include divisions within the African American population—divisions between a leadership in pursuit of political rights and the interests of a largely poor rural population who demanded land and education.¹⁵ One might argue that the fate of the South depended on the dynamics of white rule, and differences among the formerly enslaved could not play a significant role. But that could not be true in the rest of the world—Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia—where majority rule pertained. Still, Du Bois downplayed such internal divisions, thereby giving legitimacy to the emerging dominant classes of the postcolony.

Why didn't Du Bois recognize the divergent class interests within the colonized as they struggled for self-government? Limited knowledge was part of it, faith in leadership was another part, his Pan-African cultural essentialism yet another part. But beneath all of these was a political project. Having decided that working-class interracial solidarity within the United States was a lost cause, without ignoring civil rights and peace activism at home he directed his energy toward building an “international” of the “darker races,” what Bill Mullen (2015) calls a “diasporic international,” connecting African Americans to the struggles for self-determination in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. That vision already informed his 1928 surreal romance *Dark Princess*.¹⁶ No longer “workers of the world unite,” it was now “Black workers of the world unite.”¹⁷

Conclusion: The Divergence of Fanon and Du Bois

This essay opposes an “originalist” view of Marxism in which the texts of Marx and Engels are taken as gospel.¹⁸ “Originalists” lay themselves open to the charge that Marxism is an unchanging theory and, therefore, can be dismissed as “Eurocentric,” “white,” “patriarchal,” “colonial,” and so on. From this originalist perspective, Black Marxism, if it is not a contradiction in terms, is an unstable and unsustainable combination that must dissolve; or as Heidi Hartman (1979) said of Marxist feminism, an unhappy marriage.

This “originalist” view suffers from two fallacies. First, it overlooks the shift in Marx's own writings, which went through at least three phases of development. Before Marx could develop his historical materialism he had to abandon his attachment to Hegel and the Young Hegelians, which he did, together with Engels, in the flamboyant work *The German Ideology*. At the economic level he had to move from alienation to exploitation and from exchange to production, which became the foundation of the dynamics of capitalism theorized in *Capital*. The humanist and philosophical assumptions of the early writings never disappeared entirely, but they were absorbed into a fundamentally new framework. There was also a third phase, recently uncovered by Kevin Anderson (2010), in which Marx displaced the focus of analysis from center to periphery, from the development of capitalism in Britain to the Civil War in the United States, to anticolonial struggles in India and Ireland, to nationalist struggles in Poland, and to peasant wars in Russia.¹⁹ The periphery becomes the center. This complicates any claim that Marx was consistently Eurocentric.

Even if Marx were guilty of Eurocentrism and of other charges laid against him, that does not in and of itself indict the Marxists who seek to rebuild his analysis. By definition, Marxism draws on different parts of Marx to reconstruct Marxist theory and thereby address specific challenges in different places at different times. German Marxism (Luxemburg, Kautsky, Bernstein) wrestled with the political problem of revolution and reform in the context of debates about capitalism's sustainability. Russian Marxism (Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin) wrestled with revolution in a largely peasant society, what form it would take and with what consequences, namely the possibilities and limitations of socialism in one country. Western Marxism (Lukács, Gramsci, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse) dealt with the question of why there was no revolution in the West, generating theories of reification, hegemony, fascism, and so on. Third World Marxism (Mao Zedong, Fanon, Frank, Rodney) emerged after World War II to think through the significance of

imperialism, and the “development of underdevelopment” for social transformation in less developed countries. And, as I’ve argued, Black Marxism (Du Bois, Fanon, C. L. R. James, Oliver Cromwell Cox, Stuart Hall) centers racial subjugation but within a Marxian analysis. In short, the writings of Marx had (and has) multiple blind spots; that’s why there’s Marxism.

The same applies to Fanon and Du Bois. Both broke with the phenomenology of race to enter the world of Marxism. Both transformed Marxian theory by systematically incorporating an analysis of race into the dynamics of capitalism, the politics of class, and the possibility of socialism. Their goal was to understand racism and antiracism in widely different contexts—Fanon in Africa observing the struggles for national independence, Du Bois looking backward to the Civil War and its legacy and looking forward to Africa and Asia.²⁰

Their contributions to Marxism were divergent but complementary. Recognizing the color line that circumscribes the world, Fanon examined class struggle on the dark side of the color line, while Du Bois examined class struggle on its white side. On the one hand Fanon made all sorts of unexamined assumptions about the colonizing power and the colonial state as well as international capital, focusing on the struggles among the colonized. On the other hand Du Bois highlighted the power of racism, colonialism, and imperialism to mute, divert, and repress the national and international struggles of the racially subjugated.

Du Bois failed, however, to fully attend to the conflicts among and within the subjugated races. In *Black Reconstruction*, he implied that a successful interracial democracy would have emancipatory consequences, whereas from a Fanonian standpoint an interracial democracy might have taken a bourgeois path. Paradoxically, once Du Bois made the shift to Marxism, he downplayed class divisions within the African American community,²¹ although he never failed to recognize their possibility, whether in his critique of Marx or in his revision of the “talented tenth” thesis. In 1933 he wrote: “American race prejudice has so pounded the mass of Negroes together that they have not separated into such economic classes; but on the other hand they undoubtedly have had the ideology and if they had been free we would have had within our race the same exploiting set-up that we see around about us” (quoted in Robinson 2000 [1983]: 197). Others have been more forthright about the development of a Black bourgeoisie—from E. Franklin Frazier (1957) to Adolph Reed (2000).

Like any branch of Marxism, Black Marxism will thrive if and only if its specific limitations – its contradictions and its anomalies – are recognized and wrestled with so as to build on its extraordinary accomplishments. Just as presenting Marx either as the source of infallible truths or as irredeemably tainted is a regressive move, so presenting Black Marxism as a flawless and finished product will suffocate its vitality, turning it into a degenerate branch of Marxism. Like Marxism-Leninism, it will then only survive as a dogmatic ideology, before finally falling off the tree. The excitement and importance of Black Marxism lie in putting those who have contributed to its development, here Du Bois and Fanon, into conversation across time and place, all illuminating each others’ ideas as part of a widening struggle.

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Notes

- 1 Here as elsewhere (Burawoy 1989, 1990, 2013) I follow Imré Lakatos (1978) in considering Marxism to be a scientific research program, rooted in a set of assumptions (the negative heuristic) that hold firm while the tradition flourishes through the development of branches (the positive heuristic made up of auxiliary theories). As with any tree, the roots themselves shift over time as new branches appear and old ones decay. The research program grows with its own distinctive logic, its *internal history*, driven forward by internal contradictions but also through the external anomalies engendered by the different historical challenges it faces, its *external history*. In practice these two histories are inseparable.
- 2 Major works that address the Marxist tradition include Lichtheim (1961), Anderson (1976), and Kolakowski (2008). For a distinctively sociological dissection of the Marxist tradition, see Gouldner (1980).
- 3 In Cedric Robinson's (2000 [1983]) account of the "Black Radical Tradition," W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright increasingly departed from Marxism as they saw its limitations. Marxism was a "staging area for immersion" into the Black Radical Tradition (Robinson 2000: xxxii) which, as Robin Kelley (2000: xix) writes, is "neither Marxist nor anti-Marxist ... a wholly original theory of revolution and interpretation of history of the modern world." Similarly, for Anthony Bogues (2003) the Black Radical Tradition is made up of heretics and prophets wrestling against the "Western episteme" of Eurocentric Marxism. According to Michael Stone Richards (2008: 145), "it is characteristic of twentieth-century black radical intellectual culture that, moving toward Marxism, it comes to discover its difference from Marxism." In this essay I argue that once they arrived at Marxism, neither Du Bois nor Fanon ever abandoned it; rather they reconstructed it by *systematically* incorporating race and its multiple manifestations into an analysis of the dynamics of capitalism, the politics of class domination, and the possibility of socialism.
- 4 As I will suggest, the epistemological breaks in Du Bois and Fanon are parallel to the one in Marx between his early "humanist" writings and his later "scientific" writings (Althusser 2006 [1968]). This is not to say that their phenomenology doesn't reappear in their Marxism but simply that its presence is overshadowed by the new framework of Marxism, just as one finds traces of Marx's early humanism in his later theory of capitalism.
- 5 As Lewis Gordon (2015: 80) writes, Fanon was looking to institutional therapy for evidence that his pessimism might be ill-founded: "there seemed to be no hope for psychiatric efforts of normalization in an abnormal society, since, in the end, cohesion and alignment, would require making the patient, in reality, abnormal."
- 6 His letter of application to join the Communist Party in 1961, before he left for Ghana, is clear in summarizing his transition from the advocacy of socialism to the commitment to Marxism. Du Bois, Letter Applying to be a Member of the Communist Party of the U.S.A., 1961, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b153-i071>
- 7 In their excellent review, Itzigsohn and Brown (2015) show how Du Bois returned to the concept of double consciousness in *Dusk of Dawn* (Du Bois 2002[1940]) where he reflects on the social psychology of race on both sides of the veil. In making double consciousness central to "racialized modernity," they see no discontinuity between Du Bois's earlier and later writings.
- 8 A contemporary of Fanon and also a well-known Lacanian psychoanalyst, Octave Mannoni offered a competing psychology of colonialism that Fanon criticized throughout his writings.
- 9 However, it is noteworthy that, as early as 1909, Du Bois wrote a biography of John Brown that celebrated his life as a

militant abolitionist, endorsing the insurgency he led at Harper's Ferry in 1859 as the dress rehearsal for the American Civil War. Du Bois (1996[1909]: 287) embraced struggles against slavery with the often-repeated aphorism "The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression."

- 10 Bashir Abu-Manneh (2021: 6) writes: "[Fanon] was not a Marxist, nor did he give due consideration to the role of the urban working class in decolonization struggles." While it is true that Fanon did not see the working class as a revolutionary agent in colonial Africa, this was because colonialism implanted an enclave economy and dispossessed the peasantry. Fanon, however, did regard the working class in advanced capitalism as a revolutionary class. Abu-Manneh's Marxism is, therefore, Eurocentric in insisting that socialist revolutions are propelled by the same classes everywhere, and not recognizing how metropolitan capital creates very different conditions for revolution in the periphery as compared to the center of the world economy. In his later writings, Marx himself understood that revolutionary movements outside western Europe necessarily took on different forms, driven by different classes, reverberating back into the heartlands of capitalism (Anderson 2010).
- 11 Bond (2014), Hart (2013), Alexander et al (2013), Marais (1998), Von Holdt (2003), and Webster and Pampallis (2017) offer different perspectives on the South African transition and its afterlife, all broadly compatible with the capsule summary here.
- 12 Others have connected *Black Reconstruction* to the Russian Revolution. Thus, Cedric Robinson (2000 [1983]: chap. 9) reads *Black Reconstruction* as a critique of Marxist theory: it was a revolution without bourgeois society, largely made by peasants and without a vanguard party, and it was driven by a consciousness inherited from their Africa roots. Bill Mullen (2015: chap. 2) largely agrees with Robinson's reading of *Black Reconstruction* as a Black liberation struggle but sees this as an affirmation of Marxism's thesis on the historical priority of national self-determination. Whatever one thinks of the Marxist provenance of *Black Reconstruction*, it would seem that treating it as an aspiration to Black liberation only underlines the relevance of a comparison with Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.
- 13 This departure from the integrationist politics of the NAACP recalls the ideas of his one-time mentor Alexander Crummell, who saw African Americans as a "nation within a nation" (Gates 1996); it also bears the influence of the Black Belt Thesis of the Comintern, arguing for African American national self-determination (Mullen 2015: chap. 2).
- 14 This method coincides with Antonio Gramsci's more general analysis of political transformations in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971[1933–34]: 180–185). There are also close parallels between Trotsky's 1930 account in *The History of the Russian Revolution* and C. L. R. James's analysis of the slave revolt against French colonialism in *The Black Jacobins* (1989[1938]). These are all Marxist classics, but what is remarkable is that Du Bois, unlike the others, based his ideas almost entirely on Marx's economic writings, his journalistic articles on the American Civil War, and *The Communist Manifesto*, without reading Marx's political writings. In his account of the Marxist influences on Du Bois, Matt Nichter (2022) gives considerable weight to the intellectual and political exchanges he had with Will Herberg. As late as 1933 Du Bois writes to his friend the economist Abram Harris to ask him for "four or five best books a perfect Marxian must know." Harris responds with a list that included *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, which analyzes the political processes that engulfed France from 1848 to 1851, moving from revolution to reaction. It could have been an obvious inspiration for *Black Reconstruction*, but I can find no evidence that Du Bois actually read it. Yet the rapidity of his conversion followed by the imaginative appropriation and reconstruction of Marxism that frames *Black Reconstruction* is nothing short of astonishing. Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, January 6, 1933 (<https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b065-i532>) and Letter from Abram Harris to W. E. B. Du Bois, January 7, 1933 (<https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b065-i533>). W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- 15 José Itzigsohn (2013) draws a parallel between the limitations of the ways both Du Bois and C. L. R. James (1989 [1938]) represented Reconstruction and the Haitian Revolution. On the grounds of economic development, when Toussaint L'Ouverture was in charge, he tried to restore the plantation economy, managed by the white planter without slavery yet still a labor repressive regime. The move was vehemently opposed by the formerly enslaved, who demanded land redistribution. James considered this a major mistake, a tactical error of leadership—Toussaint didn't explain his plans to his followers. Like Du Bois, James did not see this as a struggle within the revolutionary movement between embryonic classes—an emerging national bourgeoisie and an emerging peasantry.
- 16 Jeff Goodwin (2022) claims that after finishing *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois was committed to interracial working-class solidarity. While Du Bois does make ritual appeals to class solidarity in socialist newspapers and magazines, while he does recognize the interracial organizing of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations), and while he does urge African Americans to join unions, much of Du Bois's political energy went elsewhere—fighting for the human rights of African Americans at the UN, supporting the decolonization of Africa through the Council of African Affairs, and representing the world peace movement through the fated Peace Information Center. After his trial in 1951 and the confiscation of his passport, his political activities were severely circumscribed, but he did support the civil rights movement, especially through the Southern Negro Youth Congress, and defended leading figures investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee (Du Bois 1952, 1968; Horne 1986; Porter 2010). Du Bois' internationalist commitments are fully expressed by the major books written in his last 20 years – *Color and Democracy* (1945) which dwelt on the importance of fighting for democracy in the colonial and postcolonial world, *The World and Africa* (1947) which focused on the history and future of imperialism, and *In Battle for Peace* (1952) which was an indictment of the growing authoritarianism of US monopoly capitalism.

- 17 This conclusion is consistent with Marx's famous aphorism that appeared in *Capital* (1967[1867]: 301): "labor in white skin cannot emancipate itself where the black skin is branded"; only Marx erroneously expected white workers to take the initiative toward class solidarity, whereas Du Bois reversed the argument, placing greater hope in Black workers leading working-class struggles for socialism.
- 18 Thanks to Chris Muller for suggesting this use of "originalist" to convey the reduction of Marxism to a narrow, unchanging view of Marx.
- 19 Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) famously offered an alternative division of Marx's writings: "History I," referring to the universalist claims about the dynamics of capitalism, especially *Capital*, and "History II," the historically specific accounts such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and *The Civil War in France*. In this view the works of Fanon and Du Bois contribute to History II. Chakrabarty leaves his readers with the question of the relationship between the two histories as the central challenge of the Marxist tradition.
- 20 The writings of Du Bois and Lenin are interestingly parallel. Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917a) contains an emphasis on self-determination for colonized peoples, the idea of labor aristocracy in advanced capitalist nations, the rule of financial-industrial oligarchy that one already finds in Du Bois (1915), "The African Roots of War." Lenin's *State and Revolution* (1917b) defines an idea of socialism similar to that of Du Bois, namely, public ownership of the means of production, radical participatory democracy, and reward according to labor—a vision Du Bois mistakenly finds in the Soviet Union; see Du Bois, "Russia and America: An Interpretation," unpublished manuscript, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b221-i082>. Finally, Du Bois's revision of the early spontaneous leadership of the "talented tenth" (1903) to the "guiding hundredth" (1948) moves toward Lenin's (1902) idea of a political vanguard in *What Is To Be Done?* While Du Bois shows great enthusiasm for Marx, I haven't found similar praise for Lenin. Still, the two move toward a similar international Marxism—Lenin from the direction of class, Du Bois from the direction of race.
- 21 In *The Philadelphia Negro* (1996[1899]: 309–321) Du Bois advanced an urban stratification that distinguished four "grades" of African Americans: families of undoubted respectability; the respectable working class; the poor; the "submerged tenth" (the lowest class of criminals, prostitutes, and loafers). In establishing this status hierarchy, Du Bois was appealing to whites to recognize a superior "grade" of African Americans as their equals. When this project failed, his politics took a radical nationalist turn in which the unity of African Americans became paramount.