

Defining the Color Line

**Debates and Dilemmas of the African American Intellectual Elite
in the Years around the Emancipation**

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Abstract

In this dissertation I discuss the ideas and dilemmas of four outstanding 19th century African American thinkers: Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell, Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois. The dissertation addresses the question: Why was the 19th century emancipation of African-Americans not enough for constituting their identity? I do this by examining two main problems African American intellectuals engaged with, at the time around the American Civil War, and in the post-emancipation era. First, the shaping the African American identity between the duty and loyalty to the fatherland (which these man defined in different ways, as Africa or as America) and, second, the nature of African American identity and its membership in the wider US society (through the ideas of the post-emancipation integration of African Americans into the US society).

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Introduction

While the American Civil War was still far from being over an important question had been lingering in that divided political community. That question was: “What shall be done with the *Negro*?”¹ Even before the American Civil War had begun, the question of *Negro*’s future has been the source of controversy. The so-called *Negro* question was posed by the African American intellectuals, activists; by the northern white abolitionists; by the political elite north of the Potomac River; and after all, this question was a nightmare of the entire slave holding south of the American Union, as they wanted the *status quo* to remain. In this essay I will consider the responses to these questions which have been provided by some of the most important protagonists of the African American political thought during the first decades of the Emancipation.

The dissertation addresses the question: Why was the 19th century emancipation of African-Americans not enough for constituting their identity? I do this by examining two main problems African American intellectuals engaged with at the time around the American Civil War and in the post-emancipation era. First, shaping of the African American identity between the duty and loyalty to the fatherland (which these man defined in different ways, as Africa or as America); and second, the nature of African American identity and its membership in the wider US society (through the ideas of the post-emancipation integration of African Americans into the US society).

The African American path to emancipation should not be viewed separately from similar processes elsewhere. Other peoples and communities had to battle for their own emancipations in different periods of history and in other territories. The Jews in Europe, the

¹ In order to preserve the conceptual and contextual nuances of those ideas, in this essay I will be using the words *Negro* and *colored people* in their original form as they have been used by the authors I am examining.

Irish Catholics in the British Empire, the Aborigines in Australia, and more holistically women have struggled to free themselves from oppression. To put the African American emancipation in this broader context I have elected to compare one aspect of it with the emancipation of another people – the Jews of Europe. There are numerous reasons why this case may seem inapplicable. Jewish emancipation evolved gradually in different European countries and at different times (and the social structure of the communities compared here are very different). In the pre-emancipation period the Jews had been educated in their religious schools, while the vast majority of American slaves forged their freedom bereft of such benefits, as they were largely illiterate and deprived of even basic education. The Jews are a religious community, or more precisely a mosaic of religious communities divided by language, culture, race, state borders, and even some aspects of everyday religious practices. In contrast, the African-Americans are a group which as their primary commonality have a ‘belonging’ to the African race. Moreover, they have at the same time been the subjects of enslavement for almost three centuries on the American soil. Thus the history of these two groups is quite different, and—by extension—so is the nature of their historical hardships and paths to emancipation. Nevertheless, there still is one very important aspect in which these two groups of people are comparable. That aspect is the dilemma that these groups, albeit in their own way, had to face once they have been emancipated. The questions of identity, loyalty and economic reproduction were questions, which these groups had to answer to in the decades following their emancipation.

Emancipation is a shorthand for access by Jews to the profound shifts in ideas and conditions wrought by the enlightenment ... Much as for slaves unshackled from bondage, colonization subjects freed from imperial domination, or serfs liberated from neo feudalism, emancipation, also implied access to state power and control of capital, and it raised fresh questions about the status of community, culture and minority rights.²

² Birnbaum, P. and Katznelson, I. (eds.) 1995. *Paths of Emancipation – Jews, States, and Citizenship*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.4.

As much as it had upgraded the state of affairs for the everyday life of the Jewish people, the emancipation shook the foundations of the Jewish communities in different European countries from their roots. I must say that not only did different Jewish communities reacted differently, depending from country to country, but this emancipation had divided the Jews within the countries or territories according to whether they should (and if yes to what extent) accept the “blessings” of emancipation. One of the movements, which emerged after the emancipation, was the Zionist movement. However, before the huge trauma of Holocaust, this movement was marginal and just as the movement for the colonization of African Americans to Liberia, it very had little effect. The major emancipation problem for the Jews was the question of conversion. The question of conversion had been often the true motive among the non-Jewish proponents of the enlightenment (such as Humboldt), and it had also often been the case that many of those Jews who had fully accepted the enlightenment took Christianity. However “Jews welcomed their new status, convinced that somehow they would be able to retain their allegiance to Judaism even under the new conditions.”³ The question of allegiance was also present among the African American intellectuals. For instance, Frederick Douglass was openly agitating that there should be no other continent or a country to which the African Americans should be loyal to except the United States. He even advocated the biological “blending” of African-Americans and other races and peoples of the US. The similar scenarios of the future sprang out when the Jewish emancipation had been discussed. Jacob Katz recalls a very picturesque account by Voltaire who had “predicted that the educated among the Jews would join the corresponding layers of society at large, while the uneducated masses would be absorbed by the lower strata of society, the scum of the earth.”⁴ Nevertheless as it was the case with Douglass’ “blending of races” this process had happened, but not as much as it might have

³ Katz, J. 1978. *Out of the Ghetto – The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation 1770-1870*. New York: Harvard University Press, p.78.

⁴ Katz, J. ed. 1987. *Toward Modernity – The European Jewish Model*. Oxford: Transaction, Inc, p.2.

been expected by some. “Absorption of Jews into the different layers of society did take place, but it affected only a small portion of Jewry. The absorption nowhere dissolved the core of the community.”⁵ All in all, the effect that the emancipation had was the shaking of the Jewish communities’ roots. The change in legal position and the opening of different opportunities created various reactions to emancipation. Some of them had embraced the emancipation in different ways and others rejected the effects it had on the community. The reactions varied and have brought the emergence of Neo-Orthodoxy, Reformation, Zionism and so on. In this thesis I would like to discuss about the options which the African Americans had when faced with emancipation, and about the ways in which African American intellectuals saw the role and duties of their community in the new reality for their people.

I have divided my dissertation into two large chapters, with each of those chapters divided into two subchapters. The first chapter addresses the questions of duty and loyalty of the African Americans to the fatherland. And the first problem was thus: which fatherland? Was it Africa or America? In the first part of this chapter I will present the ideas of the proponents of colonization to Africa – primarily the views of Reverend Alexander Crummell and Major Martin Delany. Delany’s argument for colonization was based on his belief that the *Colored* people could never elevate their social position in the United States, as this country enslaved them for almost three hundred years and does not guarantee equal civil rights to those of them who were free men. Delany’s argument could be described as rationalistic. In his 1852 book *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored people of the United States* he had advised the free black men to leave the country, regardless of the destiny of those who would stay in Bondage. Delany knew that his opinion would court controversy, but he persisted – even going as far as to state that maintaining the

⁵ Ibid. p.5.

freedom of the free black people would not facilitate their economic or social elevation, and thus slavery should be preserved. In his view, leaving the country was not only rational but moral too.

Another supporter of colonization Alexander Crummell had argued that colonization was a supreme moral question. It was the duty of the *Colored* people to return to the land of their forefathers. In Crummell's view, the mission of the American *Negros* was to bring the capitalist economical system and Christianity. These two factors would regenerate the continent of the forefathers of the colored people living in America. In the second part of the first chapter I will discuss the Anti-colonization arguments of Frederick Douglass. He condemned the arguments of both Delany and Crummell as both impossible and immoral. It is impossible because it would be too expensive and technically difficult to transport millions of people to the shores of Africa; and it would be immoral to do so. Firstly, he argued, these people were born in the US (the US was, therefore, their true fatherland), and moving them to Africa would only deprive them of one fatherland for a vague and uncertain idea of another. Secondly, colonization of the 'best' among the *Negro* population is immoral because it would leave the masses of African Americans deprived of their best men, whose labour and endeavour was their only hope for elevation.

The second chapter deals primarily with the two opposing views regarding integration – simplified as optimistic and the pessimistic views. The so-called optimistic view is essentially that advocated by Frederick Douglass. He had been born into slavery and had fled to find refuge from it. He had personally witnessed the worse possible face of slavery and the heartless cruelty of the slave-masters. He recalled the savage beating of his aunt Hester, the cold blooded murder of a slave called Damby, as well as his own suffering – being beaten, for example, for little or no reason on numerous occasions.⁶ Douglass also remembered the

⁶ Douglass, F. 1845. *Narrative of Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. Boston: Anti-Slavery Office.

arguments of the slave-masters who made a case for slavery as a “good, a positive good”, and their political leadership who had once ruled the whole Union.⁷ He also remembered how such views enjoyed primacy; supported even in the Supreme Court.⁸ He recalled how they lived their lives for slavery, how they waged wars for slavery, and how they were even ready to die in the cause of slavery. However, he also remembers the growth of the idea of abolition, the years preceding the Civil War and the war itself, which had finally ended the slavery. Douglass had also remembered the establishment of the first schools for the *Negro* children, the white people fiercely fighting side by side with him for the abolition of slavery, and the enfranchisement and equal rights for the black men, not because they were black, but because they were men.⁹ Douglass had no doubt about the future improvement in the lot of the black people in the United States – despite very indications to the contrary. During his lifetime he witnessed many bad times for his people such as the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, racial segregation, the lynching of the black people, and all the misfortunes that the African Americans faced in the post Civil War period. But for Douglass these were the desperate moves of those whose cause had been lost long time ago, but nevertheless a cause that could, and would, remain dangerous because of the resentment generated and felt by those who still advocated the cause. Regardless of the inevitability of betterment, Douglass had appealed to the US government (and even more to his own people) that they should constantly work on the betterment of the African Americans and fight the ideological descendents of slavery.

The approach that I have labeled (maybe ungrounded) ‘pessimistic’ is the one represented by one of the greatest minds of African-American thought, W.E.B. Du Bois. Du

⁷ I am referring to John Calhoun in the first place, who was famous for his speech “Slavery a Positive Good”, Calhoun was the Vice President in Andrew Jackson’s cabinet and had been one of the most influential politicians of the country.

⁸ I am alluding to the Fugitive Slave Law and the decision of the Supreme Court Justice Roger B. Taney in the Dred Scott vs. Sandford case.

⁹ Douglass, Frederick. 1894. “Blessings of Liberty and Education”
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=543> (accessed: 28 April 2010).

Bois was born just after the abolition of slavery in 1868. What he personally witnessed and experienced was in some respect the restoration of the racist policies – namely: segregation, inequality, the Jim Crow laws and the lives of African American people being, in his words, “wretched” and deprived. With the large majority bearing little or no personal possessions (and with little possibility of obtaining any), without skills and education, and with little chance that this position will ever change, their lot was poor indeed. This is very much reflected in Du Bois’ writing. His capital work “The Souls of Black Folk” is a depressing testimony of the horrible life that the masses of freed slaves and their descendents had lived in the grim south, and in the large city slums. While his work was primarily a critique, he also made suggestions about possible solutions for this state. Du Bois thought that gaining a higher level of education was the only way for the elevation of the masses of the ‘black folks’, as he sometimes called them. This is why he opposed the industrial education as the dominant educational option for the young African Americans. Industrial education in his view would just cement the existing race and social relations, and would only serve gaining of capital for the possessors, or buyers, of their labor. Du Bois thought that the ten percent of any population is the “natural aristocracy” so he wanted to see that this exceptional part of the African American population get the chance for higher education and the possibility of upward social mobility. These people would be the leaders of the community who will be able to pull the *Negro* population from the wretched state in which they have been placed.

In the final part of my thesis I will focus on my critical reading of the thought of the intellectuals my thesis is dealing with. I will analyze their understanding of what it meant to be African American. I will also try to decode their stance about the African American identity through analyzing their words, and try to understand what the motives are that underpin their concepts.

Which Homeland: Africa or America?

That there have been people in all ages under certain circumstances that may be benefited by emigration, will be admitted; This we see in the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt to the land of Judea; in the expedition of Dido and her followers from Tyre to Mauritania; and also in the ever memorable emigration of the Puritans in 1620 from great Britain.

(Martin Delany, 1852)

The Emigrationist Cause: Delany and Crummell

In the years prior to the Emancipation proclamation, and in the period immediately after it, a great moral dilemma burdened the most of the enlightened *souls of the black folk*.¹⁰ That, put simply, was the problem of belonging and the duty of the African Americans to their adopted homeland. The question was should the African-Americans stay in the US (regardless of the outcome of the emancipation process) or leave the country—one which had enslaved them for three centuries—or go to back¹¹ to Africa (the land of their forefathers) or any other place where life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness would rest in their own hands. Supporters of the idea of colonization came from the ranks of both the whites and the blacks. According to Dr Peter Myers, almost all the important white abolitionists and statesmen have been members of the American Colonization Society:

¹⁰ I am alluding to the title of W.E.B Du Bois' famous book.

¹¹ The paradox is that moving back was often used as the term for the African American colonization of Africa, as if these people and not their ancestors were the ones that were forcefully brought to the New World.

Madison as U.S. president provided crucial early support for the American Colonization Society, organized in 1816 to promote the resettling of free African Americans to a colony in West Africa, and he served as the societies president from 1833 until his death in 1836. The idea received further support from some of the most eminent statesman of the post-founding generations, including Senators Henry Clay and Daniel Webster and, for most of his career, Abraham Lincoln.¹²

Besides the white statesman and abolitionists there were also eminent members of the African American community that supported the idea. The most important advocates of colonization drawn from their ranks were Martin Delany and Alexander Crummell. In this chapter I would like to present their views and reasons for the emigration of the Afro-American people. These two were good collaborators, however their motives and purposes for colonization were quite different.

Martin Delany, born as a free man, was for a while a correspondent of the *North Star*, which was founded by Frederick Douglass, another prominent black activist. Delany's work, however, had a greater impact than most journalism. Indeed, it elevated him to becoming the ideological father of what is today known as the *Black Nationalism*. During his lifetime Delany had changed his views about emigration several times. Here, though, I will focus primarily arguments presented in his most renowned work *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored people of the United States* published in 1852. It is this book that represents an interesting line of argumentation in support for the colonization cause. Delany believed that the only way of the positive change in the life of the colored people of the US is their economic, cultural and spiritual betterment or *Elevation* as he called it. The goal of the *Elevation* would be to put the *colored people* to the same level of education wealth, civil rights and opportunities as the whites have: "That some colored men and women, in a like proportion to the whites, should be qualified in all the attainments

¹² Myers, C. P. 2008. Frederick Douglass, Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, p.120.

possessed by them.”¹³ In Delany’s view the only possible way for this elevation to come about would be a broader change of the condition in which the African Americans, both free and enslaved, found themselves: “What is necessary to be done in order to attain an equality, is to change the condition, and the person is at once changed.”¹⁴ And more importantly, this change had to transpire as a result of the efforts made by the African-Americans themselves. The motive of “self made men” appears in the thought of all the outstanding leaders of the African-American abolitionists. For Delany (and others) only by their own hands can they bring about the change, because it is in no body else’s interest to elevate the *Negros* except for the *Negros* themselves. Delany believed that the US, as they were at the time he wrote these lines, did not provide conditions necessary for the elevation of his people, and that it is unlikely that such conditions will ever come to reality. This is why Delany suggests that the African-Americans should elevate themselves by emigrating from the United States to any country that will provide them equal human rights and possibilities for betterment:

We advised emigration to Central and South America, and even to Mexico and West Indies to those who prefer to either of the last named places, all of which are free countries ... Dutch Guiana, Peru, Buenos Ayres, Paraguay, and Uruguay, in all of which places colored people have equality in social, civil, political, and religious privileges.¹⁵

As we can see from these lines Delany was very pragmatic about the emigration, as he is not necessarily supporting the emigration to Africa because of some moral duty or any other reason of that kind. In principle he is not against staying in the US, if the possibilities of life would allow the black people to stay there. Instead of staying, Delany suggests emigration to a country, which would provide good conditions for his people.

In our country, the United States, there are three millions five hundred thousand slaves; and we, the nominally free colored people, are six hundred thousand in number; estimating one sixth to be men. We have one hundred thousand able bodied freeman, which will make a powerful auxiliary in any

¹³ Delany, M. 1852. The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored people of the United States.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

country to which we may become adopted, an ally not to be despised by any power on earth. We love our country, dearly love her, but she does not love us, she despises us ... we shall love the country none the less that receives us as her adopted children.¹⁶

From the above said it is quite bluntly readable that Delany is ready to leave the enslaved *Negros* if the minority of their US brethren is able to elevate themselves in some other country leaving them behind. This argument is particularly morally questionable; Delany is more than aware of this problem and has a very interesting line of defensive argumentation: “It is true that our enslaved brethren are here, and we have been led to believe that it is necessary for us to remain, on that account.”¹⁷ To this remark of the opponents of his ideas (Douglass before all) he has a very vocal and suggestive counter question:

Is it true, that all should remain in degradation because a part are degraded? We believe no such thing. We believe it to be the duty of the free to elevate themselves in the most speedy and effective manner possible; as the redemption of the bondman depends entirely upon the elevation of the freeman; therefore, to elevate the free colored people of America, anywhere upon this continent forebodes the speedy redemption of the slaves. We shall hope to hear no more of so fallacious a doctrine, the necessity of the free remaining in degradation for the sake of oppressed.¹⁸

For Delany the whole point of emigration is very pragmatic. Emigration is about the reality of equal opportunities and citizens’ rights, which is unerringly why he suggests not only West Africa and Liberia as the destinations of possible emigration, but also states of Central and South American where he believes the ‘Negros’ would have the equal rights. On the other hand for Alexander Crummell, as I will show in the following lines, this was not the question of pragmatic choice, but instead it is a question of duty that Negroes have for Africa as the land of their forefathers.

Reverend Alexander Crummell, just as Martin Delany, considered emigration to be a more preferable alternative for African Americans than staying in the US in the close proximity of their brothers and sisters still held in bondage, and with fewer citizens’ rights

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

and economic alternatives than their white neighbors. However, Crummell's motives for supporting emigration were quite different from those of Martin Delany. Crummell was above all else interested in the moral obligations and duties of the freed black man and women. Also like Delany he appeals to the *Free Colored Men of America*, however his plea is addressed also to all of the Free people of African origin around the world, and not only to those residing within the borders of the United States. He is well aware of Douglass' arguments as regards to America being the home of the Africans as much as the Europeans, Chinese and all the other immigrants who settled in it. He does not deny the right of African-Americans to stay and prosper in the US, as they have—according to him—deserved all the rights that other free citizens possess. That is why Crummell was very cautious when appealing to exile from the US and elsewhere, placing the decision on the shoulders of every free black individual:

I need not insult the intellect and conscience of any colored man who thinks it is his duty to labor for his race on American soil, by telling him that his duty is to come to Africa. If he is educated up to the ideas of responsibility and obligation, he knows his duty better than I do. And indeed generally, it is best to leave individuals to themselves as to the details of obligation and responsibility.¹⁹

Alexander Crummell believed that by their three hundred years of residing, living and dying in the US the African-Americans did not lose their moral obligations to Africa. The emergence of the black people freed from the slaveholders bondage just gives them the responsibility to fulfill the obligation and come to help the continent of their origin:

I wish to call the attention of the sons of Africa in America to their 'Relations and Duty to the Land of their Fathers' ... Africa lies low and wretched. She is the maimed and crippled arm of humanity. Her great powers are wasted.²⁰

Clearly, for Crummell it is the moral obligation of all the free African Americans, and especially those who were best among them, to labor for the benefit of their forefathers'

¹⁹ Crummell, A. 1861. *The Relations and Duties of free Colored Men in America to Africa*. Hartford: Press of case, Lockwood and Company.

²⁰ Ibid.

continent. But what exactly were those “obligations and duties” which Crummell was writing about? Crummell indirectly asks from the ‘elite’ part of the African-Americans to lift Africa from her “wretched” condition. But what were these best “sons of Africa” supposed to do? Crummell argued that their aim should be to economically and morally regenerate the African continent. He believed that two things had to be accomplished – the introduction of Capitalism as a system of economical reproduction and Evangelization of the local population, which will morally regenerate the people. One might say that Crummell as an Episcopal priest was Max Weberian ideal type of the connection between “the Protestant ethics” and “the spirit of capitalism”. In order to introduce and consolidate Capitalism as a new system, the blacks have to organize and do exactly what the whites have already done. However, Crummell appeals to his brothers not to plunder and steal from Africa in the same way that the whites did for centuries. Moreover, he argued, it was imperative that they not enslave their brethren.

No greater curse could be entailed upon Africa than the sudden appearance upon her shores, of a mighty host of heartless black buccaneers – men sharpened by letters and training; filled with feverish greed; with hearts utterly alien from moral good and human well-being; and only regarding Africa as a convenient goldfield from which to extract emolument and treasure to carry off to foreign quarters.²¹

The irony of history is that exactly the opposite had often happened in the short and violent history of Liberia. Just as Delany, and other distinct black activists Alexander Crummell emphasized the importance of Africans helping themselves by education, thereby creating as many as possible of the “self made men” among them. Nevertheless, besides the practical training required that would facilitate Crummell’s dream, these people had to possess some moral qualities as well. Of this he was only too aware. As I have mentioned earlier, another important component, besides Capitalism, had to come from the hands of the enlightened descendents of Africa coming back to the land of their forefathers. This

²¹ Ibid.

component was, of course the word of Christ. Alexander Crummell himself came to Africa (to Liberia) as an Episcopal missionary and this was his vision of Africa's future progress:

Philanthropy would come forward with largess for colored men, thus developing the resources of Africa. Religion would open a large and generous hand in order to hasten the redemption of a continent, alien from Christ and His church. And capital would hasten forward, not only for its wonted reduplication, but also to exemplify the vitality and fruitfulness which it always scatters from golden hands in its open pathway ... you can see the likelihood of an early repossession of Africa in trade and commerce, and moral power, by her now scattered children, in distant lands.²²

In some respects Crummell's predictions did take place. Both Capitalism and Christianity came to the deprived continent but despite their presence most part of the continent of Crummell's forefathers remained "low and wretched", and they remain so until the present day.

Douglass and the Home Feeling in America

*But will he emigrate? No! Individuals may, but the masses will not. Dust will fly, but the earth will remain.*²³

Frederick Douglass ferociously opposed ideas which advocated emigration of free people of color, especially if these ideas came from the ranks of African-Americans. In principle Douglass did not oppose the right of every individual to choose their place of living; after all one of the main arguments against slavery was that the freedom of movement is among the inalienable human rights and denying of that right was according to Douglass one of many crimes of slavery. However, mass and organized emigration was, for Douglass, something entirely different.

²² Ibid.

²³ Douglass, Frederick. 1884. "The Future of the Negro"
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=776> (accessed: 7 May 2010).

Douglass had his counterarguments for all those arguments advanced by both Delany and Crummell. “Douglass argued, first, that colonization was impracticable; second that it was immoral; and third, that because it was impracticable, it was doubly immoral in its effects.”²⁴ In spite of Douglass firm belief that prospects of emigration were highly unlikely for numerous objective reasons, the very possibility of a large-scale emigration of the free African-Americans (whether it would be voluntary or conducted by force) was one of the greatest fears that Frederick Douglass held about the future of the Black race in America. The very fact that he had written his “The Folly of Colonization” speech in 1894 almost three decades after the end of the Civil war is fascinating. One would think that the war would put an end to the question of the necessity of equal citizen rights to the former slaves and also to the question of colonization of the blacks outside the United States. But this was not the case, and the question of colonization was repeatedly raised. Douglass opens his speech by stating the reasons for the impossibility of such a solution:

It is all nonsense to talk about the removal of eight millions of the American people from their homes in America to Africa. The expense and hardships, to say nothing of the cruelty attending such a measure, would make success impossible.²⁵

But despite this argument he still finds the fact that this is even discussed as dangerous. Douglass believed that words of black activists such as Crummell who were arguing for colonization (regardless of the intentions behind them) had the same effect as those of the white supremacists of the south who raised their heads as soon as the occupation period was over. Those people wanted the Blacks to leave the South, and the Union, and the words of the black activists, in Douglass’ view were just a powerful blow in the sails of such enemies of his people.

Douglass had also addressed the argument made by Crummell that the American

²⁴ Myers, C. P. 2008. Frederick Douglass, Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, p.121.

²⁵ Douglass, Frederick. 1894. “The Folly of Colonization” <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1034> (accessed: 5 May 2010).

Negros have a responsibility towards Africa as the land of their forefathers. More than this, he is disconcerted by Crummell's call for the "best men" to fulfill this duty:

Africa, according to her colonization advocates is by no means modest in her demands upon us. She calls upon us to send her only our best men. She does not want our riff-raff, but our best men ... American Negro owes no more to the Negroes in Africa than he owes to the Negroes in America. There are millions of needy people over there, but there are also millions of needy people over here as well, and the millions of America need intelligent men.²⁶

His final answer to Crummell's arguments regards the ambiguous criteria by which the African-Americans should leave the US and move to Africa. Douglass, rightly, claims that American Negroes are of mixed blood; both European and African. Because they do not have one land of origin, it would be difficult to determine to which continent, land, or country their loyalty would belong to. The feeling of belonging to a country was enormously important, to Douglass. He referred to it as the "home feeling". For him the colonization shame would only add to the existing confusion in the already troubled identity and conciseness of the American *Negro*, it would only

make him despondent and doubtful where he should feel assured and confident ... To have a home, the Negro must have a country, and he is an enemy to the moral progress of the Negro, whether he knows it or not, who calls upon him to break up his home in this country, and an uncertain home in Africa.²⁷

Douglass viewed Crummell's case for colonizing Africa as wrong, however he did acknowledge that such arguments could have been made in good intentions. Nevertheless, the same could not be said about "rational choice" arguments, which Delany was advocating and advancing. Frederick Douglass saw the urgent need for the free African-Americans to labor for their brothers and sisters still kept in Bondage. While Martin Delany thought that it would be rational for the free black persons to leave the US and find a country that will treat them as equal citizens, Douglass saw this as the ultimate act of tertiary to those who were still kept in

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

slavery. Frederick Douglass made a similar argument when he attacked his long time ally from the Abolitionist movement, associate from the *Liberator*²⁸ (and a personal friend), William Lloyd Garrison. While Garrison thought that the Northern states should form their own Union and separate from the slaveholding states of the South, Douglass argued that the possibility as abandoning the people who were still held in bondage would be immoral. Garrison's Famous cry "No union with slaveholders" had been met by Douglass with a sense of discontent and he had to an extent even ridiculed it:

If I were on board of a pirate ship, with a company of men and women whose lives and liberties I had put in jeopardy, I would not clear my soul of their blood by jumping in the long boat, and singing out no union with pirates. My business would be to remain on board, and while I never would perform a single act of piracy again, I should exhaust every means given me by my position, to save the lives and liberties of those against whom I had committed piracy. In like manner, I hold it is our duty to remain inside this Union, and use all the power to restore to enslaved millions their precious and God-given rights.²⁹

Contrary to Delany, Douglass argued that the free African-Americans should constantly work on their own personal betterment, and the elevation of the whole of African-American community: "Every colored man should ask him-self the question, What am I doing to elevate and improve my condition, and that of my brethren at large?"³⁰ For Douglass, the moment when the *Negros* will gain the rights they deserve, is the same moment in which they will start fighting for their rights in large numbers.

When thinking about the subject of colonization today, one must not fall in to the trap of measuring this idea by the modern day standards, nor by taking into account the history that took place. We are aware of the historical events today, but the 19th century African-American thinkers were not. One must attempt, as much as is feasible, in the minds and time

²⁸ *Liberator* was the famous Abolitionist newspaper, founded by William Lloyd Garrison. Douglass had left it and made his own paper "The North Star", soon after which he had ideologically split with Garrison on the question of the American Constitution and the future of the Union.

²⁹ Douglass, Frederick. 1857. "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision".

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=772> (accessed: 5 May 2010).

³⁰ Douglass, Frederick. 1848. "What are colored people doing for themselves?"

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=766> (accessed: 9 May 2010).

of the 19th century, when this debate took place. In the time when the debate was raging, no one could know the destiny of the United States of America, or what would happen with the independent state of Liberia. Colonization in Africa, Latin America—or any other place for that matter—was as legitimate idea and plan of action as was the option of staying within the borders of the United States. It is crucial to understand that the question of colonization was at the core of the identity problem of the African-Americans. That question opened numerous other questions, such as loyalty, belonging, and patriotic duty. Thinking about colonization for the African-Americans was very close to thinking about, “Who are we?”, “Africans or Americans, both or neither?”, “Where is our home? Do we have a home?” It seems that the only time gave the answer to the question of colonization. The vast majority of the former slaves and their descendents had stayed in the United States, and in this respect Douglass was right. However whether the question of identity was closed or not is less clear. In the next part of the dissertation I will address the question of undefined and unresolved identity.

The Danger of a Compromise and Two Visions of the Future

The Positivism of Frederick Douglass

Douglass predicted five possible scenarios, which could determine the future of the Black race in America. The first would be that whites would reduce all of the black population to slavery; the second option was mass colonization of Blacks to Africa; the third would be emancipation of the slaves (but without the provision of equal rights), which would in Douglass' reduce the *Colored people* to collective slaves of the whole society; fourth would be a terrible war of races in which the whole of the African race would become extinct; and the final option being that the Africans would get not only the immediate abolition of slavery but also complete equality of civil and political rights which would integrate them in to the American body politic.³¹ Frederick Douglass naturally believed that the last option would be the most righteous one, and the option, which would serve the best interests for the future of the Union. It is very important to understand that Douglass was not only a single cause activist, but also an American patriot. The whole of his argumentation is grounded upon the assumption that the betterment of the blacks and granting them equal rights is ultimately good for the union. This is why he saw the "third" solution as probably the worst possible realistic outcome of the civil war.

It would be dooming the colored race to a condition indescribably wretched and the dreadful contagion of their vices and crimes would fly like cholera and small pox through all classes. Such would be the effect of abolishing slavery, without conferring equal rights. It would be to lacerate and depress

³¹ Douglass, Frederick. 1863. "The Present and the Future of the Colored Race in America", <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=777> (accessed: 7 May 2010).

the Negro, and make him a scourge and a curse to the country. Do anything else with us, but plunge us not into this hopeless pit.³²

Douglass found this solution, this compromise with slavery (after its defeat on the battlefield), as the worse possible outcome. It would be even worse than the option of genocide over the whole of *Negro* population. Douglass (in my opinion rightfully) viewed a life without human dignity better than the life at all. It is really fascinating how Douglass predicted the negative consequences of granting emancipation without granting equal civil rights could impact negatively upon the character of the African-American population. In Aristotle's *Politics* the great philosopher once said that human beings are born either as free humans or as slaves. This also implies to those who have been born in the condition of slavery. They can fight for their freedom, and if not succeed the ultimate act of non-acceptance of the condition of slavery would be for them to commit suicide. I would not go as far as saying that Douglass entirely agreed with Aristotle, but do I believe he was very close to philosopher's view in the sense that the life without human dignity is a life of a low value, and this is what Douglass feared even more than the very physical extinction. In his speech "Why should a Colored man Enlist?" Douglass gives much accent to the question of dignity. "Enlist for your own sake. You need an act of this kind by which to recover your own self-respect."³³ For Douglass the very act of African-Americans enlisting in the Unionist army would not only give them self dignity, but it will also give them the right to full claim of the American citizenship, but even more importantly it will be the means of preventing a shameful compromise with the slavery.

Even before the end of the Civil War Frederick Douglass knew there would be challenges in the future for the *Colored* people of the American Union. This is why he tirelessly warned about possible negative consequences before, during, and after the Civil

³² Ibid.

³³ Douglass, Frederick. 1863. "Why Should a Colored Man Enlist", <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1135> (accessed: 10 May 2010).

War. Douglass said that long after the war finishes the white people of the South would be bitter about the loss in the civil war and the occupation that will follow. In such a situation he predicted that the only true and firm ally of the Union will be the *Negro* of the South. This was one of the main arguments Douglass made in favor of disenfranchising African-Americans.

I tell you the Negro is your friend. You will make him your friend by emancipating him. But you will make him not only a friend in the sentiment of heart by enfranchising him, but you will make him your best defender, your best protector against the traitors and the descendents of those traitors, who will inherit the hate, the bitter revenge which will crystallize all over the South, and seek to circumvent the Government that they could not throw off. You will need the black man there, as a watchman and patrol; and you may need him as a soldier.³⁴

Douglass believed that only full and unconditional granting of all citizens' rights (among which was the right to vote), would finally unite the divided country, stop the perpetual injustice, and secure the best for the future of the country. The whole point of the war for Douglass was not to "restore the order" or going back to the *status quo*. In his opinion, the old Union, that which had a history of eighty years of compromise with the slavery, had to be buried once and for all. In establishing the new Union there should, in his view, be no place for another compromise. All of the compromises made with the Slaveholders, were just postponing the inevitability of division with violent consequences. In his view, the compromise with the slave holding south, and the prolonged delay of solving the question of slavery from the time of the Constitutional convention, had brought the Union to the breakdown, and made of it the site of what is today known as the first "industrial" war. The Civil War time president Abraham Lincoln once said: "A house divided against itself cannot stand ... I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it

³⁴ Douglass, Frederick. 1863. "Our Work is Not Done"
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=2232> (accessed: 3 May 2010).

will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.”³⁵ From the remnants of the old one a new Union should rise, one which will make no difference between the black and the white, union which will “make every slave free, and every free man a voter”³⁶.

Now we come to the question of the action plan for the post-war period, and the legal consolidation of universal abolition. On this complicated question, which had troubled many minds of the day, Frederick Douglass had a very short, simple and somewhat unexpected answer. His answer was: “Do nothing with them.”³⁷ If the former slaves get immediate enfranchisement and all the other equal rights, nothing more or extraordinary should be done with them. Contrary to the thinking of the perceived majority asking this question Douglass exclaims:

Mind your own business, and let them mind theirs. Your *doing* with them is their greatest misfortune. They have been undone by your doings, and all they ask, and really have need of at your hands, is just to let them alone ... As colored men, we only ask to be allowed to *do* with ourselves, subject only to the same great laws for the welfare of human society which apply to other men, Jews, Gentiles, Barbarian, Sythian.³⁸

The only thing Douglass asks from the lawmaker is not to prevent the African-Americans from their development. He does not ask for charity, nor mercy, but for the freedoms that the law and the Constitution of the United States guaranty, to be universal and unbiased. He asks for the law not to discriminate, *the Negro*, or anyone else, on the basis of race. This will in, Douglass’ mind, allow the *Negro* to fully integrate into the body politic of the country. In his words, the *Negro* was the citizen in all the wars that the union fought; if he can be a citizen during the war, he can also be citizen in peace. Equality under the law would, he argued, eventually bring communities close to one another, break down the wall of separation and (in

³⁵ Lincoln, Abraham. 1858. “House Divided Speech”

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=103> (accessed: 17 May 2010).

³⁶ Douglass, Frederick. 1863. “Our Work is Not Done”

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=2232> (accessed: 3 May 2010).

³⁷ Douglass, Frederick. 1862. “What Shall be done with the Slaves if Emancipated?”

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1134> (accessed: 10 May 2010).

³⁸ Ibid.

the final phase) bring about the extinction of races in the country. Douglass supposed that the future would bring about blending of all the races in the United States; and that the majority of the citizens will no longer belong to one race or the other, but to this new, blended race:

I do not see how he can survive and survive in this country as a distinct and separate race ... he will not be expatriated nor annihilated ... he will be absorbed, assimilated only to appear on the shores of Shannon, in the features of a blended race.³⁹

This is a very interesting point. In the later history of African emancipationist thought he used to be attacked for it, and it was argued that he was talking of the *Blended race* because of him being a child of a white father. This even went so far that his whole work got the epithet of being “white”. But when Douglass preached of the emergence of the blended race, he did not assume only the mixing of the whites and blacks but also all the other people composing the American nation. Nevertheless, the precondition for this future had to be the principle of “absolute equality.”⁴⁰

However, this could not have happen if a compromise was made with the rebels and traitors (as Douglass likes to calls the Confederate cause in the Civil War) who lost the war. A necessary measure for the former slaves to elevate themselves would be the right of education. For Douglass, education was the key asset in the effort of helping the *Colored people* become aware of their rights and the importance in fighting for them. This is the point that a thinker of the next generation, W.E.B. Du Bois, emphasized above all. In a speech given on the occasion of the opening of one of the Industrial schools for blacks in Virginia just some six months before his death, Frederick Douglass gave his views about the virtues of education for the development of every human being. Just as Socrates being very modest of his own knowledge, Douglass says: “Some men know the value of education by having it. I

³⁹ Douglass, Frederick. 1886. “The Future of the Colored Race”
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=493> (accessed: 7 May 2010).

⁴⁰ Douglass, Frederick. 1869. “Our Composite Nationality”
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=2464> (accessed: 29 April 2010).

know its value by not having it.”⁴¹ Douglass uses a lot of Platonic metaphors while elaborating on the “blessings” that education could provide (and in this spirit he compares it with the light). With education, the man has archived everything that the civilization has:

He is the commander of armies; the builder of cities; the tamer of wild beasts; the navigator of unknown seas, the discoverer of unknown islands, capes and continents, and the founder of great empires and capable of limitless civilization.⁴²

On the other hand, without education, man is just an unachieved creature, not fully a man: “A giant in body, put a pigmy in intellect ... Without education he lives within narrow, dark and grimy walls of ignorance. He is a poor prisoner without hope.”⁴³ Douglass’ appeal was addressed to the members of his own community (if one can call only African-Americans his people, it is difficult to say because of Douglass’ American patriotism and universalistic view points); But he also sent his message to the whites of the South, appealing to them not to prevent the blacks from pursuing education. This message was evidently sent in the spirit of Douglass’ “do nothing to us” doctrine. Douglass believed that denying the right to educate the *Negros* was one of the main tools of the slaveholders in preventing them to fight for their freedom. In the post-emancipation world, this would be the tool for the spiritual descendents of the slaveholders to “keep the Negro in his place”. In his first Autobiography “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave”, Douglass describes how he, for the first time in life met with the fear that the slaveholders held over of the slaves who were receiving education. In an early age Frederick Douglass lived in the house of Master Hugh Auld. Mr. Auld’s wife was in Douglass’ memoirs a very kind women, who liked the little boy (Douglass) and had decided to teach him to read and write. However, once master Auld found out about this he was outraged and wanted to prevent this immediately. These were master Auld’s words as he recalls them:

⁴¹ Douglass, Frederick. 1894. “Blessings of Liberty and Education”
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=543> (accessed: 28 April 2010).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

If you give a nigger an inch, he will take a mile. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now, if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master.⁴⁴

Frederick Douglass memorized these words well, and according to his account, Master Auld gave him one of the most valuable lessons in life – he had inadvertently persuaded Douglass to persist in becoming literate. Douglass recalls that literacy was the tool, which opened his eyes to further education, and eventually made his condition of slavery unbearable.

This feeling grew in Douglass as the years passed by and it has motivated him to seize the first possible opportunity to follow the North Star, and run away to freedom. In the “Blessings of Liberty and Education” Douglass expressed some discontent with the first thirty years of emancipation:

Under the whole havens there never was a people liberated from bondage under the less favorable to the successful beginning of a new and free mode of life, than the Freedman of the South.⁴⁵

But the very fact that the elevation of *Negro* is being sabotaged by his enemies; for Douglass represents a sign of his progress:

The Negro in ignorance and rags meets no resistance. He is rather liked than otherwise. He is thought to be in his place. It is only when he acquires education, property, popularity and influence, only when he attempts to rise above his ancient level, and appears to be a man and a MAN AMONG MEN, that he invites repression.⁴⁶

As once Hugh Auld had tried to stop little Douglass from receiving the light of knowledge, the descendents of the slave holders were trying to prevent the whole race from literacy and education. Douglass motivates his brothers and sisters to do just what he had done, persist on their path to educate themselves and by education reach spiritual freedom. Douglass calls upon them not to be pessimistic because there had, despite all the hardships, never been a

⁴⁴ Douglass, F. 1845. *Narrative of Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. Boston: Anti-Slavery Office.

⁴⁵ Douglass, Frederick. 1894. “Blessings of Liberty and Education”

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=543> (accessed: 28 April 2010).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

more favorable time for the elevation of the black race. In doing so he reminds them of past times: “I have seen many dark hours and have yet never despaired of the colored’s man’s future ... Go back to the annexation of Texas – the fugitive slave law times, and the border war in Kansas.”⁴⁷ Ultimately, for Douglass, the perspectives of the *colored* people in America seemed to be bright if they persisted with the task of educating themselves. But still, as Professor Myers writes in his books,⁴⁸ Douglass realized that the work ethic of the African Americans was degraded by the legacy of long centuries of slavery and that self-elevation had other internal obstacles besides those posed by the ideological descendents of slavery.

Douglass was well aware of the racial prejudices, deeply rooted among the white majority of his country. He knew that years would pass between the establishment of legal emancipation and the ending of racial prejudices. The continuation of racial casting,⁴⁹ and especially discrimination in the state institutions such as the courts was, as I have mentioned earlier, what Douglass feared the most. But he held that this was not a natural phenomenon. People were not borne to have and discriminate on the basis of race; it was, rather, socially constructed.

In his view, some groups of people were more inclined to hate on the racial basis than others. Prejudices were present more intensely among certain parts of the majority, one of those groups being the Irish-Americans. Douglass thought that it was not an accident that the Irish, who had been themselves a subject of oppression for many years, hated the Negro so much. Illustrating this phenomenon, Douglass says: “It is said that a Negro always makes the most cruel Negro driver ... there is something quite revolting in the idea of a people lately oppressed suddenly becoming oppressors.”⁵⁰ However, Douglass had always insisted that

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Myers, C. P. 2008. Frederick Douglass, Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, pp. 110—150.

⁴⁹ The term “Racial casting” I have took from Dr. Myers’ book about Douglass.

⁵⁰ Douglass, Frederick. 1869. “Our Composite Nationality”
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=2464> (accessed: 29 April 2010).

those prejudice are unnatural and imposed by the social system of slavery. For Douglass, the children were not discriminating against one another on the basis on color, but learn these tendencies as they grow up in a racially segregated society.⁵¹ This casting was present everywhere, and the people of color faced it in their every day lives: “It meets them at workshop and factory, when apply for work. It meets them at the church, at the hotel, at the ballot-box, and worst of all, it meets them in the jury-box.⁵²” Here we see an allusion to another of Douglass’ convictions. He thought that neither the Constitution not the Declaration of Independence were made *for* slavery, but that it was always the wrong interpretation of those documents that served as the “legal” justification of slavery. The fact that assumptions based on the racial prejudices were taken for granted troubled Douglass. Everything that a black man and women do was met with suspicion, and if they were praised when their achievements were recognized that it was probably because they had some white origins:

One drop of Teutonic blood is enough to account for all good and great qualities occasionally coupled with a colored skin: and on the other hand, one drop of negro blood, though in the veins of a man of Teutonic whiteness, is enough of which to prejudice all offensive and ignorable qualities.⁵³

The main reason for the continuation of the racial prejudices was the very fact that people who were slave-owners and those who had been enslaved still lived next to each other (as did their children). “We may easily forgive those who injure us, but it is hard to forgive those who we inure.”⁵⁴ Douglass thought that the only way for the supporters of the former slave owning system to justify slavery and segregation that followed emancipation is to deprive the *Negros* from their manhood. This is why they would downgrade a black person by calling him “boy” regardless of his age, and separate in all of the everyday life activities. “The old

⁵¹ Douglass, Frederick. 1881. “The Color Line” <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=DouColo.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=1&divison=div1> (accessed: 28 April 2010).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

masters set themselves up as much too high as they set the manhood of the Negro low. Out of the depths of slavery came this prejudice and this color line.”⁵⁵

Douglass himself fought against unjust practices of racial prejudice. Long before the globally known *sitting-in* actions of the civil rights movements, Frederick Douglass had opposed the unjust system of racial segregation:

To the point of persona physical resistance, he fought such segregation in a wide variety of venues (churches and schools, public accommodations such as restaurants, hotels, and theatres, public conveyances such as trains and ships), and he exhorted other African Americans to similar opposition.⁵⁶

The very existence of the color line was problematic for Douglass. He always placed manhood above race, pleading that race *per se* does not bare any kind of quality. On it's own it is neither good nor bad. In this context, Douglass viewed the function of race pride, and thought of it as a tool to fight prejudice, but one which should only be used for this purpose, and this purpose only. Once it had been used to prove the humanity and the manhood of the *Negro* it loses its function and becomes pernicious.

Du Bois' Scepticism

If I had to find one single word with which I would express the thought and attitude of W. E. B. Du Bois, that word would be 'bitterness'. Du Bois had a long life and it happens to be that he lived in a very unfavorable and grim period (or century) for the African-American people. He was born in 1868, and had just reach boyhood when the direct federal rule period (or the Yankee occupation as it is sometimes referred to in the states of former Confederacy) ended in the South. Du Bois died in 1963, one year before adoption of the civil rights act and

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Myers, C. P. 2008. Frederick Douglass, Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, pp. 122—123.

two before the voting rights act, which ended the era of the discriminatory “Jim Crow” laws, and finally gave full legal guaranties of equality and voting for all the citizens of the United States. The key to understanding Du Bois’ thought is the discrimination that flourished in his time. Du Bois’ thought represented the voice of the people without elementary justice; people whose rights were jeopardized and who felt tricked because promises were never delivered. Du Bois’ voice, in a sense is the voice of Douglass’ resentment. What Frederick Douglass feared most, was the compromise with the “traitors and rabbles”; however, these “traitors” also happened to be the former slave masters. But despite them being the armed enemies of the Union, yet another compromise had been made with them. This compromise was cut just more than a decade after slavery, whose defenders they were, (and have been as such defeated on the battlefield). Dr. Myers describes how this event took place:

Two practical developments held a decisive importance for the nineteenth-century fate of the Reconstruction Amendments. The more dramatic of the two was the Compromise of 1877, a political arrangement fashioned to resolve the disputed presidential election of 1876. To gain the presidency, the Republican Rutherford Hayes required the assent of southern Democrats in Congress, and the price for that assent was the removal of federal troops remaining in the states of the old Confederacy.⁵⁷

It was the consequences of this compromise Du Bois had to live with during his whole life.

For W.E.B. Du Bois, the problem of the 20th century would be the problem of “The Color Line”, and the psychological problem of “double consciousness” that it creates within African Americans.

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 twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body ... The history of the American negro is the history of this strife, – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self in to a better and truer self. In this merge he wishes neither of the other self’s to be lost.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid. p.138.

⁵⁸ Du Bois, W. E. B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 7—8.

Here Du Bois addresses the same problems that Douglass also described; a former slave-master's shaping the society in such a way, in which the manhood and self esteem of the Negroes would always be questionable. In such a grim situation, Du Bois saw African-Americans as the only people who could effectively help their kin. Du Bois was a great advocate of black education – but not just a basic education. Du Bois was placing the emphasis on higher education. He held that in order for the Blacks to elevate themselves they needed a numerous, educated, elite, which could lead them. This elite he called “the talented tenth.”⁵⁹ In order for this to happen, the Negroes themselves have to push towards this as their aim and collective plan of action. That is why he criticized Booker T. Washington who was, according to Du Bois, solely promoting industrial education as the main branch in which the Negroes should be educated as it was profitable. Du Bois was fiercely against this:

This is an age of unusual economic development and Mr. Washington's programme naturally takes an economic cast, becoming a gospel of work and money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life.⁶⁰

It is not that industrial knowledge is not important, but that this kind of knowledge placed as the almost only possible option of education for the Black masses, was compromising with the class of former slave masters, according to Du Bois. In his view, Washington did not want to provoke the whites by promoting the higher education of the Negro masses. On the other hand, white capital needed workers, and the industrial education from the perspective of whites accomplished two goals – it brought them profit, and it guaranteed the perpetual reproduction of power relations along the color line for the future. This was, after all, a time when the Ku Klux Klan flourished, when the homes of African Americans used to be burned and when public lynching of the *Negros* was a relatively common practice. Therefore this “low profile” of ambitions, that Washington is accused of promoting, should be seen in

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.52.

context. But Du Bois was not ready for any kind of compromise, and for him the hierarchy of priorities should look like this: First, political power, Second, insistence on civil rights, Third, higher education of the Negro youth.⁶¹ Continued compromise, he argued, only deteriorated the position of the *Negro* as it has brought:

The disfranchisement of the Negro; The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro; and The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.⁶²

To overturn the tide, the *colored people* need to have their elite, their talented tenth whose very existence will shake the power structure, and who will pull their people toward full emancipation. They need an educated elite that will represent the masses of manual industrial laborers, farmers and poor who have been denied the voting rights and who have no voice to represent them. This class of new *Negro* elite would, according to Du Bois, be the force that would give voice to the people and bring about change of the unfavorable conditions in which the *colored people* of the South live.

Progress in human affairs is more often a pull than a push, a surging forward of the exceptional man, and the lifting of his duller brethren slowly and painfully to his vantage-ground. Thus it was no accident that gave birth to universities centuries before the common schools.⁶³

Just as Douglass, Du Bois was aware that the highly educated *Negro* was a dangerous and an “unhappy” *Negro*. In the chapter “The coming of John” he had in a novelist style described what kind of resistance does the educated *Negro* has to face, from the white community. As long as he is ignorant, he is “happy” and “in his place”. That is why Du Bois had repeatedly insisted that the African Americans needed a talented, and educated, elite which would guide the masses and “pull” them from their desperate position.

Despite Du Bois being placed among the pessimists of the African American thought, I would argue that he was still an integrationist, albeit a peculiar kind of integrationist. Maybe

⁶¹ Ibid. p.55.

⁶² Ibid. pp. 53—54.

⁶³ Ibid. pp. 95—96.

he was not an American patriot in the same sense Douglass was. Nevertheless, in my view, Du Bois clearly saw African Americans as citizens of the US. He was not appealing for the masses to leave, although he personally migrated to Ghana, where died and where his grave lies today. Du Bois remained embittered about the way policies towards the African Americans were made in the US (or rather not made at all) after the emancipation of slaves came to the South. The *Negro* was freed, but they were left to fend for themselves with no real help from the wider society. In the first place, the people who once were property of the slave masters were freed, but without education, guidance, and with no property of their own to start their new lives.

I will not stop to ask whose duty it was, but I insist it was the duty of someone to see that these workingmen were not left alone and unguided, without capital, without land, without skill, without economic organization, without even the bold protection of law, order, and decency ... but destined to be thrown almost immediately into relentless and sharp competition with the best of the modern workmen ... where every participant is fighting for himself.⁶⁴

“Throwing” liberty to the ignorant slaves in a completely hostile environment for them combined with the newly established policy of racial segregation gave some peculiar results in the character of the African American people. What happened after the war is that all of the property over the land remained in the hands of the whites – the former slave masters. The best that the vast majority of the former slaves could expect was to become tenants on this land. Soon enough for a combination of social and economic reasons the former slaves became *de facto* enslaved again, but this time by debt, since they constantly owed money to farm the land they were working on. When they could not return the money their property was taken away from them. In some cases even the furniture was taken from them, which should have not be taken because the law did not allow that. However, the word of the law and its practice in the South were two completely separate things. The so-called “black belt” became a very depressing place that many people wanted to leave, and eventually large

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.164.

portions of poor Negro population moved to the big cities. This migration created a new class of poor black urban population and a completely new architecture of social relations and habits. These new relations gave birth to city crime among the African American population:

There can be no doubt that crime among Negroes has sensibly increased in the slums of great cities in the last thirty years, and that there has appeared in the slums of great cities a distinct criminal class among the blacks. In explaining this unfortunate development, we must note two things: (1) that the inevitable result of Emancipation was to increase crime and criminals, and (2) that the police system of the South was primarily designed to control slaves.⁶⁵

Du Bois said that crime made the tensions stronger on the color line. The blacks did not believe in the just conduction of law informant upon the members of their community, while the whites used to prosecute the *Negros* whether they were involved in crime or not. Du Bois thought that the tension had only worsened the overall situation. The segregation also resulted in communities changing – consolidating along racial lines. The southern whites and blacks started living parallel lives. The whites did not know what had happened to the “old Negro”⁶⁶ and the blacks lost all the confidence in justice. Du Bois was deeply worried about the segregation and the consequences it had on the fabric of Southern society. The color line grew deeper and wider:

I know some towns where straight line drawn through the middle of the main street separates nine-tenths of the whites from nine-tenths of the blacks ... A Negro slum may be in the dangerous proximity of a white residence quarter, while it is quite common to find a white slum planted in the hearth of a respectable Negro district. One thing, however, seldom occurs: the best of the whites and the best of the blacks almost never live in anything like close proximity.⁶⁷

That is why, Du Bois wrote, that what both communities see in one another is primarily negative characteristics. Thus their negative stereotypes were just more likely to become further deeply rooted and to grow. Du Bois writes that just before and right after the Civil

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.172.

⁶⁶ I am referring to the stereotypical image that the southern whites had about the “good and careless Negro” portrayed in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”. Du Bois think that the segregation separated the two communities and that the color line had eventually pushed them so far from each other that they had problems in understanding each other and started to develop separately. He especially talks about the problem of whites in this respect.

⁶⁷ Du Bois, W.E.B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Pocket Books, p.162.

War the opposite was the case: “the best of the Negroes were domestic servants in the best of white families, there were bonds of intimacy, affection and sometimes blood relationship, between the races.”⁶⁸ However, Du Bois knew that this period was over, and that “The Sons of Masters and Men”⁶⁹ are an all-together new generation. Like the generation that preceded it they were unequal, and the emancipation had separated them while not making them equal in any respect. The only change for the vast masses of the African American population was that they were not in property of others. That said, they had, according to Du Bois, but paraphrasing Douglas, become the collective slaves of the whole society.

In my understanding, Du Bois’ opinions and descriptions about the affairs in the South following the first decades after emancipation seems akin to Douglass’ letter from hell. The condition of people in the black belt, the establishment of racial segregation (especially Du Bois’ account about the lack of contact between the best representatives of both communities), the objective possibilities of blacks bettering their position, lack of educated and good leadership all depicts the South in a depressing state. All the worse possible predictions that Douglass had made about the future after emancipation were present: emancipation without equal voting, and citizen rights being on the first row, but also abandonment of the *Negros* by their natural allies from the north of the Union.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.178.

⁶⁹ “Of the Sons of Master and Men” is the title of one of Du Bois’ chapters in “The Souls of Black Folk”.

Conclusion

If one labels the American Civil War as a revolution, an abolitionist revolution that was fought for the establishment of equal civil rights of all the citizens of the United States; In that case racial segregation and the Jim Crow laws could be labeled as a reaction to that revolution. However if one agrees that the Civil War was the revolution, then one should acknowledge that the Civil War was certainly neither the first, nor the final, in a series of American revolutions. Therefore the post 1877 period too was neither the first nor the final reaction. The first revolution was that against the British, which started with a famous slogan “no taxation without representation”, and which had The Declaration of Independence as its crown document. The second revolution was American Civil War, and the reaction to it had lasted until the 24th amendment had been established; and these constitutional reforms were triggered by the third revolution led by the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King Jr.

Since Jefferson’s Declaration of independence had proclaimed that *all men are created equal*, and that they, *are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights*, the struggle for equal rights of “all men” had began. The problem was thus – who are these “all men” and how to define manhood? The history of African-American emancipation is the history of claiming that manhood for the African-Americans. Frederick Douglass had on almost every occasion when given an opportunity to speak, insisted on claiming manhood for the American *Negro*. Douglass was, as Thomas Jefferson was, a follower of the natural rights theory of John Locke. According to Locke, human beings are born with certain natural, “unalienable rights”, which he had defined as properties. Those are the rights (or properties) in: Life, Liberty, Body and Property. If a human being has the property in his self, then no one can claim that property from that human being. The United States being founded on a

document such as the Declaration of Independence (which guaranties exactly those rights), is a country, which was in Douglass' mind, unfit for the system of slavery. What Douglass claimed was that the documents (and principles) upon which the US was founded were not designed to produce, or to defend slavery, but that it was the practice of deliberate misinterpretation of these documents that made slavery possible.⁷⁰ In Douglass' observation, the slaveholders' only possible way to morally legitimize slavery was by proving that slaves were not human beings, and therefore the rights upon which the Union had been established do not apply to them. This is why Douglass claimed the manhood of the American Slaves. By proving the manhood of the *Negro*, Douglass proved the immorality of slavery, and automatically all of the false justifications of slavery must fall, and with it the whole system upon which slavery had been built. However, there is a very interesting pattern when reading Douglass' arguments. It seems that Douglass always places humanity together with American citizenship, almost as if the two concepts are intertwined or symbiotic. On one occasion, he argued that:

When this nation was in trouble, in its early struggles, it looked upon the Negro as a citizen. In 1776 he was a citizen. At the time of the formation of the Constitution the Negro had the right to vote in eleven States out of the old thirteen. In your trouble you have made us citizens. In 1812 Gen. Jackson addressed us as citizens – “fellow-citizens.”⁷¹

In a very angry and sarcastic tone Douglass finishes his thought: “Then he wanted us to fight. We were citizens then! And now, when you come to frame a conscription bill, the Negro is a citizen again. He has been a citizen just three times in his history of this government, and it has always been in time of trouble. In time of trouble we are citizens. Shall we be citizens in war, and aliens in peace? Would that be just?”⁷² The very fact that the African-Americans had been called upon as ‘patriots’ and ‘citizens’ in the times of crises, Douglass wants to

⁷⁰ Myers, C. P. 2008. Frederick Douglass, Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, pp. 83—109.

⁷¹ Douglass, Frederick. 1865. “What the Black Man Wants”, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=495> (accessed: 10 May 2010).

⁷² Ibid.

prove that those who were denying the manhood of the these people were, in essence, renouncing their own. They had not been honest to themselves either in the times of peace when the *Negro* was treated as a slave (or denied citizen rights in the case he was free), or in times of war, when the *Negro* was treated as a citizen. They were wrong in either both cases – indeed, not only wrong but treacherous and immoral. Immoral they were to the *Negro*, whose citizen rights they denied when it suited for them, and treacherous to the Union as their common fatherland. It is interesting how Douglass makes the dichotomy between the slaves and the slave masters, as the natural alleys and traitors of the Union. Reading Douglass clearly implies that, the slaveholders had lost their ‘moral’ right to citizenship, although he does not insist on that. This is why it is again immoral of the government to deny the citizen rights to former slaves as allays of the Union and thus the true citizens.

Douglass explicitly claims that the Negroes were (and are) actually just a part of the Composite nationality of the Union, just as any other group, Whites, Chinese, Irish or Anglo-Saxon. He says that the color of the Negro is not a quality that should be celebrated as such

There is no moral or intellectual quality in the color of a man’s cuticle; that color in itself is neither good nor bad; that to be black or white, is neither a proper source of pride nor shame. I go further and declare that no man’s devotion to the cause of justice, liberty, and humanity is to be weighed, measured and determined by his color or race.⁷³

Douglass continues in the same vein by claiming that not only there is not particular quality in the race, but that there actually exists a hierarchy of qualities: “It is better to be a member of the great human family, than a member of any particular variety of human family.”⁷⁴ Douglass’ stance about the virtues of being part of the human family is perfectly coherent with his predictions about the races in the US being extinct and loosing their ground in favor of the future blended race, which will in Douglass’ view make the vast majority of the American population. The American Negro, therefore, for Douglass is not a specific peculiar

⁷³ Douglass, Frederick. 1894. “Blessings of Liberty and Education”
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=543> (accessed: 28 April 2010).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

“being”, but just one branch in the great human family. The Negro will eventually be blended in the Union nation of the future, which Douglass does not see as a horrible loss, but as a positive development. Douglass’ visions of the future raise some interesting question about certain concrete policies of today’s United States. For instance it would be very interesting to know what Douglass would say about ‘Affirmative Action’, as the aim was “blending” of races; and as his policy of action towards the African Americans is: “Do anything with the Negro”, “let him alone”. On one occasion he said: “And if the Negro cannot stand on his legs let him fall also. All I ask is to give him a chance to stand on his own legs!”⁷⁵ Today the argument against this specific policy is often labeled as a white supremacist argument. However, I believe that Frederick Douglass would have supported such an argument, if the equality of human rights and chances had been secured for all the citizens regardless of their ethnic, religious or racial background.

As a final remark about Douglass I would like to share a doubt I have about this great thinker. In my opinion, it is very hard to say whether Douglass equates concepts of American-ness and Humanity, or maybe even thinks that only in the US these two concepts can fully be identified in the not so distant future. To me, it seems that he had often, maybe even intentionally, mixed these two concepts. Whenever Douglass spoke about humanity, he had always held the American interest first. Douglass was a 19th century intellectual, and as such he had known the German enlightenment and specifically the philosophy of Hegel. It might be that Douglass saw the realization of the world spirit (*Weltgeist*) in the young American republic. Douglass had on several occasions said that many nations had seen their high points, and that America’s is yet to come.

It has been thoughtfully observed that every nation, owing to its peculiar character and composition, has a definite mission in the world ... I need not stop here to name or describe the missions of other or more ancient

⁷⁵ Douglass, Frederick. 1865. “What the Black Man Wants”, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=495> (accessed: 10 May 2010).

nationalities. Our seems plain and unmistakable Our geographical position, our relation to the outside world, our fundamental principles of government, world-embracing in their scope and character, our vast resources, requiring all manner of labor to develop them, and our already existing composite population, all conspire to one grand end, and that is, to make us the perfect national illustration of the unity and dignity of the human family that the world has ever seen.⁷⁶

If this quote is read through lenses of Hegelian philosophy it seems that the world spirit had, in Douglass' observation descended from the unnamed "old nations" and is ready to embody the American republic which only obstacles is the slavery⁷⁷ and inequality. Here again it seems to me that Douglass' notion of mission of the US is in close relation to his peculiar vision of humanity realized in the American republic based on the Declaration of Independence. If one cannot with certainty say that Douglass' ideas reflected Hegel's thought, then we can with conviction detect the thinking of another classical political thinker. That thinker is Charles Montesquieu, who was most famous for the connection he found between geography and the character of the people on a given territory, their habits and most importantly their inclinations towards this or that political system.

In my reading the various strategies that are on the offer for the future of the African-Americans given by the thinkers I have taken into account, might have a deeper layer then the one that is immediately obvious. There are certain indicators, which the examined authors reveal about their understanding of what the African American identity actually consists of. There seems to exist a hierarchy of loyalties and identities that can be detected when we read the works of Delany, Crummell, Douglass and Du Bois. As I have thus far shown in Douglass' case, he places human identity of the Negro above the African one, he does not deny the African roots, but believes these will eventually blend in with all the other identities that are present in the American Union. For Delany and Crummell the African Americans are

⁷⁶ Douglass, Frederick. 1863. "The Present and the Future of the Colored Race in America", <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=777> (accessed: 7 May 2010).

⁷⁷ The quote is taken from an 1863. Speech in the middle of the civil war, when the slavery was the main focus of all the abolitionists and when the practice of the post civil war segregation was still unknown.

in the first place African, and only after that can they ‘become’ American, while Douglass sees the allegiance conversely. For both Crummell and Delany, “Blackness” or “African-ness” is what should motivate the African Americans to leave the United States in their attempt to establish their rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. For Delany they were marked and defined by their color in the sense that on the basis of baring it they could no longer live in the country, which had always denied their equal citizen rights. Therefore, in Delany’s understanding, they should find a new patria which will embrace them as their equal. Alternatively, they could establish a new patria for themselves in the similar way the Zionist movement wanted to establish the land for the Jewish people, and governed by the Jewish people. Delany was, however, very pragmatic, in the sense that he did not feel too much of a solidarity with the *Negros* of Africa or any other continent. Here another attitude of Delany’s is revealed. Based on his lack of interest for the non-US Africans, one can assume that he had the interest of specifically African-Americans in the first place. Unlike Crummell he was not concerned about other peoples of the African origin, not even about the Non-US former slaves of the American continent. Even more specifically, he was concerned about the elevation of those Negroes of the United States who were not in bondage, and was ready to sacrifice those who were still in slavery for the elevation of the freed ones.

Crummell’s ideas about African-ness are, in a sense, idealistic and somewhat universalistic. He believed that African Americans have an obligation for the continent of their forefathers. However, this obligation was extended in Crummell’s mind to all people with African roots. He wanted to see not only the former slaves of the US help Africa as the continent of the forefathers, but also the former slaves of Caribbean countries, Brazil and Latin America in the grand struggle of helping and evangelizing the African continent. In the case of Douglass, the African American-ness will get blurred and eventually entirely blend in the great family of humanity, in the borders of the United States, on the other side, in

Crummell's vision of the future, the African-Americans also will "lose" themselves, but in the African continent, just in the same way they will blend in Douglass' future American Nation. In Crummell's standpoint, as I perceived it, the African race is, in a way, a surrogate for humanity. He is concerned with the future of the Continent of the forefathers and in this where the work of the colored people should be invested as for Crummell it is their moral duty. When referring directly to Liberia, he does not address it as a permanent nation of the African American colonists, but rather a place from which this moral, social and economic revolution of the African continent could start from; not because it is a God given place, but because the conditions for establishing settlements there was easy in the period he was writing about. Common for both Crummell and Delany is the notion of African-ness in African-Americans is a given and more importantly defining mark of this people, given by God or nature. Their presumption is that this mark will always define African-Americans as people and that this mark will force them (or at least should motivate them) to find their future outside the rotten American Union. They could only find happiness among common fellow *Negros* whether they were in Africa or not, which is a moral duty for Crummell; or in Delany's case, somewhere in the American Continent, wherever the conditions are most advantageous.

It is more difficult to determine Du Bois' stance about the nature of the identity of the black folks. I am afraid that Du Bois' observations and visions had turned out to be the closest predictions regarding the future of the African Americans, at least until the mid 1960s. The racial segregation underpinned by the Jim Crow laws justified the *separate but equal* principle that has significantly slowed the "race blending" predicted by Douglass. After the swift emancipation of the slaves, the "betterment" and the implementation of equal citizen and human rights slowed for almost a whole century in the US. It is really striking how Du Bois wrote about the culture of crime that developed among the new poor urban

African-American population. How the lack of education perpetuates the crime and provides wrong models of behavior for the young *Negros*, and how in combination with lack of trust between the representatives of the governmental law and force it had made a cycle of perpetual reproduction of crime, lack of trust between the people and the state, and extensive use of police violence. Du Bois' description of "black" crime in the poor slums, as well as the lack of trust between the representatives of the government at the turn of the 20th century, amazingly resemble the picture in many modern day cities of the United State, such as Philadelphia, Baltimore or St. Louis and give a powerful explanation about the origins of their present state. I strongly believe that Du Bois was an integrationist, when it came to the question of the future of African Americans. He had, however, been deeply concerned about the nature of the discrimination they have been subjected to for whole of the history of their existence on the American continent. Du Bois had his own view about the African American identity that was quite distinct from both Douglass' on one side, and Crummell's and Delany's on the other. He acknowledged the special place of the African-American, and the complexity he faced in reconciling the two identities. This is why he had put so much emphasis on "double conciseness". For Du Bois this peculiar sensation was a constitutive element of the personal identity of every African American. He had praised it, and wanted neither of the two identities to be lost or overpowered by the other (unlike the other three thinkers I have been writing about). However, he thought that this richness is at the same time the greatest curse of the black folks. Du Bois saw the African-American as a tortured being "An American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two wearing ideals, in one dark body."⁷⁸ The African-American was, in Du Bois' eyes, a permanent orphan, being constantly pushed aside by its country and helplessly trying to integrate in it, with no skills, no property, no education and a weak and disoriented elite. The

⁷⁸ Du Bois, W.E.B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Pocket Books, p.7.

African American identity is one that is constantly struggling with the internal schizophrenic sensation from the day of birth. I do not think that Du Bois gave some transcendental meaning to color itself, in the sense that it has some inherent features. He was more concerned about the established social relations between races, and its reproduction in the future. The “color line” (as he referred to it) and the deepening of that line of segregation was the main problem of future. An African-American was for Du Bois unquestionably an American, but his main problem was that this truth had to be reiterated over and over again. With anger Du Bois writes: “Your country? How come it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here.”⁷⁹ Du Bois was very unhappy about this fact, and had appealed to the whites to bring the segregation to the end, so that the effects of the color line division could also be, if not undone, then at least marginalized. Observations made by W.E.B. Du Bois were the least optimistic descriptions of the state of affairs for the African Americans. In the end, it is his account that offered the closest insight to the future of a large part of the African American population. He was dealing with the roots of the problem that the modern day United States is still struggling with.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.252.

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