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W. E. B. Du Bois at the Grand Canyon: Nature, History, and Race in *Darkwater*

Introduction

While Booker T. Washington's autobiographies promote a racial uplift agenda through ecological agencies, W. E. B. Du Bois's *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (1920) cultivates an aesthetic project in his quest for integration. Du Bois's essay "Of Beauty and Death" appears as a culminating experimental effort near the end of *Darkwater*, his modernist text par excellence: a semiautobiographical callaloo of poems, essays, and short stories. "Of Beauty and Death" contains much of the biting social critique one would expect from the then-editor of the NAACP's *The Crisis*: depictions of black life behind the Veil, studies of whiteness, and applications of his theory of double consciousness. What come as a surprise, however, are its Thoreauvian thick descriptions of the Grand Canyon, the Rocky Mountains, and Maine's Acadia National Park. Romantic and social realist modes occupy the same page: lyrical accounts revering the "glory of physical nature" and "all the colors of the sea" are interspersed with anecdotes about his journey to the national parks in a train's Jim Crow car (1920: 174–5). Despite these themes, Kimberly K. Smith observes that "we don't read this essay as an expression of progressive environmentalism at all; we read it as a discourse on social justice" (2007: 2). Why, then, does Du Bois mix environmental, racial, and existential themes in this often overlooked essay? How is it that natural beauty gives rise to this combination of strident antiracist protest and an imported German romanticism?

Even more eclectic than its predecessor *The Souls of Black Folk*, *Darkwater* assembles poems, essays, and short stories into a fragmented work.¹ Du Bois's

method throughout is juxtaposition: he pushes the reader to make thematic and historical connections among the book's varied genres. Scholarly insights and emotional lyric exist side by side in *Darkwater*. For example, the essay "The Souls of White Folk" dissects the "discovery of personal whiteness among the world's peoples" as a "very modern thing" (1920: 21); it is then followed by the poem "The Riddle of the Sphinx," which seethes disgust at the "white world's vermin and filth" (1920: 39). Along with this formal experimentation, Du Bois brings to the parks the experience of double consciousness, or the "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" (1903: 9). In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he claims that this cognitive and affective doubling of the black self means that African-Americans are "gifted with second-sight in this American world," a way of seeing themselves and the country differently (1903: 9). Later, in his 1940 autobiography *Dusk of Dawn*, he speaks of a "double environment," a concept that merges double consciousness with "environment":

Not only do white men but also colored men forget the facts of the Negro's double environment. The Negro American has not only the white surrounding world, but usually, and touching him much more nearly and compellingly, is the environment furnished by his own colored group. (1940: 173)

African-Americans experience their own immediate environment as it is moated by the larger white environment. They experience environments doubly, as both white and black enfolded in one another. The concept of double consciousness can be augmented to include the psychic internalization of double environments.

Du Bois maps the disjunctive spaces of modernity and the double environments of the color line by engaging with the discourses of emergent environmentalist movements—a loose, mostly conservationist coalition that Roderick Frazier Nash dubs the "wilderness cult"—at the turn of the twentieth century (1967: 141). Writers, naturalists, and politicians such as Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and Roosevelt saw the federal government as protector of the nation's resources from unchecked profiteering and they campaigned for and secured the first national parks. Works such as Roosevelt's *The Wilderness*

Hunter (1893), Muir's *Our National Parks* (1901), and Pinchot's *The Fight for Conservation* (1910) came to embody an increasingly mainstream, white-dominated, and nationalistic environmentalist discourse. At the same time, many of these early environmentalists, particularly Roosevelt, deployed "nature" as an ideology meant to justify white supremacy, social Darwinism, and a cult of masculinity. While the mode of nature writing characteristic of Sierra Club founder John Muir contains exhaustive phenomenological detail, Du Bois's writing employs formal experimentation that gestures at a fragmented grasp of totality. For Du Bois, the sublimity of the Grand Canyon becomes an analog for the inaccessibility of the social totality.

Darkwater is significant for the literature of the civil rights and environmental movements because it bridges disparate histories and aesthetic modes. It developed out of two events that seem to belong separately to environmental history and African-American history: the passage of the 1916 National Parks Act and the Red Summer of 1919. The 1916 Act created the National Park Service and maneuvered into place the state apparatus needed to administer the nation's designated wilderness spaces, including the Grand Canyon (Merchant 2007: 151). The 1916 Act seemed to have caught the eye of the increasingly socialist Du Bois, for the power to administer the parks involved the massive and unprecedented expropriation of land away from private (and, perhaps unknown to Du Bois at the time, Native American) hands and into public control. Fueled by urban segregation, the bloody riots of the Red Summer ravaged the country's cities from May to September of 1919. For Du Bois, the riots were stoked in part by the unjust treatment of black soldiers during the First World War—a subject he analyzes and condemns throughout *Darkwater*. But the riots were also triggered by a drowning "accident" on a segregated Lake Michigan beach. Environmental historian Colin Fisher argues that the Chicago race riot reflected a longer struggle in the black community for access to public parks and other urban natural spaces (Fisher 2006: 63–76). In responding to these events, Du Bois racializes romantic modes of nature writing through the lens of double consciousness, double environments, and modernist aesthetics.

This chapter first explores the concept of wilderness in *The Souls of Black Folk* and Du Bois's 1904 "Credo," a short prayer-like piece he later reprinted as the opening of *Darkwater*. I then contextualize my reading of *Darkwater* by

examining the wilderness discourse of Muir, Roosevelt, and Pinchot, whose works came to dominate the conservationist movement that had arisen between Du Bois's writing of *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Darkwater*. In the next section, I show how Du Bois's explorations of the double environments of Jim Crow and national parks in *Darkwater* foreground practices of segregation across both natural and urban spaces. Such practices involve managing and controlling space in order to include or exclude racial groups—to enforce a color line of physical space and aesthetic experience. At the same time that he racializes the nature discourses of the conservationist movement, Du Bois also revises their tropes in his own *Crisis*-style critique of these segregating practices. Du Bois uses Colonel Charles Young as a figure who unites the spaces and histories of Jim Crow and conservation. Du Bois's patchwork of nature writing ends with portraits of urban nature—portraits that anticipate the Harlem Renaissance project of reimagining an American cultural nationalism. Du Bois rearranges the opposition between natural and urban spaces, substituting a more differentiated, heterogeneous sense of modern space.

Wilderness in *The Souls of Black Folk* and the 1904 “Credo”

The environmental themes in *Darkwater* appear less anomalous when placed in the context of Du Bois's literary and sociological work at the dawn of his scholarly career in the late-nineteenth century. Much of his late-nineteenth-century work analyzed the economic plight of southern black folk, most notably his 1893 University of Berlin doctoral thesis, “The Large and Small-Scale System of Agriculture in the Southern U.S., 1840–1890” (Lewis 1993: 143). Du Bois brings a scholar's eye to the same region Washington wrote about. While this early work shows a primary concern with race and economics, the material relations within and across environments—whether they be rural or urban, swamps or plantations, national or global—increasingly come to the fore.

The Souls of Black Folk combines historical, sociological, and economic insight with what Leo Marx would describe as a “complex pastoral” mode of representation.² In contrast to sentimental depictions of an unspoiled nature, the complex pastoral imagines a landscape inscribed with the traces of

modernization and, in Du Bois's case, the histories of slavery and Jim Crow (L. Marx 1964: 14–15). In the chapter “Of the Meaning of Progress,” for example, Du Bois recounts his two summers spent teaching in rural Tennessee, where he often “lingered to look at the blue and yellow mountains stretching toward the Carolinas” (1903: 49). This reverie is framed within a racial and social context: Du Bois was at the time a student at the all-black Fisk University and received his summer school training at a segregated teachers' institute. He characterizes his journey to dine with the white school commissioner's family as idyllic: the “sun laughed and the water jingled” as he walked through the woods. The idyll suddenly takes a wrong turn when he arrives and sits down to eat with the family: “even then fell the awful shadow of the Veil, for they ate first, then I—alone” (1903: 50). This complex-pastoral mode is mixed with the experience of double consciousness and double environment.

My foremost concern here is to sketch Du Bois's early, complex-pastoral figuration specifically of wilderness rather than a generalized environment in *The Souls of Black Folk*. This early figuration of wilderness previews the even more complex representation of race and nature in *Darkwater*. To understand wilderness in *The Souls of Black Folk*, it is important to contextualize it with other romantic discourses circulating about wilderness at the time. Du Bois's contemporary Roosevelt romanticized and politicized wilderness in his frontier memoir *The Wilderness Hunter*, published ten years before *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1893. Roosevelt is exemplary here because of his key role in the conservationist movement. Among his many accomplishments, he successfully lobbied for the Forest Reserve Act of 1891 and served as president of the Boone and Crockett Club, an influential conservation lobbying group, for six years (Cutright 1985: 182). As US president, he worked closely with Pinchot to establish the national parks and federal bureaus that managed forests and game. His many writings about his frontier sojourns helped him fashion a self- and public-image as an amateur naturalist and “wilderness warrior,” in Douglas Brinkley's words, which in turn motivated his conservationist policies. *The Wilderness Hunter* offers an account of the future president's hunting and ranching experiences in the Dakota Badlands—a “devil's wilderness”—during the last days of the Western frontier (Roosevelt 1893: 71). Environmental justice critic Mei Mei Evans contends that there is a close relation between wilderness and American cultural identity in popular

narratives like Roosevelt's: the "conception of wilderness or Nature in U. S. American popular culture is the site *par excellence* for (re)invention of the self" (2002: 182). Roosevelt's memoir, then, is an act of political self-invention, as he "finds" the essence of that political identity in the Dakotas, far removed from his comfortable New York lifestyle.

In *The Wilderness Hunter* Preface, Roosevelt begins by remarking that he spent much of his life "either in the wilderness or on the borders of the settled country" (1893: xxi). He goes on to paint his romanticized view of wilderness, linking it to nationalism, democracy, and masculinity:

In hunting, the finding and killing of the game is after all but a part of the whole. The free, self-reliant, adventurous life, with its rugged and stalwart democracy; the wild surroundings, the grand beauty of the scenery, the chance to study the ways and habits of the woodland creatures—all these unite to give to the career of the wilderness hunter its peculiar charm. The chase is among the best of all national pastimes; it cultivates that vigorous manliness for the lack of which in a nation, as in an individual, the possession of no other qualities can possibly atone. (1893: xxi)

For Roosevelt, wilderness is both "inside" and "outside" of civilization. On the one hand, removal from civilization forces him to cultivate the manly virtues of self-reliance and rugged individualism. On the other hand, this very removal "civilizes" or anthropomorphizes the wilderness as an ideal training ground for the hard-hitting political life that someone born into the comfortable and well-connected life of New York City's elite would need.

The rest of Roosevelt's memoir seldom refers back to civilized life, creating the effect of the solitary frontiersman in the Dakota territories and reflecting the disjunctive space of modern capitalism. Typifying the nature writing genre, he provides exhaustive phenomenological detail of the various species he encounters and hunts: blacktail and whitetail deer, prong-horn antelope, mountain sheep, white goat, caribou, round-horned elk, and moose. Interspersed with thrills of the chase are contemplative, pastoral moments, as when Roosevelt stops to listen to a mockingbird sing: "theme followed theme, a torrent of music, a swelling tide of harmony, in which scarcely any two bars were alike" (1893: 47). Moments of rapture like this one reveal a romantic sensibility at work or, in Leo Marx's lexicon, sentimental pastoralism. However,

political life creeps back into the text through analogy. For example, Roosevelt likens the teamwork required of ranchers in order to round up cattle to a “real and healthy democracy” (1893: 69).

The memoir concludes with a form of politicized wilderness hero-worship akin to the romanticism of Thomas Carlyle. Life in the wild is a “rugged and stalwart democracy; there every man stands for what he actually is” (1893: 161). He then lists a number of exemplary great men, American leaders who “sought strength and pleasure in the chase” and in the process discovered their essence: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and Henry Cabot Lodge (164–7). For the romantic Roosevelt, wilderness discloses the essence of great men; it helps realize a masculinized democracy and American nationalism, and lies at the core of American identity.

Du Boisian and Rooseveltian conceptions of wilderness cannot be reduced to opposing viewpoints, especially given *The Souls of Black Folk*’s ready use of a German romantic aesthetic and Herderian philosophy of the *Volk* in order to promote a black nationalism. Just as white America’s strength is drawn from nature in *The Wilderness Hunter*, so too is an emergent black nationalism drawn from the black folk’s connection to the southern soil in *The Souls of Black Folk*. To do this, Du Bois draws on the eighteenth-century *Sturm und Drang* rhetoric of early German romanticism, with a focus on the landscape as an objective correlative for the “storm and stress of human souls” (1903: 129). Similarly, Roosevelt valorizes frontier travel and hunting as correlates of the human spirit, in which rugged conditions dish out chicken soup for the sportsman’s soul: “[n]o man who, for his good fortune, has at times in his life endured trial and hardship, ever fails to appreciate the strong elemental pleasures of rest after labor, food after hunger, warmth and shelter after bitter cold” (1893: 57). Placed in its context, Roosevelt here plays the role of the white, European frontiersman “going native.”

However, despite their shared romanticism, Du Bois and Roosevelt also work within divergent traditions of American and African-American wilderness thinking and imagery. Where Roosevelt sees the wilderness as a proving ground for a future great leader, Du Bois works within an African-American tradition that sees wilderness more ambivalently as both a refuge and a difficult spiritual trial for downtrodden black masses. In his study of

metaphorical geography and identity, Melvin K. Dixon argues that spatial metaphors of mountaintops, wilderness, and the underground, structure a figural as well as often literal topography of an African-American quest for selfhood. Such metaphors create “alternative landscapes where black culture can flourish apart from any marginal, prescribed ‘place’” (1987: 2). During slavery, wilderness takes on special symbolic status as a pathway to freedom and a space of flight from the plantation zone, as dramatized in the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Henry Bibb (1987: 26).

The slave song “Go in de Wilderness,” published in an 1867 collection, combines many of the themes seen in the various “Sorrow Songs” Du Bois analyzes toward the end of *The Souls of Black Folk*:

I found free grace in de wilderness,
in de wilderness, in de wilderness,
I found free grace in de wilderness
For I’m a-going home. (qtd. in Dixon 1987: 18)

The wilderness offers a spiritual and physical alternative to the plantation, an oppressive pastoralized space cultivated and “conquered” by slave labor. Du Bois generalizes that in slave songs the “‘Wilderness’ was the home of God” (1903: 82). The wilderness here, as in the trials of biblical figures, is also a space that both tests the individual and, through this test, offers the possibility of salvation and refuge.

For Du Bois, laboring and pastoralizing the American wilderness is one of the “gifts” of black folk to the country’s early formation. In the context of arguing for the integration of a black nation into the nation as a whole, Du Bois observes that slaves have, in an “ill-harmonized and unmelodious land,” given their “sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire” (1903: 187). In *The Gift of Black Folk*, he would later reiterate the role of black labor in taming the American wilderness and modernizing the “new world”: the “black man was the pioneer in the hard physical work which began the reduction of the American wilderness” (1924: 13). For Du Bois, conquering the wilderness becomes the occasion for locating a black nationalism at the forefront of an American nationalism and expansionism. Much like it did for Washington, this black environmental reconstruction turns the alienated

labor of slavery into a case for the kinship between African-Americans and nature, and thus to the kind of American national identity advocated by Roosevelt.

While the “Forethought” of *The Souls of Black Folk* draws the bulk of critical attention for famously announcing the problem of the twentieth century as the “problem of the color-line” and for introducing the concept-metaphor of “the Veil,” the single-paragraph “Afterthought” employs a new concept-metaphor: the “world-wilderness” (1903: 189). This metaphor becomes important from an ecological perspective and for understanding some of *Darkwater*’s environmental themes. Additionally, Du Bois thought the concept-metaphor significant enough to decide to conclude the book with it. The concept also helps to frame the color and ecological lines as more than a national problem, as well as to preview the transnational turn of *Darkwater*. “World-wilderness” appears in the context of an apostrophe to the reader and a prayer to “God the Reader.” The whole “Afterthought” also employs an extended nature metaphor that invokes a menacing atmosphere indicative of a complex-pastoral aesthetic mode:

Hear my cry, O God the Reader; vouchsafe that this my book fall not still-born into the world-wilderness. Let there spring, Gentle One, from out its leaves vigor of thought and thoughtful deed to reap the harvest wonderful. (Let the ears of a guilty people tingle with truth, and seventy millions sigh for the righteousness which exalteth nations, in this drear day when human brotherhood is mockery and a snare.) Thus in Thy good time may infinite reason turn the tangle straight, and these crooked marks on a fragile leaf be not indeed. (1903: 189)

In the context of the extended metaphor, “world-wilderness” refers to the world of print culture and an international readership. These “crooked marks” (writing) on a “fragile leaf” (the book’s pages) pun on the materiality of the book—it is as though the book starts to spring to life in the reader’s hands in an instance of the trope of the talking book. But the metaphor “leaf” suggests the material origin of books in wood pulp, in trees, and thus in nature and out of the soil. The wilderness here pointedly suggests hostility, for the book is like the infant Oedipus abandoned to the wild. But it also suggests the world-wilderness as a space of trial for the souls of black folk.

The year after publishing *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois's "Credo," a short prayer-like work he would later choose and leave mostly unchanged for the opening of *Darkwater*, appeared on a single page in an October 1904 issue of the *Independent*. Though it does not mention "wilderness," it includes pastoral and racial themes that help to bridge *The Souls of Black Folk* to *Darkwater*. The "Credo" professes a series of beliefs: in God, in the "Negro Race," in "humble, reverent service," in the "Prince of Peace," and in the "Training of Children" (1904: 787). Like so much of the work produced by African-American writers at the time, "Credo" appears doubly coded for white and black: white audiences would read expressions of Christian piety, whereas black audiences would read a profession of racial pride and spiritual uplift. "Credo" enjoyed immense popularity, suggesting that its racial, religious, and pastoral themes must have touched the pulse of the country's black masses. It was reprinted throughout the black press, and a member of Du Bois's short-lived but significant Niagara Movement read it aloud at the group's second meeting (Lewis 1993: 12; 328–9). When it was published again in *Darkwater*, which sold well to the working class and Talented Tenth African-Americans alike, families across the nation hung it on their walls (Lewis 1993: 312–13).

"Credo" strategically muddles black nationalism with a mainstream American nationalism. Echoing the religious and egalitarian sentiments expressed in the Preamble to the US Constitution as well as the Catholic "Apostles' Creed," Du Bois begins: "I believe in God, who made of one blood all races that on earth do dwell" (1904: 787). He changes "races" to "nations" in the *Darkwater* version, reflecting again the book's globalist turn. About halfway through the Credo, Du Bois condemns the "scramble for Africa": "I believe that the wicked conquest of weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger but foreshadows the death of that strength" (1904: 787). Careful to distinguish his more German-romantic religious vision from Washington's pragmatism, Du Bois exhorts the races / nations to strive for the "possibility of infinite development" (1904: 787). Listing "black and brown and white" races, he singles out the exceptional potential of the "Negro Race": he believes in the "beauty of its genius, the sweetness of its soul, and its strength in that meekness which shall yet inherit this turbulent earth"

(1904: 787). In a preview of Du Bois's later, more explicit brand of socialism, labor serves as the great equalizer and builder of interracial solidarity, for there is "no distinction between the black, sweating cotton hands of Georgia and the first families of Virginia" (1904: 787).

Along with black nationalism and an expressed belief in a possibly Christian deity, free movement within national space is a central motif of the "Credo." Du Bois believes that everyone should have the "space to stretch their arms and their souls; the right to breathe and the right to vote" and to "enjoy the sunshine and ride on the railroads"—freedoms that can only be fully realized through desegregation. Under the category of "Training of Children" in the Credo's penultimate paragraph, Du Bois champions a pastoral pedagogy, advocating that "little souls" be led out into the "green pastures and beside the still waters, not for pelf or peace, but for life lit by some large vision of beauty and goodness and truth" (1904: 787). The distinction between venturing out into the wilderness not for "pelf or peace" but for "life lit" by the good, the true, and the beautiful challenges the popular, contemporaneous view of nature as a relaxing retreat for nerve-wracked, white bourgeois urbanites. This pastoral scene appears to reconcile racial conflict, as black and white children enjoy an idyll in the country. It also echoes the idea of nature as training ground in Washington's *Working with the Hands* and Roosevelt's *The Wilderness Hunter*. Nature for Du Bois is not an upper-class white playground but a space where sublime and existential truths are revealed. In Du Bois's early work, he sets up a discourse of nature and wilderness that parallels those of other writers such as Roosevelt. For Roosevelt in *The Wilderness Hunter*, the wilderness is a proving ground where he shapes his political identity. For Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, wilderness is filtered through both his Germanromantic sensibility and his invocation of wilderness tropes in Negro spirituals, or "Sorrow Songs." His writing is a version of complex pastoral: he frames nature and wilderness tropes within a larger social critique of racism and the experience of double environments. "Credo" extends this complex pastoral, linking travel and free movement to the experience of the overall national space. In this way, he sets up an African-American counter-discourse about wilderness that becomes more evident and fully developed in *Darkwater*.

National Parks and Race: John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and the Grand Canyon

By the time Du Bois wrote *Darkwater*, the wilderness preservationists had been fighting for the establishment of national parks for decades. The recognition of the Grand Canyon as a national park in 1919 marks a symbolic culmination of this history of the struggle to preserve supposedly pristine natural spaces. In the dominant reading of this history, preservationists such as Sierra Club founder John Muir saw this push as a noble resistance to the expansion of eastern capital set on consuming the nation's natural resources. Against this reading of the history of the parks, Richard Grusin, borrowing a notion from nineteenth-century landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead, argues that the formation of the parks functioned as part of a national project of "postbellum reunification"—an attempt to unify the country geographically and culturally after the North/South division of the Civil War (2004: 23). The way people experienced wilderness and the national parks at the time depended largely on the discursive frames of writers such as Roosevelt, Muir, and Pinchot. Works such as Muir's *Our National Parks* and Pinchot's *The Fight for Conservation* helped shape the parks as aesthetic, political, and cultural constructions—constructions that Du Bois challenges with his own reconstruction. As the myth of the frontier ebbed, their rhetoric sought what Terry Gifford calls a "rediscovery" of the western frontier as an "essentially inner experience," though access to this "inner experience" would for a while only be available to wealthy white tourists (2006: 19). These works also codify and popularize the dominant environmentalist discourse that Du Bois critiques and reframes in *Darkwater*.

Conservationists such as Pinchot advocated the "wise use" of natural resources, while preservationists such as Muir were more romantic in outlook, calling for large wilderness areas to be set aside, unused, and uninhabited (Nash 1967: 129). Beginning in the 1870s, Muir began publicizing the beauty of places such as Yosemite Valley in magazines such as *Century Magazine* and *Harper's* and in a number of bestselling books (Gifford 2006: 29; 39). His *Our National Parks* celebrates and commodifies various national parks, emphasizing their aesthetic attraction to wealthy easterners and centering on

Yosemite, Yellowstone, Sequoia, and General Grant National Parks. Muir's passages celebrating the Grand Canyon (not yet a national park) helped sell the idea of the park to the federal government and to tourists: "so incomparably lovely and grand and supreme is it above all other cañons in our fire-moulded, earthquake-shaken, rain-washed, wave-washed, river and glacier sculptured world" (1901: 35–6). He repeatedly stresses the canyon's transcendence and otherworldliness: "as unearthly in the color and grandeur and quantity of its architecture, as if you had found it after death, on some other star" (1901: 35). With the "you" directed at the tourist-reader, Muir functions as a sort of guide who will lead the visitor to the romantic sublime. *Our National Parks* is full of descriptions like these, framing these wilderness spaces as singular, sublime, sacred, and almost entirely devoid of any sign of civilization.

Though he does champion the public good over private profit, Muir's writing also participates in a discourse of enclosure that assumes a division between culture and nature—a division that Du Bois implicitly challenges as racially codified. Outka chronicles Muir's latent racism, arguing that his account of the western frontier "traces the process of forgetting the explicitly racialized geography of the east and south" (2008: 156). Muir's project continues the postbellum reunification that, Outka argues, sought to repress the national trauma of slavery and the Civil War. Despite such repression and even as they espouse the interconnectedness of all things, Muir's writings reflect a Jim Crow mentality of segregation. Though not explicitly stated, Muir's target audience is clearly white, city-dwelling bourgeois easterners: "[a]wakening from the stupefying effects of the vice of over-industry and the deadly apathy of luxury, they as do best they can to mix and enrich their own little ongoings with those of Nature, and to get rid of rust and disease" (1901: 1). This appeal is a strategic attempt to translate Muir's own values into the utilitarianism of the urban-dweller and to advertise the parks to potential tourists. This passage also reflects white male fears of, as Nash puts it, "over-civilization" that could lead to a national crisis of masculinity and the degeneration of the white race (1967: 152). Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell, the editor of *Forest and Stream*, would say in a coauthored 1893 publication laying out the principles of the Boone and Crocket Club that without the manly virtues cultivated in the wilderness "no race can do its life work well" (qtd. in

Nash 1967: 152–3). The solution to the feminizing force of modernity would be a return to a primitive condition, in which the cure is, as Muir famously said, to “go home” to nature: “going to the mountains is going home.”

Muir more directly manifests his racism in his attitude toward Native Americans. In *Our National Parks*, a racially charged moment occurs when he describes his visit to Alaska. While studying the various Alaskan plant and animal species, he encounters a group of Inuit and proceeds to compare them with animals: “men, women, and children, loose and hairy like wild animals” (1901: 9). He objectifies them and places them in a picturesque landscape: a “lively picture they made, and a pleasant one” (1901: 10). Elsewhere, he describes Yosemite’s Native Americans as “lazy” and reassures those white tourists who might fear that the park harbors hostility: “As to Indians, most of them are dead or civilized into useless innocence” (1901: 193; 28). Merchant also charts examples of Muir’s racism toward Native Americans, citing numerous cases where Muir characterizes Indians as “dark and dirty” contaminants in his vision of a human-free wilderness (Merchant 2003: 382). These are not “gotcha” racist moments incidental to Muir’s nature writing, but rather evidence of his participation in a discourse of enclosure and segregation between culture and nature that had larger material and historical effects.

This conservationist discourse of enclosure helped create the cultural environment that would validate the removal of Native Americans from these wilderness areas. In the case of the Grand Canyon, there was a decades-long struggle between the Havasupai tribe and the federal government over control of the land and resources. According to historian Karl Jacoby, Native American experiences from Wisconsin and Michigan to Minnesota and Colorado reveal that “Indian peoples offered a powerful collective dissent from the official mores of conservation” (2001: 150–51). For the Havasupai, conservation merely continued a history of conquest over their land and resources. In 1893, President Benjamin Harrison issued an executive order to create the Grand Canyon Forest Reserve, federalizing tribal hunting land and turning the Havasupai into a “solitary island in a sea of conservation land” (Jacoby 2001: 165). The final designation of the Grand Canyon as a national park led to the construction of ranger stations, warehouses, mess halls, administration buildings, roads, and trails along the canyon’s rim. Ironically, many of the Havasupai were employed as wage laborers for these various construction

projects (Jacoby 2001: 187–8). The Havasupai experienced the park’s establishment as a “narrative of loss” rather than national gain (Jacoby 2001: 149).

While Native Americans make occasional appearances across Muir’s oeuvre, African-Americans appear mainly in the posthumously published *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*.³ As “natural” objects Muir encounters on his wilderness journeys, African-Americans are sentimentalized from within an equally sentimental view of nature as a passive landscape painting put there for the white gaze to behold. Like the naïve and cheery Captain Delano of Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno*, Muir cannot imagine black agency or culture. Stumbling across some playful black children in Florida, Muir concludes that they do not live “in harmony with Nature,” for “[b]irds make nests and nearly all beasts make some kind of bed for their young; but these negroes allow their younglings to lie nestless and naked in the dirt” (1916: 107). Paradoxically, African-Americans are both discordant with nature and “beasts” segregated into it—they are *in* nature but not *of* it. “Harmony” with nature, it seems, is best achieved by a well-traveled, white naturalist like Muir himself. This culture–nature opposition clears the ground for a pernicious white supremacy that sees African-Americans as less than animals, for at least birds know how to make shelter.

Muir’s much-maligned contemporary Gifford Pinchot held more controversial views about the relation between the social and natural worlds. His views build a sort of bridge between Muir and Du Bois. Much of Pinchot’s negative reputation originates in the Hetch Hetchy Valley Dam controversy, when he approved the construction of a dam in the Yosemite National Park (1967: 161). But Pinchot combined his national park and wise-use advocacy with a strong, progressive stance on issues of social and economic justice—issues that merge in his nationalist rhetoric of domestication. His conservation manifesto *The Fight for Conservation* is strewn with metaphors of domesticating wilderness for the nation: the “nation that will lead the world will be a Nation of Homes. The object of the great Conservation movement is just this, to make our country a permanent and prosperous home for ourselves and for our children” (1910: 23). Functioning both as an agent of westward expansion and an idea to rally against, Pinchot argues that the profit-motive was also at work in this westward expansion and enclosure. He saw an opposition between narrowly defined profit and the public good, seeing conservation as

a way of protecting people (and nature) from the powerful interests of the captains of industry and their “great concentrations of capital” (Pinchot 1910: 26). Rather than repudiate the profit-motive altogether, he sought to redefine it in democratic and quasi-socialist terms: “natural resources must be developed and preserved for the benefit of the many, and not merely for the profit of a few” (1910: 46–50). Pinchot’s redefined notion of profit and attempt to synthesize conservation with cultural and economic demands offers a philosophical bridge between conservation and Du Bois.

Du Bois at the Grand Cañon: “Of Beauty and Death” and the Sublime

The Grand Canyon passage in “Of Beauty and Death” paints the park as sublime, while at the same time drawing on the racialized, complex pastoralism and double environments found in *The Souls of Black Folk* and other parts of *Darkwater*. That Du Bois (or any black writer for that matter) writes about the parks at all is significant in 1920, given the perceived lack of African-American interest in wilderness spaces. This passage also challenges Outka’s white sublime / black trauma opposition, revealing a tradition of African-American writing on the natural sublime that will be further explored in later chapters. By representing the Grand Canyon or “Grand Cañon” (Du Bois uses the Spanish name), Du Bois engages in the American cultural nationalism of representing the parks, but he rejects Olmsted’s project of postbellum reunification. Rather than conceal the trauma of civil war, Du Bois seeks to denaturalize segregation and naturalize integration in defiance of Jim Crow and early environmentalist discourse.

The Grand Cañon passage gains much of its implied meaning through the essay’s overall context. The essay’s experimental form redefines and widens the scope of conventional nature writing with a modernist aesthetic of juxtaposition. In the essay, Du Bois actually visits both the Grand Canyon National Park and Maine’s Acadia National Park, where he marvels at the “glory of physical nature,” though he describes the cañon in greater detail (1920: 174). Beginning early on with the essay’s fourth fragment, the Acadia section previews what is to come and establishes the centrality of the national

parks to the essay's themes. With careful attention to place names, Du Bois describes Bar Harbor, Mount Desert, and Frenchman's Bay off the coast of Maine, where he admires the variety of intermingling colors: "white, gray, and inken" clouds, a "shadowy velvet" that "veiled the mountain," the sea's "gray and yellowing greens and doubtful blues, blacks not quite black, tinted silvers and golds and dreaming whites" (1920: 174–5). This motif of integrated colors in nature will become even more evident in the later Grand Canyon section. Evoking a key concept-metaphor from *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois repeatedly puns on "veil," for nature is continually veiling and unveiling itself: "[b]efore the unveiled face of nature as it lies naked on the Maine coast, rises a certain human awe" (1920: 175). This unveiled space offers Du Bois a respite from the social world, someplace where he can rejuvenate and where, echoing Muir, "in the tired days of life men should come and worship here and renew their spirit" (1920: 175).

The Grand Canyon section is sandwiched between a tale of segregation in the military during the Great War and a number of fragments critiquing Jim Crow. Earlier in the essay, Du Bois explicitly characterizes his overall method as "juxtaposition" in order to "compare the least of the world's beauty with the least of its ugliness—not murder, starvation, and rapine, with love and friendship and creation—but the glory of sea and sky and city, with the little hatefulnesses and thoughtlessnesses of race prejudice" (1920: 174). Juxtaposition shows that the "truth" of the ugliness of Jim Crow and the beauty of the national parks (or natural beauty in general) exist in the same world: "[t]here is not in the world a more disgraceful denial of human brotherhood than the 'Jim-Crow' car of the southern United States; but, too, just as true, there is nothing more beautiful in the universe than sunset and moonlight on Montego Bay in far Jamaica" (1920: 177). Further juxtapositions of about twenty separate fragments make "Of Beauty and Death" into a sort of montage capable of producing unexpected connections and third meanings similar to the later dialectical montage of 1920s Soviet cinematic style of Sergei Eisenstein. It can produce meanings and associations that would usually escape the intentional control of the author, allowing a textual unconscious to run wild. Rather than writing a philosophical tract, Du Bois hopes that "out of such juxtaposition we may, perhaps, deduce some rule of beauty and life—or death?" (1920: 174). The logic of juxtaposition defies the Aristotelian

sylllogism, for it seeks to deduce underlying truths about the social totality by means of aesthetic accident instead of philosophical deliberation.⁴

The Grand Canyon passage must be placed in the context of the passage immediately preceding it, where Du Bois describes a conversation with a multiracial group of friends. He draws an analogy to colors mingling in nature: “[a]round me sat color in human flesh—brown that crimsoned readily; dim soft-yellow that escaped description; cream-like duskiness that shadowed to rich tints of autumn leaves” (1920: 176). A white companion suggests that the group travel for recreation, but the “thought of a journey seemed to depress” the others at the table (1920: 176). An unnamed black friend (who could be Du Bois himself) then gives an account of the arduous process of traveling by train. Petty Jim Crow “thoughtlessnesses” harass the black passenger before she has even boarded the train: “to buy a ticket is torture; you stand and stand and wait and wait until every white person at the ‘other window’ is waited on” (1920: 176). After dealing with the agent’s racially motivated contempt, the black passenger must then ride in the segregated Jim Crow car:

Usually there is no step to help you climb on and often the car is a smoker cut in two and you must pass through the white smokers or else they pass through your part, with swagger and noise and stares. Your compartment is a half or a quarter or an eighth of the oldest car in service on the road . . . The white train crew from the baggage car uses the “Jim-Crow” to lounge in and perform their toilet. The conductor appropriates two seats for himself and his papers and yells gruffly for your tickets before the train has scarcely started . . . As for toilet rooms,—don’t! (1920: 176–7)

National park enthusiasts extolled the virtues of visits to wilderness spaces as a rejuvenating escape from the claustrophobia of the cities, yet the punishing ride in a Jim Crow car undermines this particular value of the parks—or specifically the journey to the parks—for African- Americans. Du Bois exposes park tourism as not just bourgeois escape, but also an activity of white privilege. Railroad companies themselves possessed a huge economic stake in establishing the parks for tourism, prospecting for new vistas as one would for gold. Railroad companies such as Northern Pacific, for example, lobbied for the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872. They and others

in the tourism industry sought to make the national parks, in Grusin's words, an "idealized commodity" for tourists as well as armchair tourists eager to consume verbal and visual representations such as those of Muir and landscape painter Thomas Moran (2004: 12). In helping to commodify and promote the parks, the railroad companies also succeeded in expanding their Jim Crow policies westward. To be sure, the reasons Du Bois gives for visiting the parks are similar to Muir's: bourgeois exhaustion with urban life and war. He affirms, too, that actually being in the national parks can offer African-Americans temporary respite from racism. But Du Bois asks a question about the infrequency of visitors to these places, which leads him directly to issues of race: "[w]hy do not those who are scarred in the world's battle and hurt by its hardness travel to these places of beauty and drown themselves in the utter joy of life?" (1920: 176). Whatever their value as escape for Du Bois, getting to the parks requires disposable incomes and navigation of the Jim Crow gauntlet—petty, everyday intrusions when set next to the grandeur of the Grand Canyon.

The travel passage that follows this description of a Jim Crow car offers an unusual moment in Du Bois's prolific corpus. It begins by charting Du Bois's "great journey" that spans "over seven thousand mighty miles" across the United States (1920: 182).⁵ He begins with the fairy-tale opening "Once upon a time," which suggests this journey is somewhat imaginary—a fantasy confabulated to illustrate his form of social protest (1920: 182). Traveling through deserts, mountains, and cities, he visits, among other places, the Rocky Mountains, "the empire of Texas," and finally the Grand Canyon (1920: 182). He also intersperses visits to cities on this trip: Seattle, Kansas City, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Manhattan. The journey, then, is diverse and sweeping both in its geographical and environmental range, for Du Bois moves from the most natural spaces to the most built and human-centered environments. In its inventorial geography marked by the essay's fragmentary, elliptical prose, the journey also invokes the close relation between natural resources and nationalism in conservationist discourse. In *The Wilderness Hunter*, for example, Roosevelt performs a similar inventory of the country's earthly gifts, naming places, regions, and animal species: the Atlantic Coast, the Mississippi Valley, "magnificent hardwood forest[s]," "fertile prairies," "tepid swamps" that "teem with reptile life," Texas, the Rocky Mountains,

the “strangely shaped and colored Bad Lands” (1893: 1–11). Contrary to Du Bois, Roosevelt does not list any cities, showing the latter’s sense of a distinct separation between natural and built environments. By intertwining such seemingly disparate and opposed spaces, Du Bois forces us to compare them according to the logic of double consciousness and double environments.

In contrast to the more static natural beauty of Acadia, Du Bois represents the Grand Canyon as a sublime landscape that is dynamic and even somewhat menacing. This representation of the canyon as sublime follows in a long tradition of nature writing about the southwestern desert region. Grusin observes that from its initial exploration in 1869 to 1919, the Grand Canyon has been troped as “cognitively inaccessible” and the “preservation of this inaccessibility is critical to the establishment and continued attraction” of the park (2004: 103). Here, Du Bois’s writing typifies both representations of the canyon and the ambivalence toward wilderness found in African-American slave narratives and sorrow songs. The tradition of black wilderness ambivalence that emerged in *The Souls of Black Folk* reaches its apotheosis in *Darkwater*. The Grand Canyon, then, is the perfect landscape for a meeting between African-American ambivalence and sublime representations of nature.

Such ambivalence toward the canyon follows the same structural logic between the human observer and nature found in Kant’s theory of the sublime. According to the *Critique of Judgment*, the sense of the sublime differs from beauty: the “beautiful in nature relates to the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form” (1793: 306). For Kant, natural beauty “conveys a finality in its form” and suggests a systematic ordering even if the whole cannot be comprehended by the observer (1793: 307–8). Du Bois’s visit to Acadia exemplifies the beauty both in Kant’s sense and in the title “Of Beauty and Death.” Du Bois claims, following Kant, that beauty has a certain completeness to it: “for beauty by its very being and definition has in each definition its ends and limits” (1920: 190). In contrast to beauty, the sublime provokes an “image of *limitlessness*, yet with a super-added thought of its totality” (Kant 1793: 306). The sublime is nature as excess, as a break from form and systematic ordering that produces a “negative pleasure” in the subject, who is, ambivalently, “alternately repelled” and attracted to the sublime object (Kant 1793: 307).

The ambivalence built into the experience of the sublime suggests that it has more to do with culture than with nature, with subjective feeling than the perceived thing-in-itself. In Spivak's reading of the Kantian sublime, the subject's "feeling for nature" operates according to a metalepsis, a substitution of effect for cause (in this case, of nature for culture) (1793: 11). For Kant, sublime feeling is the result of receptivity to aesthetic experience that must be cultivated, for it is the "attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the image of nature" (Kant 1793: 308). Spivak argues that because the sublime depends on the subject's cultivated sensibility, it is a cultural aptitude belonging, by way of implication, to the enlightened, European subject. This aesthetic capacity is important in the Kantian philosophical system because, in addition, it reveals the capacity for freedom, which for Kant is also the capacity to make ethical choices and to be fully human. Opposed to the cultured European, Spivak argues, is the "man in raw," who corresponds to the "savage," or, adjusted for the context of the Jim Crow era, African-Americans. Pseudo-scientific studies such as Charles Carroll's *The Mystery Solved: The Negro a Beast* (1900), novels such as Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1908), and D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) consistently portray African-Americans as animalistic, uncultured raw men (1993: 276). As shown earlier, Muir portrays the black children in Florida as incapable of aesthetically (and spiritually) experiencing the nature around them. For Kant, Spivak goes on, the raw man experiences the sublime as "*Abgrund*-affect," as terror before an abyss (1999: 26).

Pushing back against these popular portrayals, Du Bois offers a decidedly "cultured" experience of the canyon. He begins his sublime portrait with a Miltonic trope of the wounded, feminized earth: "[i]t is a sudden void in the bosom of earth, down to its entrails—a wound where the dull titanic knife has turned and twisted in the hole" (1920: 182–3). The "sudden" appearance of the "void" mimics or attempts to recover the affective response of the first discoverers of the Canyon. The sublime, expressed as an act of phallic violence inflicted on the earth, functions as a strategy to recuperate and represent an authentic encounter with nature. Given its context in the essay, the image also suggests the trauma of racial violence. Du Bois then moves on to describe the colors of the Canyon—a tactic he uses throughout the essay to contrast the fluid mingling of colors in nature with the social rigidity of the

color-line problem. The Grand Canyon “hole” leftover from the knife leaves the anthropomorphized canyon’s “edges livid, scarred, jagged, and pulsing over the white, and red, and purple of its mighty flesh” (1920: 183). The landscape of the canyon is like an inverted mountain, drawing its sublime power from the radical uniqueness—the seeming unnaturalness of the canyon itself. “It is awful,” writes Du Bois, and because it appears as nature violently attacking herself (in reality, the “slow violence” of the Colorado River), “[t] here can be nothing like it. It is the earth and sky gone stark and raving mad. The mountains up-twirled, disbodied and inverted, stand on their peaks and throw their bowels to the sky. Their earth is air; their ether blood-red rock engreened. You stand upon their roots and fall into their pinnacles, a mighty mile” (1920: 183). Here, Du Bois gives us a black experience of the sublime.

Du Bois goes on in a mode of fervent questioning and Old Testament bombast, adopting rhetoric similar that of Muir’s almost twenty years before:

Behold this mauve and purple mocking of time and space! See yonder peak! No human foot has trod it. Into that blue shadow only the eye of God has looked. Listen to the accents of that gorge which mutters: “Before Abraham was, I am.” Is yonder wall a hedge of black or is it the rampart between heaven and hell? I see greens,—is it moss or giant pines? I see specks that may be boulders. Ever the winds sigh and drop into those sun-swept silences. Ever the gorge lies motionless, unmoved, until I fear. It is a grim thing, unholy, terrible! It is human—some mighty drama unseen, unheard, is playing there its tragedies or mocking comedy, and the laugh of endless years is shrieking onward from peak to peak, unheard, unechoed, and unknown. (1920: 183)

The repetition of “ever” and “mocking of time and space” suggests the canyon’s seeming eternity, created long before humans—before Abraham—ever existed. The sublime comes close to what Kant calls the “horrible,” an ambiguous variant on the sublime that closely resembles his youthful definition of the “dynamic sublime” or “terrifying sublime” in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764). Because, for example, a storm-wracked sea can present imminent danger to the viewer, it is “horrible,” unless one has cultivated the subjective feelings capable of receiving it (Kant 1793: 308). The landscape gains some of its horror through the simultaneous absence of human presence—“No human foot has trod it”—and the canyon’s uncanny

anthropomorphism. This simultaneity makes the canyon a human-like alien, capable of the same or even greater acts of violence similar to those perpetrated by humans overseas in war-torn Europe or the 1919 race riots. By the measure of typical ecocritical litmus tests, such blatant anthropomorphism may undermine the possibility of a more ecocentric perspective in Du Bois's work. In this case, however, anthropomorphism functions more as rhetorical strategy than evidence of insensitivity to the landscape's alterity. Personifying the canyon as a "mighty drama" brings it closer to the social world, just as the natural colors—"mauve," "purple," "blue shadow," "greens"—evoke the problem of the color line. The gorge thus becomes a symbol of racial integration.

A series of short meditations on the African-American experience in Europe during the Great War immediately follows the Grand Canyon passage. Du Bois begins with an idyllic description of everyday race relations in Paris. Enjoying an evening out among "civilized folk," Du Bois feels thankful for the absence of the "hateful, murderous, dirty Thing which in American we call 'Nigger-hatred'" in the evening's "community of kindred souls" (1920: 184). The black intellectual's cultivated sensitivity to the natural sublime—expressed in the Grand Canyon reverie—manifests itself in a European social context as a "reverence for the Thought" that transcends the "commonplaces" of race (1920: 184). Through juxtaposition, Du Bois implies that the only escape from white America's racism is either into the bourgeois playground of the national parks or Europe. Set against the spirit of Roosevelt's nationalist "democracy" of American wilderness is Du Bois's exhortation to African-Americans: "[f]ellow blacks, we must join the democracy of Europe" (1920: 165).

Parisian intellectual life, however, is no paradise: the cityscape bears the traces of the war, itself a product of European colonialism turned against itself, as Du Bois argues in "The Souls of White Folk." The next fragment describes a haunting image of invasion: "[t]hrough [Paris's] streets—its narrow, winding streets, old and low and dark, carven and quaint,—poured thousands upon thousands of strange feet of khaki-clad foreigners" (1920: 185). The sublime feelings induced by the Grand Canyon transform into the terror of the cityscape. The streets are "feverish, crowded, nervous, hurried; full of uniforms and mourning bands, with cafes closed at 9:30" (1920: 186). In Du Bois's view, France is saved by black American soldiers drawn from every

part of the United States. Ironically for Du Bois, the war affords African-Americans the opportunity to travel to Europe and witness its democracy. If Paris and the Grand Canyon can be seen as urban and natural democracies of color, then they are hard fought and hard won, for both mix “beauty and death.” By juxtaposing this social expression of racial community in Paris with nature’s mixing of colors at the Grand Canyon, Du Bois continues to naturalize desegregation and transnationalize a vision of democracy across the color line.

Actually being in the national parks can only offer African-Americans a temporary respite from racism. The reasons Du Bois gives for visiting the parks are similar to Muir’s: bourgeois exhaustion with urban life and war. But he asks a question about the infrequency of visitors to these places, which leads him directly to issues of race: “[w]hy do not those who are scarred in the world’s battle and hurt by its hardness travel to these places of beauty and drown themselves in the utter joy of life?” (1920: 176). Whatever their value as escape for Du Bois, getting to the parks requires the navigation of many obstacles set by Jim Crow—petty, everyday intrusions when set next to the grandeur of the Great War and black soldiers sacrificing their lives for France.

By intertwining the Grand Canyon with Jim Crow in these fragments, Du Bois strategically subverts the racialism of Kantian and conservationist discourses. He demonstrates not only an African-American aptitude for the aesthetic experience of nature, but also its superiority to a form of nature writing that erases signs of the social world. That Du Bois, or any African-American, proves capable of writing about nature so eloquently makes his nature writing an act of social protest. Unexpectedly, it is the experience of racism, which would seem to (and indeed threaten to) foreclose this aptitude in the first place that bestows the advantage of second-sight and a challenge to discourses of segregation. The black subject’s second-sight saves her from the white bourgeois tourist’s commodified experience of nature.

A few years later, in his Harlem Renaissance manifesto “Criteria of Negro Art” (1926), Du Bois shows his contempt for white American “excursionists,” who interrupt his pastoral reverie at the Scottish lake of Sir Walter Scott’s poem “Lady of the Lake” (1810). He sets the idyllic scene: “[i]t was quiet. You could glimpse the deer wandering in unbroken forests; you could hear the soft ripple of romance on the waters. Around me fell the cadence of that

poetry of my youth. I fell asleep full of the enchantment of the Scottish border" (1926: 778). Into this scene, much like Leo Marx's machine in the garden, intrude the vulgar Americans:

They were mostly Americans and they were loud and strident ... They all tried to get everywhere first. They pushed other people out of the way. They made all sorts of incoherent noises and gestures ... They carried, perhaps, a sense of strength and accomplishment, but their hearts had no conception of the beauty which pervaded this holy place. (1926: 778)

Here, it is the white American tourists who are the "men in the raw"; they are philistines without the capacity for aesthetic experience and they profane the "holy place." Worse yet, they drag along the noisy, frenzied rush of the city into the pastoral idyll, turning it into another urban space. Furthermore, Du Bois inverts white supremacy and reduces them to creatures incapable of speech or the ability to communicate at all.

Precisely because of their marginalization from this vulgar version of white American culture, African-Americans have an escape hatch out of philistinism. Du Bois states: "pushed aside as we have been in America, there has come to us not only a certain distaste for the tawdry and flamboyant but a vision of what the world could be if it were really a beautiful world" (1926: 778–9). Through this reversal of cultural taste, Du Bois transforms a perceived weakness into strength: African-Americans become "co-worker[s] in the kingdom of culture" (1903: 9). The ironic gift of second-sight becomes another Kantian faculty, a unique capacity for experiencing natural beauty that not only grants African-Americans access to the cultural-nationalist project of the national parks, but also reconfigures the opposition between culture and nature. Showing the influence of his study abroad in Germany, Du Bois even gives this African-American exceptionalism a flavor of German romanticism, seemingly to respond to Poundian exhortations to "make it new" with a "gift" of black folks' "new appreciation of joy, of a new desire to create, of a new will to be" (1926: 779). Continuing in this vein, he claims that the "bounden duty of black America" is to step forward as "custodian" of the beautiful, "to begin this great work of the creation of Beauty, of the preservation of Beauty, of the realization of Beauty" (1926: 782). Through participation in the cultural project of representing the sublimity of the cañon, Du

Bois invokes an African-American exceptionalism that previews the Harlem Renaissance. For Du Bois, Colonel Charles Young embodies this exceptionalism and plays a crucial role in connecting the essay's themes of segregation, national parks, and the war.

Charles Young at Sequoia National Park

Appearing immediately before the Grand Cañon passage, the longest section of "Of Beauty and Death" narrates the segregation of black soldiers during the First World War. Du Bois argues that this ultimate outrage (depriving black soldiers of their rights even as they died for their country) set in motion the "extraordinary series of events" that pushed black anger to a "fever heat" and culminated with the 1919 race riots (1920: 179). The historical and thematic links between this passage and the Grand Canyon seem unclear at first: what does anger about segregated soldiers have to do with national parks? Following the essay's method of juxtaposition, segregation and the national parks converge in the figure of Charles Young. A paragon of the Talented Tenth, Young was the third African-American to graduate from West Point Academy and the highest-ranking black officer in the US Army at the time. Promoted to colonel by the time he died in 1923, Young served in the military for twenty-eight years, commanding the all-black Twenty-fifth US Infantry and the Ninth US Cavalry. Du Bois celebrates his friend's military accomplishments: "[i]n Haiti, in Liberia, in western camps, in the Sequoia Forests of California, and finally with Pershing in Mexico—in every case he triumphed" (1920: 181). Though Du Bois gives a brief account of Young's work at Sequoia, that account becomes significant to the essay because of its context among passages on Acadia and the Grand Canyon national parks.

Prior to the creation of the National Park Service, the caretaking duties fell to the US Army. In summer 1903, while serving as captain of the Ninth Cavalry, Young was appointed to supervise the Sequoia and General Grant National Parks in the Sierra Nevada (Kilroy 2003: 60). Young himself helped literally and discursively to build the national parks as part of a larger project of American cultural nationalism, as well as perform his summer job as "custodian of the beautiful" (Du Bois 1926: 782). By focusing on the

circumstances surrounding Young's discharge from the Army, Du Bois further connects segregation and the First World War to the cultural project of the national parks.

During the war, when many black leaders thought Young would have been promoted to general if he were white, he was unexpectedly forced to retire on the dubious grounds of high blood pressure (1920: 181). Du Bois fought hard on Young's behalf during this time—a fight that, according to David Levering Lewis, scarred Du Bois emotionally. Young's and Du Bois's friendship went back to their days teaching at Wilberforce College in Ohio from 1894 to 1896, where Du Bois taught classics and Young taught military science (Lewis 1993: 176; Kilroy 2003: 47). They would spend many evenings playing music together, occasionally accompanied by the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (Kilroy 2003: 33). In public speeches, Young, though he admired and emulated the militaristic discipline at the heart of Washington's philosophy, would advocate Du Bois's Talented Tenth theory of an educated black leadership as the best path to full black citizenship (Kilroy 2003: 64). He campaigned on behalf of civil rights, contributing to and raising money for the NAACP's anti-lynching fund (Kilroy 2003: 110). Soon upon (what would prove to be) his temporary retirement, Young accepted a position on the NAACP board and toured the country speaking on behalf of civil rights (Kilroy 2003: 139). He even joked that he "fathered" *Darkwater*, because he saw so many of his conversations with Du Bois reiterated in that book. It is possible that one of those conversations revolved around Sequoia National Park, for which Young frequently waxed nostalgic later in life (O'Connell 2003). Du Bois responded by sending Young an autographed copy of *Darkwater* when it was published (Kilroy 2003: 150).

When the Great War came, however, Du Bois's friendship and loyalty to Young embroiled him in political debates with other civil rights leaders. Risking charges of nationalistic chauvinism from his Talented Tenth cohort, Du Bois supported the war in Europe. He reasoned that the sacrifice of African-American soldiers on European battlefields might, for all its necessary evil, pave the road to integration and full citizenship (Lewis 1993: 530). He thought (wrongly) that the gravitas of such large-scale war would squash the triviality of racism: "[w]hat were petty slights, silly insults, paltry problems, beside this call to do and dare and die?" (1920: 178). To Du Bois's chagrin, however,

the war calcified the color line in the military. First, the US Army refused black volunteers, and then when a draft was implemented, black soldiers were segregated into separate regiments and used for labor purposes—a fate that befell 89 percent of black soldiers (1920: 179; Kilroy 2003: 119). Moreover, the black officers leading these soldiers would have to be trained at the segregated Camp Des Moines (Lewis 1993: 530). This caused Du Bois to proclaim that possibly “never before in the history of the United States has a portion of the citizens been so openly and crassly discriminated against by action of the general government” (1920: 179). Deciding that African-Americans had opportunistically to “take advantage of the disadvantage,” he reasoned that the officer training camp set up at Des Moines was better than nothing, and rallied wavering civil rights leaders to support it. Du Bois, working in an uncharacteristically pragmatic mode and conciliatory mood, successfully advocated that black officers lead black soldiers (1920: 180). His support of the war and the camp stirred controversy among some of his closest allies, including Archibald Grimké of the Niagara Movement, *The Messenger* editors Asa Randolph and Chandler Owen, and William Monroe Trotter (Lewis 1993: 531).

In the midst of this less-than-ideal compromise, the dismissal of Young in the summer of 1917 (the first year the US entered the war) struck a significant blow to Du Bois’s morale and that of black masses in general (Kilroy 2003: 120). To Du Bois, it was a major personal and political affront. Perhaps he speaks especially of his own feelings about the bad news when he writes: “[t]o say that Negroes of the United States were disheartened at the retirement of Colonel Young is to put it mildly” (1920: 181). There seemed to be no doubt surrounding Young’s fitness: in protest against his racist superiors, the colonel even rode five hundred miles on horseback from his home in Ohio to Washington DC (Kilroy 2003: 120). Du Bois mobilized all the resources of the NAACP and *The Crisis* to lobby for the colonel’s reinstatement, but to no avail (Kilroy 2003: 130). Young even had the backing of former president Roosevelt, who fantasized about Young leading a black version of Roosevelt’s Spanish-American War era “Rough Riders” into European battlefields (Kilroy 2003: 124–5).

Young’s forced retirement was emblematic of what was happening within the military across the United States. Everywhere, Du Bois protests, a black

soldier would be “separated like a pest” from his regiment (1920: 181). He laments that “one poor fellow in Ohio solved the problem by cutting his throat” (1920: 181). White paranoia conjured the specter of “German plots” seeded among a disgruntled black populace, making “Negroes too dangerous an element to trust with guns” (1920: 179). *The Crisis* further testified to the poor treatment of black soldiers: the magazine reported on harassment of black soldiers by military police; the constant barrage of racial epithets from white soldiers and officers; the lack of USO facilities for black soldiers; and denials of recreational activities such as going to the movies (Lewis 1993: 135–6). A young George Schuyler, a sergeant, reported that black officers-in-training at Camp Des Moines received none of the study courses available to white officers (Lewis 1993: 542). In a foreshadowing of the 1919 riots, in 1917 a resentful black regiment attacked a police station and shot sixteen whites in Houston (Lewis 1993: 541). Du Bois compares the incongruous justice served against the perpetrators in Houston to those in the 1917 East St. Louis riots: “[a]t East St. Louis white strikers on war work killed and mobbed Negro working-men, and as a result 19 colored soldiers were hanged and 51 imprisoned for life for killing 17 whites at Houston, while for killing 125 Negroes in East St. Louis, 20 white men were imprisoned, none for more than 15 years, and 10 colored men with them” (1920: 182). Still embittered about all these events years later, Du Bois gave a eulogy in 1923 at Young’s memorial service, taking advantage of the occasion to protest racism in the military and to pin the responsibility for Young’s early death to the despair brought on by his forced retirement (Kilroy 2003: 157).

Du Bois’s visit to the Grand Canyon recalls the moment fourteen years before the calamitous events just recounted when captain Young served as acting superintendent for a summer in Sequoia National Park. Sequoia was the second national park designated by the federal government in 1890 in order to protect the heavily forested area from the lumber industry (Kilroy 2003: 60–61). The park is so named after the Sequoias or giant redwood trees, often referred to simply as the “Big Trees.” Muir writes about them in *Our National Parks*, stressing their enormous size and old age, calling them “Nature’s forest masterpiece” (1901: 268). Measuring approximately three hundred feet high and thirty feet in diameter (269), the trees are so big, Muir notes, that one could hollow them out and live in them—as some

people actually did (1901: 306). He writes of the destructive threat of the lumber industry to the forest, noting the necessity for their supervision at the hands of the US Army, though he does not mention much about the soldiers or Young's role (1901: 328).

Though the park was thirteen years old when Young arrived on the scene, its infrastructure remained rudimentary. A workaholic like his hero Booker T. Washington, Young was one of the most industrious park supervisors up until that time. Historian David P. Kilroy summarizes the young officer's industrious approach: "[w]here previous acting superintendents perhaps saw this assignment as a temporary summer sojourn, Charles Young committed himself body and soul to the parks" (2003: 61). In addition to having his troops clear and improve park trails, Young constructed more miles of road in one summer than previous supervisors did in three. He completed a wagon road that gave tourists access to the Giant Forest and Moro Rock, the park's main attractions. They also built a road connecting the General Grant National Forest to the nearby town of Visalia. Young's exemplary custodianship earned him unprecedented respect for an African-American in the local community. Leaders of the local town of Visalia publicly thanked him for his work as the town stood to benefit greatly from increased tourism to the parks (Kilroy 2003: 61–2). The park's next superintendent lauded the improvement to the park's roads and trails, which he ascribed to the "strict personal supervision of the work given by Captain Young" (Young 1903: 3).

While Young's experiences in the park were not devoid of racial tensions, he did often succeed in smoothing over race relations that were also strained by the complicating factor of locals resenting any form of federal government intrusion, let alone an all-black cavalry. Generally, however, the California was friendlier than the Jim Crow South. Upon Young's arrival, the local newspaper, *The Tulare County Times*, printed a sympathetic press release. It reported that Young is a "man of brilliant parts. His career has been one of hard struggle against the prejudice of race. He has, however, risen above all these difficulties by force of character and inherent ability" (O'Connell 2003). When Young completed the roads, he gave what the local newspaper called a "great feast" to a "hundred or so" of all those involved in the work and the elites of the area. The paper concludes that "Those from this city who sat about the festal board speak in glowing terms of the hospitality of Captain

Young and his ability to entertain” (O’Connell 2003). Anecdotal evidence reveals that there were some moments of racial tension: at least one Visalia restaurant owner refused to serve Young (Kilroy 2003: 62). In another incident, two white lieutenants once passed the African-American captain without saluting. This act of disrespect prompted Young to remove his uniform and hang it on a fence, proclaiming to the offenders that they did not have to salute him, but they did have to salute the uniform (O’Connell 2003).

Young’s final report to the Department of the Interior (DOI) reads as though it spilled from the pen of John Muir. In words echoing the opening passages of *Our National Parks*, which Young may have read, he dreams of a future where “overworked and weary” Americans can escape the frenzy of urban life during the summers:

The trees of the park consist of pines and cedars and firs in general and of the giant redwoods, or sequoias, in particular, all of which are well worth protecting. It has been previously remarked that the Sequoia National Park is the Giant Forest, but it is believed by many that even without the grandeur of the Giant Forest, which is matchless anywhere else in the world, there are enough beautiful mountain views, delightful camping sites, and water courses stocked with fish to constitute a national park where the overworked and weary citizens of the country can find rest, coolness, and quiet for a few weeks during the hot summer months, and where both large and small game can have a refuge and be allowed to increase. (1903: 6–7)

He goes on in this nature writing mode to celebrate Sequoia and General Grant parks for their beauty and sublimity.

While Young waxes poetic about the forests, he also warns the US Interior Secretary about the destruction of the Sequoia trees and the parks; he urges the federal government to take more drastic steps to protect the forests against the exploitation of local interests and to promote their preservation. Thinking pragmatically and willing to lay the groundwork necessary to facilitate his preservationist vision, Young prodded the DOI to purchase 3,877 acres (O’Connell 2003) of private property in the park at nineteen dollars an acre per request of the owners (Kilroy 2003: 62). Muir likewise advocated the purchase two years earlier: “[p]rivate claims cut and blotch” the park, “every one of which the government should gradually extinguish by purchase”

(1901: 329). The DOI delayed this acquisition for about fifteen years, and in the end the federal government paid inflated prices for the land (Kilroy 2003: 62).

Evoking the conservationist and nationalistic spirit of Roosevelt's presidency, Young recommended to the DOI that the government adopt a tradition of christening the giant redwoods with names "acceptable to the entire nation" (1903: 10). In an attempt to memorialize the Civil War in the West, Young named a tree for the Grand Army of the Republic, a Union army veterans' organization (Young 1903: 10). To help preserve the memory of African-American labor in the parks, he named another tree after the "great and good American, Booker T. Washington" (Young 1903: 10).⁶ Though locals insisted that the tree be named after Young himself, he stuck to the Washington name, perhaps realizing that his soldiers had performed the sort of physical laboring of the environment preached by Washington. In this politics of tree naming, the size of the Sequoia would symbolize the stature of the man to hikers passing by, for Washington was at his peak of power and fame in 1903.

Du Bois works within the tradition of this African-American discursive construction of the parks that emerged with Young in order to create a counter-narrative. Though Du Bois focuses on the First World War, Young's biography also clears space for inclusion in an American cultural nationalism through an early contribution to the national parks. As a figure, he helps Du Bois facilitate an integrationist vision of the parks as a cultural space that simultaneously transcends race and bears the marks of an ideology of segregation.

Urban Nature: Toward the Harlem Renaissance

Du Bois argues that stories such as Young's and other acts of discrimination against black soldiers during the war contributed to the 1919 race riots. But other factors were involved too. Because of the dense cityscape and influx of African-Americans to the city in the Great Migration, opportunities for outdoor recreation in urban spaces became increasingly vital by 1919. African-Americans' limited access to officially or de facto segregated parks, beaches, and other spaces of urban nature became a growing source of racial tension

and violence. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Fisher has argued that segregated parks and beaches played a determining factor in the Chicago riots. Prior to this tragic event, urban nature spaces such as Washington Park or Cook County Forest Preserves in Chicago were valued by African-Americans as an escape from the claustrophobic South Side. In defiance of “forced exclusion from parks, playgrounds, and beaches, blacks struggled for access to open space” (Fisher 2006: 64). Many black children were left to play in marginal spaces of urban nature: open dumps, vacant lots, and roughshod playgrounds. Culminating a series of smaller skirmishes of racial violence, the riots started in July 1919 on the segregated beaches of Lake Michigan. The “black beach” was nicknamed “Hot and Cold” because it was near the industrial area of the shore (Fisher 2006: 64). When fifteen-year-old South Side working-class resident Eugene Williams drifted into the “white” section of Lake Michigan beach, angry whites perceived this breach as “polluting” their water. They began throwing rocks at Williams and the boy drowned. The resulting outrage from both black and white Chicagoans made for the worst rioting in the city’s history, lasting four days and leaving thirty-eight dead, 537 injured, and about one thousand homeless (Fisher 2006: 64–75).

Though the end of “Of Beauty and Death” does not represent race riots directly, it does draw attention to spaces of urban nature that set the pre-conditions for the riots. By referring to the East St. Louis riots in the fragment just prior to the travel account of the Grand Canyon, Du Bois makes a direct link with the sociological study “Of Work and Wealth” in *Darkwater*. In that essay, Du Bois writes extensively about the 1917 East St. Louis riots. He frames the study as a lesson in sociology, taking the 1917 riots as a case study in urban race relations and interspersing it with the language of what ecocritic Lawrence Buell calls a “toxic discourse” (2001: 30). According to Buell, toxic discourse draws on the trope of “Gothicized environmental squalor” that dates back to early industrialization (2001: 43). Toxic discourse also previews the environmental justice movement of the 1980s. Using similar Gothicized rhetoric, Du Bois describes St. Louis as a place where “mighty rivers meet” (1920: 64), but this convergence results in the opposite of a pastoral scene, for these “rivers are dirty with sweat and toil” (1920: 69) and the “city overflows into the valleys of Illinois and lies there, writhing under its grimy cloud” (1920: 64). He casts St. Louis proper as a “feverish Pittsburg [sic] in

the Mississippi Valley” (1920: 64) full of “Nature-defying cranes” (1920: 70). If St. Louis is an industrial landscape comparable to Pittsburgh, then East St. Louis, across the river in Illinois, is a toxic one. It has “no restful green” and smells of “ill-tamed sewerage.” The cityscape also shows the lingering “ruins” of the 1917 race riots (1920: 65).

The final fragments of “Of Beauty and Death” continue the urban nature thread begun in “Of Work and Wealth,” as Du Bois turns his eye toward the Manhattan cityscape. These fragments paint the frenetic energy of city life through images of urban nature, eventually returning to the philosophical themes of beauty, death, ugliness, and their relation to the Veil. Formally, the fragments become increasingly shorter and disconnected. This movement from the national parks of the west to the more urban east suggests a frontier reversal, an importation of wilderness into urban space. After describing the broken Paris of the First World War, Du Bois sketches New York in language that echoes his portrait of the Grand Cañon: “white cliffs of Manhattan, tier on tier, with a curving pinnacle, towers square and trim, a giant inkwell daintily stoppered, an ancient pyramid enthroned” (1920: 187). By characterizing the cityscape in such terms, Du Bois makes it a kind of second (mediated) nature in an example of urban nature writing.⁷ Du Bois also invokes the seasonal cycles: “[w]e would see spring, summer, and the red riot of autumn, and then in winter, beneath the soft white snow, sleep and dream of dreams” (1920: 190). The “red riot” conflates two events, one social and the other natural: the Red Summer, which actually continued into late September, and the changing colors of leaves in the autumn.

At the same time that it represents urban nature, the end of “Of Beauty and Death” and *Darkwater* also reflect the 1919 race riots. After the riots, Lewis says that Du Bois’s mood “verged on apocalyptic bitterness”—a mood clearly reflected in the sardonic humor of the apocalyptic short story “The Comet,” which follows “Of Beauty and Death” (2000: 13). Finalized for an early 1920 publication in the midst of the riots and at the close of the First World War, *Darkwater* is usually read within the context of these violent episodes in the long history of the United States and global race relations. Though Du Bois claimed to have finished the manuscript in February 1918, he continued revising it until September 1919—before reverberations of the riots across the country had died down (Lewis 2000: 11). Oswald-Garrison

Villard's review of the book for *The Nation* frames it in terms of the race riots, praising the artistry of "A Litany at Atlanta," a poem about the Atlanta race riots (1920: 726). But such proximity to the violent events, Villard continues, produces excessive affect, for the book "carries with it a note of bitterness, tintured with hate, and the teaching of violence which often defeats his own purpose" (1920: 727). Some whites but mostly black residents were killed during the rioting. These riots were for Du Bois, in a sense, the First World War brought home from Europe.

These last fragments of the essay, then, are permeated with the tense urban atmosphere that sparked the riots. Punning on "riot," Du Bois describes the Harlem streets as a dense space, a double environment segregated from the "white world" and full of "black eyes, black and brown, and frizzled hair curled and sleek, and skins that riot with luscious color and deep, burning blood" (1920: 188). He invokes claustrophobic living conditions: "[h]umanity is packed dense in high piles of close-knit homes that lie in layers above gray shops of food and clothes and drink" (1920: 188). Du Bois's and writers such as McKay's pastoralization of urban nature would later permeate much of the work of the Harlem Renaissance.

By making nature part of the color-line problem, Du Bois maps double environments and disjunctive social and natural spaces. In his second-sight, the wilderness becomes simultaneously an ideal "integrationist" space of intermingling natural colors—an objective correlative for a desegregated society—and a compromised, fraught space mediated by the problems of the color line and modernity. This counter-narrative challenges the dominance of white supremacy and social Darwinism as well as an emergent environmentalism. Ultimately, for Du Bois there is no "nature" without the baggage of the color line, no Grand Cañon without Jim Crow, and no wide-open landscapes without claustrophobic cityscapes. These concerns carried over to Du Bois's editorship.