

Bringing Together the Progressive and Accommodationist Camps: The Metaphorical Usage of the Biblical Exodus in W.E.B. Du Bois's Rhetoric

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Abstract: The Black Movement in early 20th century was divided into two main poles in terms of the methods they proposed in order to fight racial discrimination. Within this intra-race debate, W. E. B. Du Bois was seen as the leading figure in the progressive camp, which championed for the immediate attainment of the Black Peoples' social, political and economic rights. The accommodationist camp, on the other hand, led by Booker T Washington, had a more compromising approach to existing social structures. This paper will take a critical look at the consistency of Du Bois's progressive stance via an analysis of his usage of the narrative of the Exodus in his work "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" in *The Souls of Black Folks*, in particular by focusing on his use of certain concepts such as *sand*, *water*, *cry* and *forty years journey*. Though within these debates the biblical Exodus Narrative was a widely used metaphor to make an analogy with the struggle of the African-American people especially by the progressive camp, the purpose of this critical analysis will be to ascertain whether Du Bois had revealed any deviances in his stance through this narrative.

Keywords: Religious Rhetoric, W.E.B. Du Bois, Black Movement, Progressive, Accommodationist, Exodus, Religious Rhetoric.

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Introduction

The accommodationist-progressive distinction, a fundamental debate in the Black Movement, divided black intellectuals in how they viewed the advancement of the Movement. This discussion focused primarily on how Black Americans could achieve their liberation in the long-term. The sharp distinction between these two camps is blurred in some of W.E.B. Du Bois's (1868-1963) writings, who is one of the main representatives of the progressive movement.² Though Du Bois is deemed the leader of the progressive camp, this article will argue that he retains some accommodationist ideas, which can be traced in his use of metaphors throughout his essay especially in the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings."

In the vast literature that focuses on W.E.B. Du Bois's writings, there has been a great deal of discussion on Du Bois's relationship with organized religion and his use of religious themes and symbolism in his writings. While scholarly research continues, there is little doubt among researchers as to how effectively Du Bois applies religious rhetoric.³ In this paper, we will try to analyze the function of Du Bois's religious rhetoric and shed critical light on the firmness of his progressivist stance. For this purpose, we will focus on the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* in which, Du Bois forms an analogy between the black struggle and the biblical story *Exodus*. In the *Exodus* narrative, the Israelites were held in bondage by the Egyptians but, through the leadership of Moses and the guidance of God, they ultimately gained their freedom from their captors in order to reach the *Promised Land*.⁴

The *Exodus* narrative was widely used by black scholars, priests and intellectuals as a story of hope in which God would be with those who were oppressed. In this context, the *oppressed* refers to the Israelites who wished to reach the *Promised Land*, namely, *Kanaan*.⁵ By reaching this land, the sons of Jacob believed that they would also attain the freedom for which they had been lamenting for many years during their captivity in Egypt. Du Bois's essay seems to convey some significant concepts related to the narrative of *Exodus* in the progressive framework. However, when close reading is applied to certain phrases used in the first chapter of *Souls* such as *cry*, *sand* and *forty years journey*, it can be argued that these references point out to a deviation in Du Bois's progressive stance. In other words, here in this context Du Bois seems to present some more accommodationist ideas via the *Exodus* allegory.

On the whole, this paper will investigate the underlying rationale of Du Bois's use of certain concepts related to the *Exodus* allegory and also his emphasis on the *forty years journey*. After

² Gerald Horne, *W.E.B. Du Bois, A Biography*, (California: Greenwood Publishing Press, 2009); <https://www.britannica.com/biography/W-E-B-Du-Bois>.

³ For further information on Du Bois's use of religious themes and symbolism and his stance on organized religion please see: Phillip Luke Sinitiere, "W. E. B. Du Bois and Religion", *The History Teacher* 45/3 (2012), 421-436; Edward J. Blum, "The Spiritual Scholar: W. E. B. Du Bois", *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 57 (2007), 73-79; Edward J. Blum, "There Won't Be Any Rich People in Heaven: The Black Christ, White Hypocrisy, and the Gospel According to W. E. B. Du Bois", *The Journal of African American History* 90/4 (2005), 368-386.

⁴ Martin J. Medhurst, "Let My People Go: The Exodus in African American Cultural History", *Martin Luther King and the Rhetoric of Freedom, The Exodus Narrative in America's Struggle for Civil Rights*, (Texas: University Press, 2008), 27-50; Scott M. Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries), (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

⁵ Anna Hartnell, *Rewriting Exodus: American Futures from Du Bois to Obama*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

providing the historical background, the parallels between metaphor and reality and the religious rhetoric used by Du Bois will be studied through the following frameworks: in the first chapter, Black people's lamentations that led them to seek freedom and the Black Movement, as referred to in the literature, will be analyzed through Du Bois's implicit references to the *Exodus* narrative. In the second chapter, we will examine how the struggle to attain freedom effected black people's souls, and conveyed them to a search for a new identity and self-consciousness as discussed by Du Bois. Finally, the struggles which culminated in the establishing of the *kingdom of culture* as framed by Du Bois, will be analyzed.

1. Historical Background

In the middle of the 19th century, the two parts of the United States of America, the North and the South, considered themselves as wholly separate worlds, with completely different priorities, ways of life and political stances. The epoch-changing event, the American Civil War, which lasted between 1861-1865, took place between these two poles of the same country. The primary cause of the war, in the popular narrative at least, was the status of slavery.⁶ While the Unionists of the free North fought to assure the freedom of black people, the Confederates of the South wished to maintain the practice of slavery, which they perceived as being integral to their country.⁷ African-Americans perceived the war as essentially being between slavery and freedom, but it would soon be realized that the real struggle would begin after the end of the war, which ended with the victory of the Unionists.⁸ The Era of Reconstruction (1865-1876) that came after the end of the Civil War, was a time when black people were trying to construe their new statute as freed men and women. The Reconstruction Era was a turbulent and significant time for the beginning of Civil Rights movements in the United States, and an immense collective effort began to bring back some kind of order to a country which had been shaken by groundbreaking social, political, physical and constitutional transformations.⁹

At the turn of the century, Black intellectuals were discussing what black folk's stance should be in demanding their social, legal, economic and educational rights. The debate was primarily between two poles, which can be named as Accommodationists and Progressives. The moderate approach, which was championed by Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), in the main stressed that economic rights and employment opportunities should be attained first, and that over time and through hard work black people would eventually attain equal social and legal rights with whites. However, the progressive camp, which Du Bois belonged to, emphasized the importance of high culture and education for the welfare of the race and disagreed with the accommodationist idea that "the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment

⁶ Jone Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 236.

⁷ Justin Behrend, *Reconstructing Democracy: Grassroots Black Politics in the Deep South After the Civil War*, (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2015), 19.

⁸ Behrend, *Reconstructing Democracy*, 20.

⁹ Richar Zuczek, "Introduction", *Encyclopedia of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. Richard Zuczek (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006), xxxi.

of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing".¹⁰

2. Agony and Hardships that Freedman Has to Face: W.E.B. Du Bois's Application of Religious Rhetoric

Du Bois starts the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* with a poem that uses some of the key symbolic concepts of the *Exodus* narrative, such as *sand*, *water* and *cry*. Although he does not openly state that he uses the *Exodus* story, he makes references to the important concepts mentioned in this narrative in order to draw a parallel between the Black Movement and the people who left the land of Egypt in order to attain freedom.

Of the many references to the concepts referred to in the poem, it can be said that the main theme of the poem is lamentation. The general ambiance of the poem reminds the reader of the struggles of the Israelites, as told in the biblical account of *Exodus*. The poem presents the reader with the experiences of the Sons of Jacob to attain *emancipation* and the hardships they endured after leaving Egypt (Exodus 16:3). Accordingly, the words *water*, *sand* and *cry*¹¹ remind us of the thirst of the Israelites and their cry for water when lost in the desert after they escaped from slavery in Egypt in search of their homeland/promised land.¹² Through this metaphor, Du Bois highlights the pain that black people suffered in order to honor their struggle. He presents the sorrows that black people experienced after the Era of Reconstruction via an analogy with the Israelites' sufferings after they left Egypt.

The references in the poem allude to black people's need to construct a self-consciousness. If the meaning of water in the Bible is a symbol of being cleansed of sin and awakening into a new life, it can be argued in this context that water represents black peoples' need for self-definition, escaping double consciousness¹³ and fostering a firm identity.¹⁴ As Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) says, "The post

¹⁰ Henry Louis Gates, "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black", *Special Issue: America Reconstructed* 24 (1988), 129-155; Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*, (New York: Doubleday, Page&Co., 1907), 223; Mark Bauerlein, "Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois: The Origins of a Bitter Intellectual Battle", *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 46 (2004-2005), 106-114.

¹¹ For further analysis of these symbols in other traditions please see: Sâlime Leyla Gürkan, "Su", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2009) 37/440-2; Annemarie Schimmel, *Tanrı'nın Yeryüzündeki İşaretleri*, (İstanbul: Kabcacı Yayınları, 2008), 25-30; Maksude Fidan, "Kutsal Suyun İzinde: Suya Yüklenen Dini ve Sembolik Anlamlar", *İslam Akademi Dergisi* 1/1 (2021), 1-26.

¹² Exodus 15:22.

¹³ Double consciousness is one of the main concepts in Du Bois's understanding regarding the obstacles Black people face in their fight for freedom. The following passage is Du Bois's definition of this important concept: "... the Negro is ... born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields to him no true self consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, - this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spat upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face." (Du Bois, *Souls*, xii). For further aspects of the mentioned double-consciousness, see: Nasar Meer, W.E.B Du Bois, Double Consciousness and the Spirit of Recognition, *The Sociological Review* 67/1 (2018), 47-62.

¹⁴ Mark 1:4; Peter 3:21.

emancipation period demanded a fresh and immediate inquiry into the new reality of black freedom in America".¹⁵ This inquiry at the same time included a search for a definition of identity that the new social structure required and there was much pain and sorrow awaiting black folk until a firm identity and self-consciousness was established.

From this point onwards, how the concept of *cry* represented the sorrows of the black people and how this pain pushed black people to a search for a new identity will be understood better. The phrases *unresting water* and *wonder and cry like the sea* shows that this search is towards a newly emerging identity.¹⁶ The underlying reasons of the sorrows that will accompany an emerging new identity will be presented more clearly in later sections of the paper. However, to make the statement clear, it should be stated that Washington, who was known for his moderate stance, argued that social rights will come to black people only after a long and hard journey.¹⁷ Similarly, Appiah argues that for black people, pain will usher in the emergence of a new identity.¹⁸ Du Bois fosters this argument through these metaphorical references. The repetition of the word *cry* reveals the sorrow that is hidden between the lines of the chapter.

The reason behind the lamentations and sorrows can be interpreted as the identity crises of the people of Moses. After escaping Egypt, the Israelites were no longer slaves, however they were not completely free either.¹⁹ They were deprived of the soul and strength that would sustain them because they did not know themselves and they were not aware of their capacity, as understood from Du Bois's references that focus on pain. Given that the pain in the poem refers to the sorrows black people experienced after the Reconstruction Period as a result of identity crisis and deprivation of certain rights, similarly, water can be seen as a symbol of the self-consciousness that black people long to attain. Thus, Du Bois acknowledges the pain that black people will encounter in their struggle to define their identity and know themselves. Here is the point where Du Bois's accommodationist ideas becomes more apparent in his rhetoric.

In other words, it seems as though Du Bois conveyed accommodationist ideas behind the metaphor and claimed that, in order to attain self-consciousness and a firm identity, black people had to face certain adversities, as Washington argues in his Atlanta Speech.²⁰ To explain it more clearly, Du Bois states that these hardships were necessary as a ransom in order for black people to be truly free.

¹⁵ Muhammed Khalil Jibran, *The Condemnation of Blackness, Race, Crime, and The Making of Modern Urban America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 19.

¹⁶ Du Bois, *Souls*, 7.

¹⁷ Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 223.

¹⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Lines of Descent: W. E. B. Du Bois and The Emerge of Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 54-61.

¹⁹ Exodus 16:3.

²⁰ "Brook T. Washington challenged the African Americans' intellectual and cultural image presentations made by white people in his Atlanta Exposition Speech in 1895. He declared blacks had love and fidelity for whites and they were faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people." For further information on Atlanta Speech Washington, see *Up From Slavery*, 223; see also Robert J. Norell, "Have Historians Given Booker T. Washington a Bad Rap?", *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 62 (2008), 62-69.

3. The Soul of the Painful People: Attaining Self-Consciousness

According to Du Bois, without understanding the effect of this oppression and suffering on black people's souls, it would not be possible to understand the function of the spiritual side of their struggle. In this respect, the titles that were chosen for the book *The Souls of Black Folk* and for the first chapter "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" seem particularly significant. According to Kahn, Du Bois in this chapter uses the prophetic language "of sacrifice and jeremiad that seeks concrete redemption in the here and now".²¹ The result of the interrelation between soul and spiritual strivings is "seeking concrete redemption" or, in other words, taking action. In Kahn's words, "There is then, a necessary connection between soul, spiritual strivings, and activist politics. Soul and spiritual strivings are tools for effecting social-justice".²² Du Bois's choice of language in which he uses the words *soul*, *spiritual* and *strivings* together, gives the impression that, for Du Bois, black people will find the strength to fight within the pain in their souls and as a result of this, they will embark upon a spiritual striving and eventually find the impulsion that will assist them to the *Promised Land* within their sufferings. Similarly, as Kahn argues, "What is absolutely the case, though, is that, in Du Bois's hands, the spirit strives for concrete action and results".²³ If considered within the perspective of the metaphor, it is reminiscent of the Israelites who took off for the desert under the guidance of Moses and found strength to go on with their soul, which was embedded with their accumulated pains and sorrows.²⁴ Thus in Kahn's words, "*Souls* is an account of what a collection of souls have: the parts of communal identity that emerge in moments of struggle. In this fashion, soul refers to the values, ideals, and sufferings that give black life its forms of dignity".²⁵ As can be seen, for Du Bois, black people's striving for soul takes its strength from their suffering and this emboldens them to fight for concrete results such as establishing a black identity that brings together Africanism and Americanism, two ideas that are seemingly unreconcilable, and establishing a self-consciousness that embodies both the memory and struggles of their ancestors and white men's vision of society, liberty and education.

Here, the reader sees the function of Du Bois's memoirs, which played an important role in helping the reader comprehend the strivings which are rooted in *The Souls of Black Folk* and which show how the new self-consciousness of black folk led him to his new goals. In his memoirs, Du Bois recounted the bitter experience of rejection from a white girl as a representation of the usual discrimination his race faced for many years.²⁶ This discrimination had many effects on black society, such as living hidden under a veil and the problem of double consciousness.²⁷ Such disturbing experiences led African-Americans to the root of their existence and made them ask specific questions as: "*Why has God created me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?*" This ontological question aims to explore a person's divine roots. Even though it sounds like a payoff and a conversation with God, in religious traditions it arises from a feeling of contempt about one's current

²¹ Jonathon S. Kahn, *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois*, (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 14.

²² Kahn, *Divine Discontent*, 66.

²³ Kahn, *Divine Discontent*, 65.

²⁴ Exodus 16:10.

²⁵ Kahn, *Divine Discontent*, 65.

²⁶ Du Bois, *Souls*, 17.

²⁷ Charles Lemert, "A Classic from the Other Side of the Veil: Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*", *The Sociological Quarterly* 35/3 (1994), 383-396.

situation.²⁸ In other words, this question is the initiation of self-questioning and self-acceptance.²⁹ According to Du Bois, for African-American this process occurs when answering the aforementioned question:

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 merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.³⁰

In this paragraph, Du Bois describes the struggle and process of African-Americans' attempts to embrace two irreconcilable parts of their identity. This also means that Afro-Americans should make peace with their current condition. Indeed, during this period, black people started to work on overcoming the negative effects of double-consciousness to unite the positive sides of the two identities. Black people were willing and trying to adapt to this new identity, to work harder, to get a better education, and to produce.³¹ In his essay, Du Bois gives strength and solutions for those black people who fight for an ideal by giving an encouraging message, using phrases such as "end of strivings" and "to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture".³² The expression the *end of strivings* indicates that Du Bois still sees his people on the way, while *the kingdom of culture* points to the *Promised Land*. In other words, the *kingdom of culture* is the beautiful land that black people will arrive with the self-consciousness they attained as a result of the soul that was born out of pains and struggles. The search for a self-consciousness and a new identity will trigger the struggle that will convey black people to *the kingdom of culture*.³³

4. From Spiritual Strivings to Kingdom of Culture

The kingdom of culture, as explained in detail in "Of Our Spiritual Strivings", was in reality a newly promised *high culture* and *the state* black people would reach as a result of their spiritual strivings. As has been well documented, in the Bible striving refers to the endeavor to attain physical and spiritual excellence.³⁴ In the context of black folk, striving refers to attaining certain rights in the personal and social levels, and – qua black people – to attain the abilities in order to truly use their rights. As Du Bois states, "This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius".³⁵ For the black artist, the single challenge awaiting this promised kingdom is the difficulty to take sides between two cultures or two identities. In Du Bois's words, since *emancipation*, the black man's loss of effectiveness was not because of his weakness but because of their struggle being

²⁸ Du Bois, *Souls*, 45.

²⁹ Schrager, Cynthia D. "Both Sides of the Veil: Race, Science, and Mysticism in W. E. B. Du Bois", *American Quarterly*, 48/4 (1996), 551-586, 551-552.

³⁰ Du Bois, *Souls*, 9.

³¹ Edward J. Blum, "There Won't Be Any Rich People in Heaven: The Black Christ, White Hypocrisy, and the Gospel According to W. E. B. Du Bois", *The Journal of African American History* 90/ 4 (2005), 374.

³² Du Bois, *Souls*, 9.

³³ Du Bois, *Souls*, 9.

³⁴ Philippians 1:9-10.

³⁵ Du Bois, *Souls*, 9.

double aimed.³⁶ According to this statement, the black artisan needed to act in a way that utilized both aspects of his existence towards a single goal, which is the *Promised Land* representing the high culture. In other words, Black people need to find a way to best utilize the benefits of being American without sacrificing their African identity. Now, they had totally different dreams to realize on American soil than the ones dreamt by the black men that had first stepped on the new continent centuries earlier. However, realizing the dreams of their ancestors did not satisfy the African-American anymore; because freedom, a right that had been desperately desired by their ancestors was not simply the ability to move freely. What Du Bois pictures in *the kingdom of culture* is the ability to actualize all the benefits of a profoundly high culture and acquire all the freedom associated with it.³⁷ African-Americans wanted not only to be authentic and spiritual as African but also to become competent in all branches of high culture, including business, education, art and literature, a culture the foundations of which were originally laid by white men.³⁸ Through this passage, it can be said that Du Bois held on firmly to his progressive ideas; his vision for the black men is, arguably, progressive, although this is open to debate and interpretation.³⁹ However, as it will be seen in the coming passage, his ideas on why black people could not reach the *Promised Land* and the time needed for this dream to actualize seems to suggest an accommodationist approach.

When the religious connotations of the newly defined *the kingdom of culture* are analyzed, Du Bois's intentions to use this phrase would be understood better. As seen in religious texts, the people of *kingdom of heaven* are free of work and burden, and are surrounded with beautiful bounties.⁴⁰ They get what they want instantaneously with no effort and fatigue. This suggestion, as an element of Du Bois's metaphor, also reminds readers of Moses in the desert, where the Israelites dreamt of acquiring wealth and abundance without struggle.⁴¹ In an effort to meticulously examine the usage of the metaphor in Du Bois's rhetoric, we need to read the words of this section closely. It can be inferred Du Bois was implying that black folk would not easily gain relief in the near future. It is because he thought that black people expected to have success in different areas of social, cultural and literal life all at once, without having burden of any kind of hard work. But this quest requires them to admit that they need a new spirit and courage to face new challenges. According to Du Bois, this is a valid and necessary demand which puts more responsibility on all black people in general as well as assigning an important duty to spiritual forerunners who task them to stay consistent and strong in their Afro-American identity.⁴² On the whole, Du Bois believes that in order to be successful in all the spheres of public life, black people had to strive, as the abolition of slavery was not enough for freedmen to be truly free.

After this point, the function of the *forty years* metaphor, used throughout Du Bois's discussion of spiritual striving, becomes much more explicit. In terms of function, this metaphor is especially

³⁶ Du Bois, *Souls*, 9.

³⁷ Du Bois, *Souls*, 9.

³⁸ Du Bois, *Souls*, 13.

³⁹ Mark Baurlein, "Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois: The Origins of a Bitter Intellectual Battle", *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 46 (2004-2005), 109.

⁴⁰ Genesis 27:28.

⁴¹ Exodus 13:18.

⁴² Du Bois, *Souls*, 13.

important in order to understand how Du Bois conveys his accommodationist ideas by the means of his rhetoric. The message that was intended to be conveyed via this metaphor makes an appearance when Du Bois remarks, “Emancipation was the key to a promised land”; then, “years have passed away since then, -ten, twenty, forty; forty years of national life, forty years of renewal and development” and finally “the freedman has not yet found freedom in his promised land”.⁴³ As stated in the tradition, the Israelites gained their freedom from the Egyptians and arrived to in *Promised Land* after a prolonged struggle that lasted forty years in the desert.⁴⁴ In their first days of freedom after escaping from Egypt, they were disappointed and questioned the meaning of *freedom* due to famine, drought and the unrelenting heat of the desert.⁴⁵ Again, as expressed in religious traditions, the fundamental barriers in front of the Israelites to arrive at the *Promised Land* were because of the inadequacies and deficiencies of the people, such as their disobedience to Moses, their hesitation regarding about work and their ingratitude concerning the blessings they had been given by God.⁴⁶ Here Du Bois explains the disappointment of African-American people by saying, “the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land”.⁴⁷ The freedman, who took his own volition into his own hands after the reconstruction period of the Civil War, recognized that the meaning of freedom had been transformed and altered. However, the new dream of freedom required more equipment that would necessitate hard work and time; therefore, he could not find himself in the promised place despite being in demand it for *forty years*. To be more precise, black people’s ideals progressed from merely being free to the ability to find work, from political rights to the highest educational goals.⁴⁸ When a close reading applied to this metaphor, it is understood Du Bois points out that it is necessary to overcome many internal and external problems in order to reach *the Promised Land*. In accordance with the accommodationist thought, the usage of the religious metaphor underlies the fact that to accomplish this target, black people should prepare themselves to strive to overcome the hardships that began with the period of reconstruction.⁴⁹

What were the hardships that black people had to overcome? As Du Bois writes in the chapter “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”, the hardships that black people faced after the emancipation were first, “the holocaust of war, the terrors of the Ku-Klux-Klan, the lies of carpet-beggars, the disorganization of industry... (which) left the bewildered serf with no new watchword beyond the old cry for freedom” etc.⁵⁰ In other words, the bewildered serf who faced these adversities despite being a free man, like the old slavery days, had only one solution: to be truly free. Like the old days, he was crying and lamenting for freedom. However, over time, Black man began to grasp a new idea. This idea was to search to complete their ‘half-freedom’ with the right to vote. For black man, voting was a concrete representation of freedom. With the fifteenth amendment and the revolution of 1876, he was hopeful about the opportunities that political rights would bring him. In Du Bois’s words, “The ideal of liberty demanded for its attainment powerful means, and these the Fifteenth Amendment gave him. The

⁴³ Du Bois, *Souls*, 12.

⁴⁴ Exodus 16:3; Exodus 16:35.

⁴⁵ Exodus 17:1.

⁴⁶ Numbers 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:7, 24, 27.

⁴⁷ Du Bois, *Souls*, 47.

⁴⁸ Du Bois, *Souls*, 16, 27.

⁴⁹ Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 223.

⁵⁰ Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

ballot, which before he had looked upon as a visible sign of freedom, he now regarded as the chief means of gaining and perfecting the liberty with which war had partially endowed him".⁵¹ Attaining political power did not give the complete freedom he had envisioned, it did give him the strength to continue to his struggle and inspired him with regards to the steps he should take. For Du Bois, at this stage the black man realized his need for education and the stultifying effect of ignorance.⁵² Black people realized that they could not truly use the opportunities and rights that were endowed to them because of their lack of education and they started to cry and lament their ignorance. In Du Bois's words "It was the ideal of book-learning"; the curiosity, born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man, the longing to know".⁵³ For Du Bois, education was the discovery of the road to *The Land of Kanaan*.⁵⁴ However, education being the discovery of the road to *Kanaan* did not mean that they were closer to the *Promised Land*. Rather, in the same way it took *forty years* for the Israelites, so for black folk the land of *Kanaan* was far away and hard to reach. "To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark, the mists were often cold, the *Kanaan* was always dim and far away".⁵⁵ According to Du Bois, black people had to strive and struggle to attain the status they are willing to attain. So here, Du Bois is affiliated with the accommodationist approach, which claims that black people could attain their rights only through time and as a result of hard work.⁵⁶ Du Bois argues that hardship allows black people to reflect and examine himself.⁵⁷ After all, a new soul is born as a result of these sorrows. In Du Bois's words, "If changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect".⁵⁸ Indeed, this struggle ushered in the dawning of these vital aspects of the actualization of a race. However, in order for a true self-consciousness to be attained, there was still a long way to go.

In the context of the metaphor of the *Promised Land*, when the relation between black folks' pursuit of freedom and the endeavor of the Israelites to reach *Kanaan* is examined more closely, Du Bois's understanding of struggle, which was established upon the principles of "liberty, education and work", will be further clarified.⁵⁹ Du Bois's *Freedman* is a new formation, which knows its origin but has his branches in another land.⁶⁰ Accordingly, black people knows that their dream of freedom will be no longer like their ancestors, who had dreamt of simply walking freely on the lands they worked. Strictly speaking, for Du Bois, the *Promised Land* is already far away, but the redefinition of freedom within Du Bois is guidance; if the highest facilities for art, education and working life are targeted and serious burdens are undertaken, the *Promised Land* is a place that can be reached within a certain time.⁶¹ According to Du Bois, this ideal is not only a heavy burden that should be carried altogether on behalf of the black race but is also the greatest goal to the freed man would ever achieve.

⁵¹ Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

⁵² Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

⁵³ Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

⁵⁴ Du Bois, *Souls*, 10; For further information on The Land of Kanaan please see: Süleyman Uludağ, *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü*, (İstanbul: Kabcacı Yayınevi, 2001), "Ken'an", 210.

⁵⁵ Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

⁵⁶ Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 223.

⁵⁷ Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

⁵⁸ Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

⁵⁹ Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

⁶⁰ Du Bois, *Souls*, 9.

⁶¹ Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

Du Bois offers the ideals “education, work, liberty” as the ultimate goals for African-Americans. These ideals, as it would be understood, approach black folk from a progressive angle. However, when looked at how Du Bois conveys these progressive ideals through his rhetoric, it can be seen that what he tries to say is closer to the accommodationist camp. Du Bois’s sayings imply that black people have been in the wilderness for *forty years* because of their unemployment, ignorance and their lack of a complete perception of freedom. By giving this message through this metaphor, it seems that Du Bois conceals his accommodationist thoughts under a metaphor which is considered progressive.

Conclusion

There is every appearance that in “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”, Du Bois effectively examined the biblical *Exodus* which was used by black folk’s leading progressive thinkers and leaders to galvanize the progress of their race during the reconstruction period and afterwards. Considering the positive connotations of the biblical *Exodus* in relation to the black movement, the general impression that occurs at first glance is that Du Bois, in his essay, maintains a progressive stance. By highlighting the ideals of education, work, liberty and, in particular, by underlying the importance of education and book-learning, Du Bois delineates a very progressive ideal for the black people. However, when the concepts belonging to *Exodus*, namely sand, cry, water and, especially, *wandering the wilderness for forty years* are more closely analyzed, it can be seen that the situation is not what it seems at first glance. Just as Moses’ people wandered the desert for forty years, due to the lack of integratiy, black people could also experience the same problem on the way of freedom. This obstacle is the cause of their suffering and black people were not able overcome this difficult period of forty years without gaining a new identity that embraced the two aspects of their existence (African and American) and utilizing the opportunities that came with being Africa-American. According to Du Bois, these futile forty-year strivings are inevitable due to the inabilities of blacks. Black people could not head towards a search for a new identity and a demand for of education and employment without experiencing first the pain of non-identity, unemployment, ignorance and semi-free status. However, had Du Bois stated that clearly, he would have openly been in support of the accommodationist camp; but rather doing that, Du Bois seems to have presented his ideas within the context of the metaphor of the *Exodus*. To be more precise, when the sequence between reality and metaphor is followed carefully, it can be argued that in order to disguise some of his accommodationist ideas, Du Bois uses the opportunities of this widely-used metaphor, which is considered a progressive example for the black race. However, he presents these ideals through an accommodationist framework. Through the metaphor, he implies that black people have to work hard and that there is a long way to go before these ideals may be actualized.

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