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From One Crisis to the Other: History and Literature in The Crisis from 1910 to the Early 1920s

Lamia Dzanouni, H el ene Le Dantec-Lowry and Claire Parfait

¹ In 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was created to protest against all forms of segregation, racial violence and economic oppression, and call for strict enforcement of the Fourteenth (1868) and Fifteenth (1870) Amendments to the Constitution, which provided former slaves with citizenship rights and equal protection under the laws, and granted black men the right to vote. Indeed, the platform of the “National Negro Committee,” out of which the NAACP would emerge, laid particular emphasis on full civil rights for African Americans, equal educational opportunities, and the restoration of the right to vote, which had been denied to many Southern Blacks since the late nineteenth century.ⁱ The NAACP subsequently launched *The Crisis Magazine, a Record of the Darker Race*,ⁱⁱ a monthly publication meant to help in the fight for full civil rights and against stereotyped representations of African Americans. Black intellectual and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Boisⁱⁱⁱ edited the *Crisis* from its creation until 1934.

² In the first issue of the monthly, dated November 1911, Du Bois thus outlined the scope and intent of the magazine: it was to be “first and foremost a newspaper” that would “record important happenings and movements in the world which bear on the great problem of inter-racial relations, and especially those which affect Negro-Americans”; secondly, it would provide “a review of opinion and literature,” and include “a few short articles.” Finally, the editorial page would “stand for the rights of men, irrespective of color or race” and vigorously defend the “highest ideals of American democracy” (*Crisis* November 1910, 10). Evidently then, literature was not the main object of the magazine and, a few years later in 1927, arguing for the creation of a “purely literary magazine,” African American writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston defined what, to her, were the limits of *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*,^{iv} the two main African

American magazines at the time: “The way I look at it, ‘*The Crisis*’ is the house organ of the NAACP and ‘*Opportunity*’ is the same to the Urban League. They are in literature on the side” (Hemenway 49).

³ Looking back on his editorship of the magazine, Du Bois later explained that, “With the *Crisis*, I essayed a new role of interpreting to the world the hindrances and aspirations of American Negroes” (Du Bois 1944, 70). This interpretation took the form of editorials and essays, reports on the situation of African Americans in politics, the economy, social life, education, crime and other problems, regular accounts of NAACP activities, cartoons and photographs, but also, to a lesser extent, fiction, poetry, and book reviews. However, book reviews along with short fiction, poetry, drama, and essays about the state of African American literature only tell part of the story. Literature in *The Crisis* is also to be found in some of Du Bois’s lyrical editorials, and at the periphery of the main essays of the magazine, with advertisements, personal ads, and illustrations being a case in point.

⁴ This essay will investigate the role of literature and the links between literature, news-reporting and history in *The Crisis* between 1910 and the early 1920s. There are several reasons why this period is particularly interesting. First, research on literature in *The Crisis* has tended to focus on the period of the Harlem Renaissance^v and less on its early years. Second, within the dozen years following its launch, the magazine grew in size (from 16 pages for the first number in 1910 to over 40 in 1922) and circulation. In April 1912, *The The Crisis* announced a circulation of 22,500; four years later, it declared itself “self-supporting” and reached 30,000 issues (Kirschke 12, 230). In September 1919, Du Bois himself proudly announced a circulation of 104,000 for the June 1919 issue (*Crisis* September 1919, 235). However, by April 1921 and for various reasons, circulation was down to 53,000 (Lewis 34). Third, the period of highest circulation of the journal corresponds to momentous events: World War I and Du Bois’s visit to France; major race riots in East St. Louis (1917), Chicago (1919), and in other parts of the United States; the beginning of the Great Migration (1916-1930), which would take well over one million black Southerners to northern cities; the suffragist movement; and a significant rise in immigration. Furthermore, in 1919 Jessie Fauset became the literary editor for *The Crisis* and the magazine would progressively devote more space to literary works until she left in 1926.^{vi}

⁵ Discussing the connection between literature and history in *The Crisis* sheds light on the African American struggle as Blacks defied racist impediments by investing in the fields of art and literature. Du Bois wanted African Americans to obtain an education, to work together, and to fight injustice. The journal would help him to achieve this goal, notably by denouncing violence against the black community. It would put pressure on the government regarding its policies on African American rights, and express a different version of black history. A patron of the arts, Du Bois also promoted writers and artists through *The Crisis*.

⁶ We will not study literature *per se* and will not provide an analysis of the literary style, nor assess the literariness of the short stories and poems printed in the 1910s. Rather, we wish to examine the place accorded literature in the *Crisis* and its role in relation to the rest of the magazine, from news commentary, political essays, and echoes of the African past, to illustrations and advertisements, all of which are linked to a broad vision of history. Our position is that of specialists of African American history, publishing history, and material culture. We will thus pay attention to the content, placement, and layout of various articles and columns, of illustrations and

advertisements, as well as to their authors—whenever possible—and to their articulation in each issue. By doing so, we will consider the intersection of literature, in a broad sense, and history. First, we will look more specifically at book reviews in *The Crisis* over time, before considering the various developments of American literature as seen in the pages of the magazine. We will then explore the representation of Blacks and of African American history in the fiction and illustrations published by *The Crisis*, in keeping with what Christian Jouhaud sees as a comprehensive historical analysis of literature that, among other aspects, “takes literature into consideration as a form of mediation between producers and receivers, at given moments and in specific sites” (Jouhaud 273).^{vii}

⁷ As Amy Kirschke argues, “On the pages of *The Crisis*, Du Bois hoped to provide his readers with the visual and written word to connect them more intimately with the national community in the United States, to make them aware of the issues of the day, to make them full participating citizens” (Kirschke 134). The periodical both sought to instill racial pride, with current examples of progress in various fields and in a regular “Men of the Month” column starting in May 1911, and also through frequent reminders of the glories of Africa, their ancestral land. It also made its readers face the grim realities of the time (segregation, racial violence, unequal justice...). Moreover, Du Bois was concerned about constructing a discourse on race and on the status of African Americans that would both counter the dominant narrative and contribute to their socio-economic progress and, more generally speaking, to racial uplift. For the editor of *The Crisis*, the magazine had a role to play in this regard, as did literature in general. Therefore, the monthly invited its audience to ponder how African Americans were to be represented in fiction. The juxtaposition of examples of achievement with accounts of miscarried justice, including a chronicle of lynchings, reflected the situation of African Americans, but was also meant to raise awareness, thus hopefully leading the readers, both black and white, to act (Carroll 27-29).

⁸ *The Crisis* may be said to have traits in common with other magazines of the same period. The collage of a variety of texts with photos, illustrations, and ads was a common trend in contemporary popular magazines such as *Harper’s Weekly* and *Collier’s* (Carroll; Farebrother; Brooker and Thacker). *The Crisis* also shared characteristics with Modernist magazines, including “modifying existing models” and “expressing new sensibilities of their time,” and it was involved as well “with the mass movements and popular cultures of modernity” (Childs 4). Still, perhaps what set *The Crisis* apart from most magazines of its time were its political use of literature and visual culture as well as its militant stance in favor of black rights and an empowering vision of African Americans. Du Bois put it plainly when he defined *The Crisis* as a “propaganda magazine” (*16th Annual Report of the NAACP* 1926 48).

1. Promoting Books and Reading: From Book Reviews to Advertising

⁹ David Levering Lewis rightly notes that the “What to Read” column in *The Crisis* evolved “from a laundry list of recommended titles to annotations and concise reviews” (Lewis 411). The first issue, in November 1910, included what was basically a catalogue of articles on both Africa and the United States and some recent books. The list brought together such odd bedfellows as Theodore Roosevelt, U. B. Phillips (a white historian who authored several works on slavery), and Du Bois himself, among others, and it seems to

have been hastily compiled from the editor's recent readings (and writings). The "What to Read" column offered readers suggestions of articles and books related to African Americans, but also to what Du Bois had described in 1903 as the "problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of man in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (Du Bois 1903, 54). Books and articles dealing with Africa, India, Australia, China, etc. were also recommended, thus providing a vast array of topics related to a diverse black diaspora and to colonized peoples around the world who shared a similar experience of white domination.

¹⁰Most of the books (and sometimes articles issued in various periodicals) reviewed were works of history or sociology, not necessarily by African Americans. Thus, the first two reviews published in the second number of *The Crisis* dealt respectively with the assessment by an English traveler of the race question in the South of the United States, and with a work issued by African American journalist and editor John Edward Bruce titled *Eminent Men and Women*. While the former was harshly criticized for being racist and inconsistent, the second received mixed praise from the unnamed reviewer, probably Du Bois himself.^{viii} Indeed, Bruce's work was depicted as a "laudable attempt" to provide role models and as potentially useful in schools; according to the reviewer, however, the work brought together all kinds of individuals, both important figures such as Frederick Douglass and obscure ones, without ever giving a proper sense of their respective merits (*Crisis* December 1910, 30). The following month brought readers a summary of an article entitled "The Lady of the Slave States" by Mrs. George Haven Putnam, a writer and the wife of the New York publisher, who essentially debunked the myth of the Southern lady, "the gracious fascinating woman of culture who ruled family and estate by the charm of her personality," and was kind to her slaves (*Crisis* January 1911, 28). It also offered long extracts from a "remarkable" pamphlet by newspaper editor Melville E. Stone denouncing "Race Prejudice in the Orient" (*Crisis* January 1911, 28-29). Book and article reviews were thus extremely diverse, especially in the first years of *The Crisis*, touching on topics about both the United States and the rest of the world, especially Africa, Asia and the West Indies.

¹¹As in other parts of the periodical, in which Whites as well as Blacks authored articles and poems or were featured in the "Men of the Month" section, the reviews (often unsigned) treated works and articles written by men and women of both races. Thus, on the anniversary of the death of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of the extremely popular anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the *Crisis* printed a portrait of her, a poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, and an essay by Charles Edward Stowe, the writer's son (*Crisis* June 1911, 69-70), before publishing a review of *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (August 1911, 168), written by Charles E. Stowe and Lyman Beecher Stowe, Stowe's grandson. This review resonated in a particular way since the same issue carried a reminder that the South had long enslaved African Americans ("A Southerner Speaks" 150), an editorial arguing against the hierarchy of races, alongside, among other pieces, a letter from a Southern black man who claimed that African Americans were still held in bondage ("From the South" 167), while the pictures of the past provided by African American artists also contributed to highlighting the conditions of black people, by contrasting starkly with those promulgated by supremacist culture. The review reminded readers of Stowe's impact on public opinion in the United States and Britain, and concluded that both black and white Americans owed much to "a frail overburdened Yankee woman with a steadfast moral purpose" ("Harriet Beecher Stowe" 168).

¹²In March 1912, for the first time, the “What To Read” column was accompanied by the byline “Conducted by Jessie Fauset.” In this section, Fauset authored the three short book reviews of works by Du Bois, Mary White Ovington (one of the NAACP’s co-founders) and a novel by Percival Gibbon. Her tone is very personal and the books are examined in the light of what they reveal of the race question. Fauset continued to write reviews for the magazine, occasionally looking at children’s literature (January 1914) as well as autobiography and fiction, but mostly examining books and articles dealing with racial issues considered from a political or sociological perspective. One of the rare exceptions was a review of black author and lawyer Charles Weldon Johnson’s anonymously published *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which Fauset praised as “an epitome of the race situation in the United States told in the form of an autobiography” (November 1912, “What To Read” 38). The reviewer noted that the book was, unsurprisingly, anonymous and that it seemed to be “a work of fiction founded on hard fact.” Most of the reviews authored by Fauset are rather short, and the magazine usually carried at least two in each issue. There were exceptions, though, as when the aptly titled “A Pile of Books” contained no fewer than eleven reviews (February 1915). The column occasionally included a specific heading to indicate the topic linking the various works under review (for example “History and Facts” in June 1914 and “Problem Literature” in August 1914).^{ix}

¹³Taken together, the reviews contributed to the general strategy of the magazine. They told readers which works provided a reliable interpretation of American history, for instance, recommended the reading of books and articles that would enlighten the reader on a particular aspect of the race question in the United States and the world, and selected works likely to instill race pride in the audience. For example, a July 1911 review recommended an article by Alexander Francis Chamberlain, who stressed the glorious history of Africa and its contributions to the arts (125). Similarly, an April 1914 review praised H. E. Krehbiel’s *Afro-American Folksongs* for arguing that African Americans had made a major contribution to American culture through slave songs (“Song and Story” 300-301), a point which Du Bois had made in his 1903 *Souls of Black Folk*.

¹⁴Fiction played a minor role in the reviews, at least in the first twelve years of *The Crisis*, with a few notable exceptions. Thus, the publication of Du Bois’s novel *The Silver Fleece* was announced by way of a front cover illustration of the November 1911 issue, with another illustration on the last page of the same number of the magazine, and a note that the novel was to be issued that month. The next issue, dated December 1911, carried a long and glowing review of the novel by poet William Stanley Braithwaite, who was one of the contributing editors of the periodical. Subsequent issues included ads for the novel, described in January as “dramatic in style and absorbing in interest” (January 12, 93).

¹⁵The scarcity of reviews devoted to works of fiction or poetry in the first decade of the magazine may be due to a concern frequently expressed in the columns of the magazine, that of the poor quality of African American literature. What type of literature African Americans should write, and how it could be improved were enduring concerns of Du Bois’s, expressed both in his correspondence and in *The Crisis* from the very beginning.^x This concern was first voiced in the monthly, probably by Du Bois himself, in the April 1911 issue, after the death of African American activist, poet, and writer Frances Watkins Harper:^{xi} “She was not a great singer, but she had some sense of song; she was not a great writer, but she wrote much worth reading. She was, above all, sincere” (20). The same issue honored poet William Stanley Braithwaite, whose art was “characterized by care, restraint and exquisite taste,” and who marked “the rise of Negro American letters above

the mere bonds of race into the universal brotherhood” (19). Yet, Du Bois lamented the fact that “We have among ten millions to-day one poet, one novelist and two or three recognized writers of articles and essays” (21). The rest of the article identified Braithwaite as the poet and Charles Chesnutt as the novelist. Du Bois may well have included himself among the writers of articles and essays. Two years later, in a rare book review devoted to poetry, the author (probably Fauset) deemed that the poems in Fenton Johnson’s *A Little Dreaming* (1913) were “very uneven in value” but that “bits of singing” were to be found here and there (April 1914, “Song and Story” 301). In June 1916, Fauset provided a rather negative assessment of African American literature in her “Looking Glass” section. She somewhat deceptively announced “interesting developments in Negro literature,” with repeated attempts at poetry (which she judged “good, bad, and indifferent”). The two novels she mentioned (one by William N. Ashley, the second by F. G. Gilmore) had “the usual difficulty that we are too near realities to write beautifully about them” (“The Looking Glass. Literature” 69). A few years later, writing about the short story in dialect by Ottie B. Graham, which had been awarded a 50-dollar prize^{xii} by the magazine, Fauset remarked on the mediocre quality of the submissions, as she felt that most lacked a plot as well as imagination. She blamed teachers who failed to provide their students with good literature from which to learn (Shaw, Galsworthy, Conrad, Du Bois, and a few others), but also rued the lack of exemplary African American writers who could serve as models: “More than ever, we need writers who will be able to express our needs, our thoughts, our fancies” (June 1923, “The Prize Story Competition” 57-58).

¹⁶Black theater, according to *The Crisis*, was also in great need of improvement. In August 1916, Du Bois promoted his “Star of Ethiopia” pageant and provided a brief overview of the history of African American theater, minstrel shows, and vaudeville. He concluded that much work remained to be done, including “new folk drama built around the actual experience of Negro American life” (August 1916, “The Drama among Black Folk” 169-173). In November 1919, African American playwright Willis Richardson made much the same point in “The Hope of a Negro Drama” (338-39). According to Du Bois, the main functions of “Negro drama” were “to teach on the one hand the colored people themselves the meaning of their history...and on the other, to reveal the Negro to the white world as a human, feeling thing” (“The Drama among Black Folk” 171).

¹⁷While direct references to fiction, poetry, and theater remained sparse during the 1910s by comparison with the issues published later during the Harlem Renaissance, several items in *The Crisis* nevertheless demonstrate the importance of reading and literature in a broad sense. Access to print culture and the benefits of reading were regularly displayed, and illustrations played a significant role.^{xiii} For example, in the *Crisis* of July 1911, a photograph illustrates an article on the growth of the YWCA; it shows young women reading in an elegant and comfortable environment (“An Evening in the New York Association” 122), thus equating reading with uplift. *The Crisis* encouraged families to read as it was believed that literacy could play a major role in African American emancipation—and women’s emancipation in particular. The presence of periodicals and literature in the home was deemed essential as they taught African Americans how to read, all the while informing them of the state of domestic and foreign affairs. In February of the same year, a photograph of “A Library” (February 1911, 31) depicts African Americans in a reading room while the accompanying text mentions that only five Southern cities offered facilities to black readers; the photograph displayed the “flourishing colored branch” in Louisville, Kentucky. Such instances exemplify the place

of literature in *The Crisis* outside the conventional offering of short stories, poems, and book reviews. There were indeed many other ways in which the black magazine mentioned literature and its importance for the African American community.^{xiv}

¹⁸ Thus, references to literature, especially by Blacks in the United States and in the diaspora, could be found in different parts of the magazine, including eulogies of deceased writers in the “Men of the Month” column, as in April 1913 with “The passing of James Edgar French” (1876-1912), a writer of unpublished “essays, poems and a novel.” He is described as “a close and devoted student of the best literature, particularly poetry” (“Men of the Month” 274). Efforts by African Americans in the field of literature were therefore recognized as worthy endeavors, even when they were not well-known.

¹⁹ Contributors to *The Crisis* were not afraid to criticize white publications and publishing houses, like the Neale Publication Company of New York City, which showed an obvious lack of respect for a manuscript by black author Kelly Miller, one of the contributing editors of *The Crisis*. An article of August 1914 points out the various mistakes made by the white publisher:

It is the last straw to have a company like this insult a man of the prominence of Kelly Miller by publishing his last book of essays with “Negro” un-capitalized and with the last sentence of the longest and titular essay (page 41) so wretchedly garbled as to be absolutely without sense. (195)^{xv}

²⁰ The anonymous commentator added that, “However, it will take more than careless or prejudiced publishers to spoil any work of [a man of the prominence of] Kelly Miller” (195). *The Crisis* was taking a militant stand in the defense of African American writers and intellectuals.

²¹ The works of Du Bois and other members of the NAACP were often targeted for special promotion, as was the case with Du Bois’s novel *Silver Fleece*, and works by members of the NAACP’s “General Committee”—as listed in the first issue of November 1910 (12-13)—which, for example, comprised Charles W. Chestnutt and Mary White Ovington.^{xvi} The self-promotion of like-minded authors, including black ones, at a time when there was almost no mention of African American contributions in white publications, created a community of writers linked to *The Crisis*. As other Modernist magazines would do, *The Crisis* also mentioned, and sometimes reviewed, works published outside of its circle, “thus invoking a modernist community of readers who were ‘in the know’ about the latest trends” (Thacker 7). Similarly, readers were also considered as a community of people who shared comparable values and ideas; this was reinforced by various articles and columns, but also by advertising.

²² Ads in *The Crisis* could promote objects and services similar to those advertised in other periodicals and in newspapers (typewriters, beauty products, real-estate property, music lessons, etc.). Often, they would also target African Americans specifically, either through what was advertised (vocational and training schools, specific universities, black businesses for example) or because the persons represented were black. They also dealt with literature in a broad sense: many ads were placed in the hope of finding agents to sell books; others promoted self-published works, often bearing on African or African American history. The magazine also carried ads for fiction, book clubs, libraries, bookstores, and publishing houses. For example, the second page of the February 1915 issue has two large inserts promoting *Out of the House of Bondage*^{xvii} described as “the latest and greatest book from the pen of Professor Kelly Miller” of Howard University, and a children’s book, *Hazel: The Story of a Little Colored Girl*, by Mary White Ovington,^{xviii} one of a

number of books, fiction and nonfiction, sold directly by *The Crisis* and its agents. In the same issue, another ad indicates a price of one dollar for “The poems of Phyllis Wheatley/ the early Negro poetess/ collected by Richard R. Wright, Jr. / and Charlotte Croghan Wright” (162). Also, in the “Crisis Advertiser” of October 1919 (321), Young’s Book Exchange of New York City presents itself as the “Mecca of Negro History and Literature.” Literature was thus scattered among more mundane topics.

²³The presence of ads for fiction and poetry alongside announcements of books about history, great African American men, and a variety of schools reinforced the importance of reading and education, of elevating oneself. It was part and parcel of black progress and it can be argued that it was an integral part of the magazine from the start, even when there was little actual fiction or poetry. All these publications reveal Du Bois’s will to bring together the black community around the same cause: civil rights. In order to do so, African Americans were to be educated through the articles, pictures, cartoons, and literature that were provided by *The Crisis*.

²⁴It should be noted that the monthly magazine also targeted children: they were evidently seen as a potential audience that had to be informed and trained in reading. Yet they raised a specific problem. As Du Bois wrote in the October 1919 issue dedicated to children, the “Children’s Number” was the most popular issue of the year with its many pictures of smiling children, yet the juxtaposition of the photographs with horrific accounts of lynching led at least one little girl—mentioned by Du Bois in “The True Brownies”—to write saying she hated all Whites (October 1919, “The True Brownies” 285). This led to the creation of a new magazine, dedicated to children, *The Brownies’ Book*, which had actually been announced in the issue of August 1919, on page 223: “The Brownie’s Book / Announcement is made of the publication beginning in November / of a monthly magazine for children / designed for all children but especially for ours.” In 1920, Jessie Fauset assisted Du Bois in the creation of this offshoot of *The Crisis*, to which she contributed regularly throughout its 24 issues, in 1920-21 (Witalec). Dedicated to children, this journal promoted Black history and education, and contributed to laying the foundation for African American children’s literature.

²⁵Promoting literature, in its various forms and practices, was thus a major aspect of the commitment of *The Crisis* to the coverage of political as well as literary and artistic items. In *Dusk of Dawn*, first published in 1940, Du Bois invokes a letter he wrote in 1905 to banker and philanthropist Jacob Schiff, in which he mentions a 1903 conversation during which he had expressed the need for:

a high class journal to circulate among the intelligent negroes, tell them of the deeds of themselves and their neighbors, interpret the news of the world to them, and inspire them toward definite ideals. (Du Bois 2007, 40)

²⁶What is obvious when reading the various issues of *The Crisis*, from the earliest volumes, is also the dedication to arts and literature not only for their aesthetic value, but also for their symbolic representation of African American self-worth, as will be examined next. Kirschke rightly notes that “Du Bois was in many ways a forerunner of the black arts movement of the 1960s which celebrated the beauty of ‘blackness’ [...] because he believed that literature (and visual arts) must serve a function for the good of black people” (Kirschke 125-126). In many ways, adding more or less substantial space devoted to these subjects gave Du Bois much leeway and allowed him not to be “just the voice of the NAACP” (Farebrother 104).

²⁷Indeed, Du Bois can hardly be seen as the mouthpiece of the NAACP. Any magazine echoes a variety of voices and is thus necessarily polyphonic: this is especially true of the first years of *The Crisis*. Reading the monthly in its first decade suggests that it increasingly became Du Bois's own production, with fewer voices being heard outside his own. As early as 1913, Du Bois's refusal to accede to a request by Villard that, in addition to a list of lynchings, *The Crisis* also include a list of crimes committed by African Americans, led to Villard's decision to withdraw as contributing editor of the magazine (Lewis 1993, 471-72). Much has been written on the quarrels between Du Bois, Villard, and other members of the NAACP over who should control the magazine and whether it should be seen as the organ of the NAACP, or whether Du Bois should have an entirely free hand to steer *The Crisis*.^{xix} Du Bois envisioned *The Crisis* as "in a sense a personal organ and the expression of [himself]" (Lewis 1993 478) and, as Elliott M. Rudwick noted, the "*Crisis* was definitely 'Du Bois's domain'" (Rudwick 218).

2. Fiction and Textual and Visual Representations of African Americans and Black History

²⁸*The Crisis* regularly published "affirmative texts," thereby "refuting the stereotypes that underlay assumptions about African Americans" (Carroll 23). The regular column "Great Men" offered readers of *The Crisis* positive representations of African American men and women (it sometimes included Whites), as did the "Racial Uplift" section. Representations of African Americans in fiction were also discussed in the pages of the magazine. In March 1911 (26-27), Du Bois printed two letters on a novel by Lloyd Osbourne (an American writer and the stepson of Robert Louis Stevenson), entitled *The Kingdoms of the World*, which was being serialized in *Munsey's*, one of the monthly magazines with the largest circulation at that time (Damon Moore 114). The first letter was penned by a black reader, Henry E. Baker, and the second was the author's reply. Baker objected to the depiction of the two black characters in the story, one of them a West Point cadet and the other a man who accepts what Baker saw as a humiliating position in a white boarding house. According to Baker, African Americans had the greatest difficulties fighting this type of representations produced by the pen of popular authors and shapers of opinion. Osbourne, who expressed "some chagrin" at Baker's reaction, vigorously defended his characters, explaining that he was "most emphatically on the side of the colored people in their hard progress upward." He intended to show the difficult position of African Americans in order to make at least some (presumably white) readers identify and sympathize with their plight but, as he pointed out to Baker, he had to do so in a subtle way (Baker had evidently missed the subtlety) so that readers would not be offended. Indeed, according to Osbourne, "The picture of a more advanced, more educated, finer, higher type of colored man—in the present truly deplorable state of public feeling—would *make enemies*."^{xx} Osbourne evidently saw himself as well-meaning and was piqued at Baker's reaction. He reminded his reader of the power of a widely circulated magazine like *Munsey's*—whose readership he assessed at around one million—to change at least a few minds on the issue.

²⁹Du Bois printed the two letters with a brief introduction explaining in neutral terms what the situation was. Readers were left to draw their own conclusions. This correspondence occupied the best part of two of the thirty or so pages of the magazine that month. The issue also carried, among others, news of racial discrimination all over

the United States, with an unsurprising emphasis on the situation in Southern States (“Along the Color Line”), as well as examples of social and economic uplift, a bleak assessment of illiteracy in the country (“The Blair Bill”), a poem by African American poet Rosalie Jonas entitled “Ballade des Belles Milatraises/The Octoroon Ball,” an essay on “African Civilization” by Mary Dunlop Maclean, a young English woman who was on the staff of the *New York Times* and also served as managing editor of *The Crisis* (Lewis 410); this issue also contained an “astonishing Afrocentric essay on the black sources of Egyptian civilization” (Lewis 416). Readers of the March 1911 number of *The Crisis* were also given a grim reminder of racial violence, with a recapitulation of the number of lynchings per year between 1885 and 1910, totaling 2,458 (“The Burden” 28). Female readers were treated to some advice on how to raise children with proper food and hygiene, thus ensuring they would grow up in sound health both physically and morally (“Talks About Women” by Mrs. John E. Milholland—a white woman whose husband was the treasurer of the NAACP). As it had in previous numbers, the “Crisis Advertiser” recommended “the best books on race and other human problems,” including a book entitled *The Curse of Race Prejudice* by James F. Morton, *Race Adjustment* by Kelly Miller, the 13 monographs of Atlanta University Studies of the Negro Problems, which had been initiated by Du Bois, as well as NAACP publications, and the eighth edition of Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk*.

³⁰ The question of the representation of Blacks in literature, which Du Bois would later address in “Criteria of Negro Art” (*The Crisis* October 1926 290-297) was all the more important because, as Du Bois noted in a November 5, 1925 letter to Carl Van Vechten, “We receive, as you know, continual criticism on things appearing in the *Crisis* and out of it, if it shows the Negro to any disadvantage.” The editor of the *Crisis* then explained that he was determined to “make a fight for art freedom in the work of Negroes and work about the Negroes” (Du Bois 1973, 325). White author Carl Van Vechten (who would author *Nigger Heaven* in 1926 and become one of the patrons of the Harlem Renaissance) had complained that it was impossible for Whites to write anything negative about African Americans without being called racist. After all, Van Vechten noted, “There are plenty of unpleasant truths to be spoken about any race” (Du Bois 1973, 324-5). While Kirschke rightly underlines that Du Bois “felt concerned that black authors would not write about the decent, hardworking, morally conventional Blacks” (Kirschke 125), *The Crisis* editor did not hesitate to defend authors who offered a rather different vision of African American life. Thus, in 1923, in answer to a letter by one Mrs. E. A. Duffield who objected to some of the short poems by Langston Hughes in the August 1923 issue, one of which was entitled “Cabaret” and another “Young Prostitute” (August 1923, “Harlem” 162), Du Bois upbraided the reader who had deemed the poems unfit for her daughter. She was absolutely wrong, he told her: “The poet depicts life as it is and he can be justly condemned only if he makes evil seem more beautiful and good. This Mr. Hughes in his strikingly beautiful poems has never done” (Du Bois 1973, 275-6).

³¹ Just as Langston Hughes’s poems in the August 1923 issue describe Harlem as he saw it then, history in *The Crisis* is a history of the present, with reports on both achievements and the problems to be addressed, including segregation, racial violence, and economic oppression. Yet the monthly carried frequent reminders of African American history, including slavery and Reconstruction, and sought to set the record straight, using articles, essays, book reviews, and, to a lesser extent, fiction to do so. When David W. Griffith’s film *Birth of a Nation* was released in 1915, *The Crisis* reported on the NAACP’s

efforts to have it banned in various cities, remarking that the city of Portland, Oregon, did not allow its libraries to hold books by Thomas Dixon, whose historical romance *The Clansman* (1905) had served as the basis for the film (Stokes 79). A cartoon accompanying the article and entitled “The Verdict” showed Dixon condemned by a “jury of fair minded Americans,” with one member of the jury holding a banner that read, “As a historian we find the defendant a pretty good liar” (*Crisis* October 1915 295-6). *The Crisis* thus offered its readers an interpretation of the past that Du Bois, as a historian, thought indispensable to allow his readers to understand the current situation of African Americans. In between his article on Reconstruction (“Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” issued in 1910 in the *American Historical Review*) and the chapter on the topic in *The Gift of Black Folk* (1924), the editor of *The Crisis* sought to provide his readers with a more accurate vision of the period than that given in mainstream histories, in literature (as in Dixon’s trilogy on Reconstruction), and movies (most notably *Birth of a Nation*).^{xxi} A letter sent by Senator Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina in answer to a request from Du Bois for information on the Senator’s views on Reconstruction in his state (which at one time was the only state with a majority of African Americans in the legislature) is significant in this regard. In a post scriptum, Tillman explained that “The negroes were dupes of course and should never have received the ballot at all, but the fanatical abolitionists under the leadership of Thad Stevens and Chas. Sumner concocted the whole program to wreak vengeance on the Southern white people.”^{xxii} Du Bois does not seem to have used the photograph of the South Carolina legislature in 1868 that Tillman had sent him, but in the January 1915 issue of the magazine he printed a letter from Tillman to the Editor of the *Maryland Suffrage News*, in which the Senator made the same point and argued that giving the vote to women would lead to even worse results, as “Negro women are much more aggressive in asserting the ‘rights of that race’ than the Negro men are” (*The Crisis* January 1915 140-1).

³² While the themes handled in fiction and poetry were not always race related,^{xxiii} they frequently were, and they contributed to the magazine’s policy of raising pride in the achievements of African Americans while also denouncing their current condition. Unsurprisingly, many of the stories strike a somber note. Thus, for instance, Du Bois published a long short story in one of the Christmas numbers of *The Crisis* (December 1911) entitled “Jesus Christ in Georgia.” This parable about a black convict who ends up being lynched, and the coming of a mixed-blood stranger who turns out to be Jesus Christ, served as a pretext for a description of the convict lease system,^{xxiv} the racial hierarchy of the South, and its racial violence. It told a story familiar to readers of *The Crisis*, but as a parable or a fable rather than as a news item or editorial. Literature here was meant to underscore a message central to the magazine. This was no new practice for Du Bois, whether in his own work (*The Souls of Black Folk* mixed fiction and nonfiction) or in his work as an editor; *The Horizon: A Journal of the Color Line* (1907-1910) included articles and essays as well as poetry and fiction (Lewis 1993 380-383).^{xxv} Both cases exemplify Du Bois’s belief that social science (“strictly descriptive, empirical history” [Blight 54]) needed to be complemented with aesthetic expression. As David Blight has noted, “Du Bois’s efforts to forge an African American counter-memory should be understood in the context of this turn in his work from social science toward art” (Blight 46). This turn is described by Arnold Rampersad as the result of Du Bois’s horror at the lynching of Sam Hose in Atlanta in 1897, which led him to realize that “one could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered and starved” (Du Bois 1940 34).

^{xxvi} In addition, imagination and the use of fiction were a way to address the “eternal

paradox of history,” i.e. the historian’s awareness of “how little the scientist today can know accurately of the past; how dependence on documents and memory leaves us all with the tale of the past half told or less” (Du Bois 1957, 315).

³³ But literature could also serve as a means to increase the attraction of the periodical. Thus in the issue of March 1912, Du Bois announced the publication of a new short story, written especially for *The Crisis* by well-known African American writer Charles Chesnutt. ^{xxvii} This was hailed as “one of the literary events of the year,” his first published work since “The Colonel’s Dream” (1905). ^{xxviii} “The Doll,” printed in the April 1912 issue, told the story of a barber who almost killed one of his patrons, a Southern white colonel, when he understood him to be his father’s killer. The sight of his daughter’s doll dissuaded him from doing so. It is a dark tale, with none of the humor of Chesnutt’s earlier short stories and more akin to his *Marrow of Tradition* (1901).

³⁴ Not all the poetry and short fiction published in the monthly dwelled on such gloomy topics, and the same issue in which “The Doll” was found also carried a meditation on time and nature by William Stanley Braithwaite as well as a poem by Jessie Fauset celebrating spring. In addition to book reviews, Jessie Fauset wrote a number of short stories for *The Crisis*, some spanning several issues, which, as George Hutchinson has noted, combined “an emphasis on the distinctiveness of black American experience and culture with American cultural nationalism, as well as with the propaganda of racial uplift and the promotion of middle-class values” (Hutchinson 155). Other authors who published short fiction in the first decade of *The Crisis* include James D. Corrothers, Mrs. Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Fenton Johnson, and many others.

³⁵ Du Bois’s own literary contributions to *The Crisis* are often prophetic in mode and frequently adopt biblical language, as Johnson and Johnson have noted (39). They are also meant specifically for the issue in which they appear. Thus, for instance, the May 1911 issue carried a new “Women’s Club” column. Replacing “Talks about Women,” often authored by white women, this new column was written by black activist Addie Waites Hunton, and included a photograph of Elizabeth C. Carter, the president of the National Association of Colored Women. In the editorial that followed immediately, simply entitled “The Woman” (19), Du Bois offered a parable about a king attacked by an army, and a black woman taking up his call to fight when black men failed to act. The April issue had carried an editorial entitled “Easter” that resonated with a poem by Braithwaite celebrating spring, but the parable also echoed an essay by Charles Edward Russell—one of the founders of the NAACP and a contributing editor of *The Crisis*—entitled “Leaving it to the South”; Russell’s essay was a scathing criticism of Southern racial policies and Northern indifference. Du Bois frequently wrote parables for *The Crisis* and they are often devastating attacks on the American racial system. In January 1912, “A Mild Suggestion,” in the manner of Swift’s “A Modest Proposal,” offered “a perfect solution” to the race problem. As its narrator, a black man, noted, the usual solutions did not work: education made African Americans dissatisfied; work meant they would compete with Whites; and migration would be far too costly. The only reasonable suggestion, then, was to eliminate them entirely. As to the best date to do so, January 1, 1913 “would, for historical reasons, probably be best.” (“A Mild Suggestion” 115-116). The reference to the unfulfilled promises of the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation could not be missed by readers of the magazine. “A Mild Suggestion,” with its rather heavy-handed sarcasm, provides a good example of Du Bois using a literary form to denounce the degraded conditions of African Americans owing to white racism.

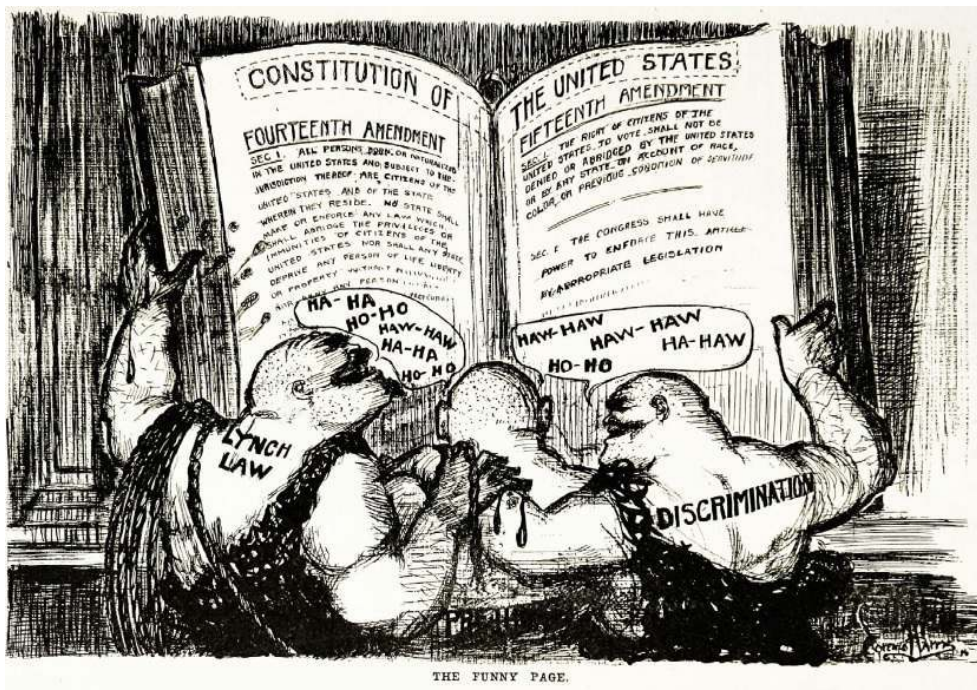
³⁶In addition to parables, some of Du Bois's editorials have a literary dimension. Indeed they occasionally mix harsh sarcasm and an almost blues-like quality. "Triumph" is a case in point, with its depiction of the lynching of a mentally unbalanced black man in Pennsylvania, with the leitmotif, "Let the eagle scream." As Lewis notes, the concluding lines ("If we are to die, in God's name let us perish like men and not like bales of hay" (September 1911, 195) anticipate the poem "If We Must Die" by Jamaican-American writer and seminal figure of the Harlem Renaissance Claude McKay, which was printed in the October 1919 issue of *The Crisis* ("If we must die, let it not be like hogs Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot...") (October 1919, 300).

³⁷*The Crisis* provided both visual and textual narratives of African-American experience, through which Du Bois sought to overcome the risk that history would be recorded and spread from a uniquely white perspective. In October 1926, he wrote in *The Crisis*:

Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white American novels and essays they have written. What would people in a hundred years say of black Americans? (October 1926, "Criteria of Negro Art" 296)

- ³⁸ The work of African American artists was meant to provide an authentic depiction of black daily life; it highlighted the conditions they lived in, while also showing positive figures of Blacks in an attempt to change the way they were perceived by the Whites. Indeed, African Americans had to build their own identity in response to a profusion of distorted representations and stereotypes.

Image 1



"The Funny Page", Lorenzo Harris, *The Crisis*, March 1918

³⁹Jim Crow laws and racial violence are denounced in the images published in *The Crisis*. Thus for instance, in the magazine's "Funny Page" of March 1918, Lorenzo Harris depicts two robust men personifying "lynch laws" and "discrimination" (Image 1). The men hold up the Constitution, showing it to a third man, all the while laughing at the 14th and 15th

Amendments, which, to them, are merely “funny page[s].” The personification of the “lynch laws” and “discrimination” as two men, mocking the Civil War amendments, represents the problem to be addressed, one underlined in the 1909 platform that led to the creation of the NAACP, namely that the Civil War amendments did not apply to part of the population. This political cartoon names and shames the Jim Crow laws that were enforced in the South between 1876 and 1964.^{xxxix} It symbolizes the white supremacist scorn for the Constitution that translated into unpunished lynching of African Americans (alluded to in the blood dripping from the hands of the man on the left). In the same issue, a cover photograph by C. M. Battey represents a well-dressed middle-class woman, while, in the “Men of the Month” column, a portrait of popular athlete Paul G. Robeson (230) and another of the multi-generational family of successful writer of black history and activist Dr. I. Garland Penn (231) demonstrate, by contrast, the achievements of African Americans.^{xxx} Four drawings of white philanthropists on the next page (232), R. J. Coady, R. E. Jones, J. C. Frund (founder of the magazine *Musical America*) and reformer Emily Bigelow Hapgood, also offset white supremacist discourse, a point underlined in the accompanying text:

The usual assumption is that Negroes are inadequate and inefficient and need “help.” Thus philanthropy in the past has usually taken the form of alms giving as far as Negroes are concerned. There is arising, however, a new and encouraging form of philanthropy toward colored folk.

The new philanthropists like Emily Bigelow Hapgood, Richard J. Coady, John C. Freund and Robert Edmund Jones are interested in Negroes, not because of their race, but because they have been especially stirred by the artistic possibilities of the Negro race. (232)

- 40 These images are reminders that the racist representation of African Americans is wrong. Indeed, the post-Civil War ideology spread by Southern Whites and known as the *Lost Cause* sought to offer a fresh perspective on the conditions of slaves, suggesting that they led peaceful and happy lives, and were well-treated by their masters. Despite the 14th and 15th Amendments, however, many laws were passed to prevent them from enjoying their rights. In 1874, Thomas Nast, the famous white Civil War cartoonist, depicted the conditions of former slaves as “worse than slavery” (Nast 1874). Meanwhile, the press and popular culture propagated more negative representations of African Americans. In the 1880s, racist ideologies were reinforced due to Social Darwinism, a distortion of Darwin’s theory of evolution, and aimed at establishing a strict racial hierarchy. By contrast, in *The Crisis*, examples of black achievements represented black progress, while involvement by white “friends” was proof that Whites were not all supremacists, thus recalling the bi-racial composition of the NAACP.

Image 2



"O say, can you see by the Dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the Twilight's last gleaming!"

"O say, can you see by the Dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the Twilight's last gleaming!", Jackson, *The Crisis*, February 1915

41 A political cartoon by Jackson (Image 2) in the February 1915 issue (197) shows, in the foreground, a tree from which hangs part of a rope that was obviously used to lynch a man, whose remains are visible in the fire pit in which he was burnt. To the right, one of the victims' arms lies on the ground, a chain hanging from the wrist suggesting both the chains of slavery and the race of the victim. These provide the reader with an explicit idea of what the victim had to endure. In the background, under a pale moon and a threatening sky, the crowd have already turned their backs on their crime and set off for other punitive raids. With scathing irony, the first two lines of the American national anthem are given by way of caption ("O say, can you see by the Dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the Twilight's last gleaming!"). The cartoon illustrates an article on lynching, "The Lynching Industry" (196-98), which includes the name and the number of victims for 1914, as well as lynching statistics for the years 1885-1914. This is followed by "A Pile of Books" (198-200), in which new publications are listed, including works of history on a variety of topics, from the Haitian Revolution to the "American-Japanese problem" and "Negro Culture in South Africa." A book of poetry by French-speaking creole poet Leon Laviaux, "Ebon Muse and other Poems," "Englished by John Myers O'Hara" is also mentioned. About Laviaux, the reviewer writes that, "to-day a man of Negro blood is recognized as being the foremost critic and expositor of American poetry." Such juxtaposition of horrific news and of more affirmative depictions of black culture and artistic abilities was certainly intended to shock the readers and to make them respond to the constant disparaging and persecution of the black population, either by recognizing "the precarious position occupied by African Americans, and perhaps even encourag[ing] involvement in NAACP campaigns for Reform" (Farebrother 106).^{xxxix}*The*

Crisis consistently denounced lynching and the October 1919 issue was devoted to this question. In that number too, there is an association of very different images. Pictures of beautiful babies contrast with the surrounding texts describing or condemning lynching. Again, this proximity—juxtaposing innocence and crime—created discomfort and aimed firstly to shock the (black and white) readership, and secondly to encourage them to think and then react.

Image 3



"Huh! I don't want to look at no pretty girl!", unknown artist, *The Crisis*, August 1920

⁴² While *The Crisis* clearly censured such crimes, it also constantly promoted more affirmative visions, including a new image of the African American family. The unsigned illustration published in August 1920 (Image 3) depicts a black family in their living room. The furniture is elegant and the atmosphere appears quite cozy. All members of the family are well-dressed and stylish. Both parents are reading newspapers, a possible sign of middle-class status and a reminder that the opportunity to read was a privilege then. ^{xxxii} *The Crisis* encouraged families to read because, since the days of Frederick Douglass, literacy had been linked to emancipation. The press also served to inform readers of the state of domestic and foreign affairs. In the illustration, children are chatting under the gaze of their parents. The scene conveys an idea of middle-class respectability. This cartoon depicts the adherence to the social model of the nuclear family living in grace and comfort. This image of the middle class can be explained by the wealthy Blacks' wish to emulate the model imposed by the norms of the dominant white group. Indeed, at the time still, the black elite would distinguish itself from other African Americans not so much by the conspicuous materialism growing in white America, but by their genteel behavior, together with the adherence to the codes of Victorian America, including respectability, character, and reason (Mullins; Summers 8). This promotion of the

American middle-class codes, however, came with the concomitant resistance against a racist consumer and cultural space (Mullins). This comes across once more in an advertisement in the May 1921 issue for the *National Capital Code of Etiquette, Combined with Short Stories for Black People* (by Edward S. Green and Silas X. Floyd, respectively—the authors are not mentioned in the ad). The etiquette book is said to be about “prominent Washington colored Society leaders” (*The Crisis* May 1921, 34), as evidenced by a small photograph of well-dressed African Americans enjoying a fancy dinner, reflecting once more the focus on “lifting the race.”^{xxxiii} The short stories included in the same book, reflect a similar uplift, through literature in this case. At the same time, however, the etiquette manual is described as “A book that will help the most prominent member of society or the most humble,” while the short stories are “for the Young and Old” as well as for “Father, Mother, or the Children,” reminding readers that, no matter their social class or their age, they all shared a common racial identity.

Image 4



“Empress Taitou”, John Henry Adams, *The Crisis*, November 1917

⁴³ African American identity was expressed through the valorization of the African origins of American Blacks too. Indeed, *The Crisis* also published portraits of such African figures as “Empress Taitou” (Image 4), “widow of the Late Ménélik II, Emperor of Abyssina, and Mother of the present Empress Ouizeros Zeoditu,” drawn by John Henry Adams in 1917 (Kirschke 147). The majesty that this last illustration exudes, with the crown and lavish veil and clothes, provides a laudatory vision of the black figure and, by extension, of the entire African American community. Incidentally, Ethiopia had defeated the Italian army in 1896 and thus remained one of the few independent African countries at that time. As Kirschke notes, “This image was intended to serve as a source of education and racial pride for the readers of the *Crisis*” (*ibid.*). In putting forward the

heroism of the Ethiopian people, Du Bois meant to establish a link between their struggle and that of the African Americans in the United States. He wanted to support the idea that the African continent was the cradle of the black revolution (*ibid.*).

⁴⁴All these illustrations clearly reveal Du Bois's intention to bring together the black community around the same cause, namely civil rights. In order to do so, he believed, they needed to be educated through articles, pictures, cartoons, and literature provided by *The Crisis*. The work of African American artists and writers developed "cultural consumption [as] an antiracism strategy that challenge[d] the marginalization of Blacks as a whole" (Banks 73). According to Du Bois, the artistic field was one of the areas of struggle for African Americans. He also argued that "these artists embodied [his] ideal of Talented Tenth" (Kirschke 33). Through their work, they helped *The Crisis* to shape African American memory and identity.^{xxxiv}

⁴⁵*The Crisis* used a format of intermediality from the start and provided its readers with a vast array of columns, articles, illustrations, and ads (Farebrother 106). As Du Bois noted in a 1914 letter to Joel Spingarn, the magazine was to educate and train its readers, "not simply in its words, but in its manner, its pictures, its conception of life..." (Lewis 1993, 494). Literature initially played a minor part in this training, and it was only in the Roaring Twenties and then during the Harlem Renaissance, that the magazine outwardly favored a more straightforward literary approach. By then, it "partially conformed to the national mood, which had moved away from concern with foreign affairs and progressive reform in the 1910s to domestic and cultural concerns" (Pencack 517). The circulation of the magazine declined when its price rose from \$1.00 to \$1.50, and also because of the worsening economic crisis (*ibid.*). Du Bois himself, whose radical editorials were increasingly criticized, left his position as editor in 1934, but *The Crisis* is still published to this day.

⁴⁶During its first decade, literature was certainly not a main focus of the black monthly, but it was always present in one form or another, and co-existed with history—whether about the United States or from a more international perspective—in the pages of the magazine, sometimes intersecting with it. While the collage of news items dealing with the injustice done to Blacks, sometimes with little or no explanations, and of more artistic and literary achievements, may appear incongruous (Farebrother 109), it actually served the cause of civil rights for African Americans through consciousness raising and, at times, by encouraging the political engagement of the readers.

⁴⁷According to Janice A. Radway, *The Crisis*'s "most influential years, 1919-1926," were those during which the magazine printed reviews of books by young black writers and published a number of those who would be associated with the black renaissance (Radway, 230). Yet, for Abby A. Johnson and Ronald M. Johnson, "Long before the 1920s, Du Bois promoted a renaissance of black literature in its editorials," and between 1910 and 1920, *The Crisis* played a major role in what was to become the Harlem Renaissance (Johnson and Johnson 40, 37). In *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), Du Bois himself claimed that he had "tried to encourage other Negro writers through the columns of the *Crisis*" and that by 1920 "we could point out that most of the young writers among American Negroes had made first publication in the columns of the *Crisis*" (Du Bois 1940 270). The editor had already made that claim in the *Sixteenth Annual Report of the NAACP*, issued in 1926 ("Practically every Negro author writing today found his first audience through the pages of *The Crisis*" 50). Elliott M. Rudwick deemed the allegation somewhat exaggerated yet noted that "if the *Crisis* editor did not introduce nearly all of the new Negro writers, he

did publish a sampling of their works. And no Negro author could help but have been stimulated by many of Du Bois's lyrical and plaintive editorials" (Rudwick 50). The examination of the magazine during its first decade does reveal that the promotion of literature by established and fledgling writers was an integral—admittedly not the most important—part of the strategy of its editor before the circulation of the magazine declined and “the New Negro literature was forced to place its dependence almost entirely upon a white audience and that audience had its own distinct patterns and preferences for Negro writing” (Du Bois 1940, 271). According to George Hutchinson, *The Crisis* “sought to be not only a beacon to black folks but the conscience of a nation” (Hutchinson 141). News-reporting, literature, history, sociology, and visual arts all played a part, albeit in varying proportions, in achieving this goal.

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NOTES

- i. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/archive/06/0608001r.jpg>. Co-founder Mary White Ovington gives an account of the birth of the NAACP in "How the National Association for The Advancement of Colored People Began," *The Crisis*, August 1918 184-188.
- ii. The complete issues of *The Crisis*, from volume 1 (1910) to volume 25 (1922) are available on line on the site of the Modernist Journals Project, at the following address:
http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?view=mjp_object&id=crisiscollection
- iii. W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) was the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard University and later taught as a professor in Atlanta. In 1905, he was one of the founders of the Niagara movement, a group intent on fighting for civil rights for African Americans, and was later involved in the creation of the NAACP. By then, he had already published two major works, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). As editor of *The Crisis*, he was inspired by John Brown, a friend and also a Harvard graduate, who edited *The Voice of the Negro* in Atlanta. Both magazines included literary texts and political cartoons (Kirschke, 2007, 9).
- iv. *Opportunity*, created by another black organization, the Urban League, ran from 1923 to 1949.
- v. The periodization of the Harlem Renaissance has long been debated. See for instance Andrew M. Fearnley.
- vi. Fauset (1882-1961) joined the NAACP in 1912 and began publishing various pieces (poetry, short stories, and essays) in *The Crisis*. She also wrote a regular column, "The Looking Glass," which offered comments on literature and other subjects that she translated from a variety of international journals. In November 1919, she took over the literary editorship of the magazine after seven years at the head of "What to Read" department of the Magazine (Hutchinson 153).
- vii. Our translation.
- viii. Before Jessie Fauset took over the "What to Read" column, in March 1912, most of the reviews were unsigned.
- ix. Between 1915 and 1916, the number of reviews decreased. A few still appeared in Jessie Fauset's regular column "The Looking Glass," but they were terse and often simply announced the publication of a work. The magazine continued to carry fiction and poetry, though.
- x. Before he wrote his well-known essay, "Criteria of Negro Art," published in *The Crisis* of October 1926, Du Bois asked Fauset to write to a number of writers, including Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson, and ask them what in their opinion black literature should be. See Du Bois, 1973, 329-330 and 342. However, according to David Levering Lewis, Du Bois intended *The Crisis* to be devoted to politics and economics, with literature playing only a secondary role (Lewis 1997, 177).
- xi. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) was an African-American poet and teacher that stood for abolition.

- xii.** The prize for the best short story by a black student was offered by the Delta Omega Chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, and nineteen stories were submitted (Jessie Fauset, “The Prize Story Competition,” *The Crisis*, June 1923, 57-58).
- xiii.** The role of illustrations will be developed further in the second part of this essay.
- xiv.** Du Bois occasionally sent out *The Crisis* free of charge: one Leonard Cowan wrote Du Bois in 1919 to thank him for doing so (Leonard Cowan to Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, October 22, 1919). Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts at Amherst. We are grateful to Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell for having drawn our attention to this document.
- xv.** The noun “Negro” with a capital “N” indicated that Blacks were put on the same level as “Whites” – always written with a capital “W” – and not perceived as inferior beings. It also demonstrated that they were considered as a community of people with the same interests and aspirations.
- xvi.** The question whether these ads were paid for remains unsolved. Lewis notes that for the issue dated December 1910, Houghton Mifflin bought a half page to promote *John Brown: A Biography Fifty Years After*, by Oswald Garrison Villard, as did A.C. McClurg for Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* (Lewis 1993, 416); the ads are on page 31. It is not unlikely that McClurg bought advertising space in *The Crisis* to advertise Du Bois’s *The Silver Fleece*, which the house also issued.
- xvii.** Miller’s book, published by Neale Publishing Company in 1914, was a collection of essays on various topics about black life (slavery, education, segregation, etc.) and black progress.
- xviii.** Ovington describes this self-published book in the black newspaper *The Afro American* of February 18, 1933 as “the story of an educated little colored girl from Boston who went South to visit her grandmother” (12). <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1532&dat=19330218&id=taA9AAAAIIBAJ&sjid=visMAAAAIBAJ&pg=647,5056685&hl=en>. [Accessed on June 30, 2015].
- xix.** See, among others, chapters 15 and 17 in David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois. Biography of a Race. 1868-1919*, *op. cit.*
- xx.** Emphasis in the original.
- xxi.** On the historiography of Reconstruction see for example Claire Parfait “Reconstruction Reconsidered” (2009).
- xxii.** Benjamin R. Tillman to “The Editor, *The Crisis*,” 23 July 1914, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, reel 4. Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner was a prominent anti-slavery activist, and a vigorous defender of African Americans’ civil rights after the Civil War; Thaddeus Stevens, a Representative from Pennsylvania, was a major figure among radical Republicans during Reconstruction.
- xxiii.** Hutchinson notes that most of the poetry in *The Crisis* did not address racial issues (150).
- xxiv.** The convict lease system developed in the last decades of the nineteenth century: Southern States leased convicts to owners of plantations, mines etc., who exploited them in brutal conditions. See, among others, Ayers, 154-155.
- xxv.** On Du Bois and *The Horizon*, also see Susanna Ashton.
- xxvi.** On this turn from scientific history or, to use Du Bois’s own words, “a careful search for truth conducted as thoroughly, broadly, and honestly as the material resources and mental equipment at command will allow,” a search meant to “encourage and help social reform” (Du Bois 1940, 33), see Arnold Rampersad.
- xxvii.** Charles W. Chesnutt (1858-1932), an African American writer, is best known for his collections of stories, among which *The Conjure Woman*, 1899, and his novel *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901).
- xxviii.** Chesnutt published 4 stories in the *Crisis* between 1912 and 1930. See Cécile Cottenet 21.
- xxix.** Indeed, while *de facto* segregation was established in the North, *de jure* segregation was instituted in the South.

xxx. The persons photographed in the “Men of the Month” column were always well-dressed, as was the norm for portraits at the time. They were usually from the growing black bourgeoisie and looked quite similar in style and appearance to the middle-class Whites in *The Crisis*. This type of black representation emphasized the respectability of African Americans as well as their acceptance of the norms of the ruling class in the United States.

xxxi. Anne Carroll notes that the mix of visual and written texts was visible in other periodicals before *The Crisis*, but she also argues that the inclusion of both affirmation and protest “filled a gap” in the depiction of the experiences of Blacks, and that the more positive texts were perhaps the most efficient at “refuting the stereotypes that underlay assumptions about African Americans” (Carroll 23-24). Some readers found this difficult to accept. A (probably white) subscriber to *The Crisis*, Annie H. Howe, wrote Du Bois in July 1923: after reading her copy of the magazine, she usually passed it on to the janitor of her building, a black man, because she deemed the magazine likely to “inspire ambition and gratify the pride of any Negro man,” yet she objected to what she saw as *The Crisis* policy of dwelling on injustice which, according to her, could arouse bitterness in the janitor over the treatment of his race (Du Bois, 1973, 273-4).

xxxii. The difference in rates of illiteracy between Whites and Blacks was still very high at the turn of the twentieth century, due in large part to the paucity of good schools in black communities, especially in the former slave States of the South where segregation favored white institutions, even if rates of black illiteracy decreased over time, from 79.9 % of Blacks (among persons over 14) in 1870 (8.7 for native Whites) to 30.5% (3% for native Whites) in 1910 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970; and Current Population Reports, Series P-23, Ancestry and Language in the United States: November 1979).

xxxiii. In the preface to the etiquette manual, the author mentions that, “Followed carefully, the teachings of this book will go far toward assuring success both socially and financially,” stressing the possibility of racial progress through changes in behavior. The full text is available at :

https://archive.org/stream/nationalcapitalc00greerich/nationalcapitalc00greerich_djvu.txt

xxxiv. At the time when the social realist movement was developing in the United States, *The Crisis* offered its own realism—brutally honest statements about African American life and about ‘the American dream,’ a dream which was never extended to black Americans (Kirschke 226).

ABSTRACTS

This essay investigates the role of literature and the links between literature, news-reporting, and history in the NAACP magazine *The Crisis* between 1910 and the early 1920s. We do not study literature *per se* and do not provide an analysis of the literary style, nor do we assess the literariness of the short stories and poems printed in the 1910s. Rather, we examine the place accorded literature in the *Crisis* and its role in relation to the rest of the magazine, from news commentary, political essays, and echoes of the African past, to illustrations and advertisements.

INDEX

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